

Iran after the 2012 Majles Elections

WWIC

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Mood before the Elections



Why were the Majles Elections Important?

- The elections were significant because:
 - These were the first polls since the disputed 2009 presidential elections;
 - The outcome of these elections would have a direct impact on the composition of power beyond Ahmadinejad (who cannot run for president anymore);
 - Low voter turnout would undermine regime legitimacy and weaken Iran's bargaining position in international negotiations;
 - Low voter turnout could also be interpreted as a confirmation that the opposition Green Movement would still be able to mobilize supporters;
- Khamenei called for a "record turnout" to "safeguard" the country against internal and external threats;
- In the absence of major reformist parties and personalities, this election was about "mainstream conservative" versus "hard-line principlists";
- For the two main groupings (pro- and anti-Ahmadinejad) this election was a platform to gauge their popular strength;

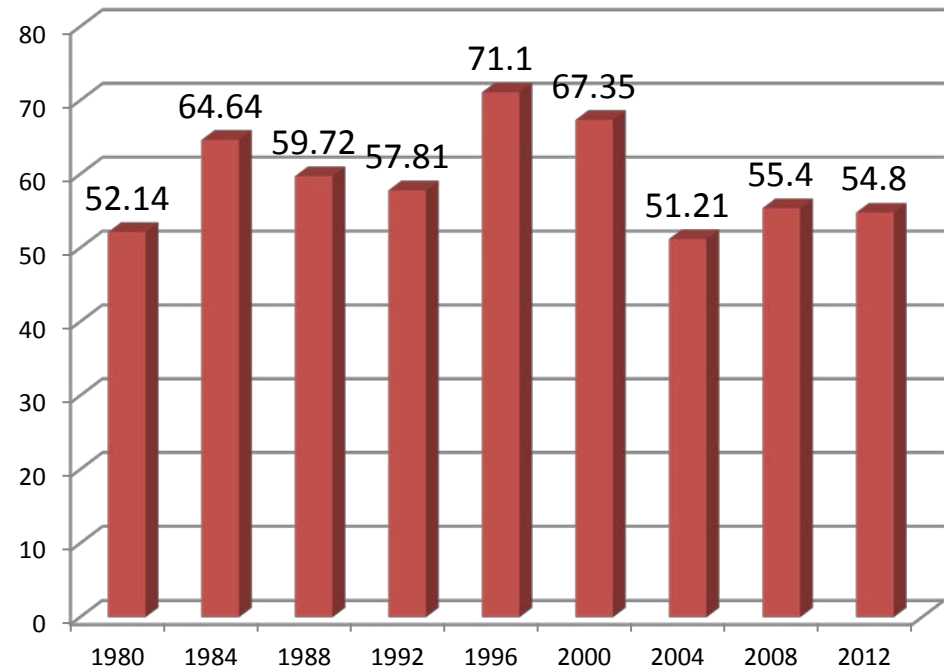
How did the regime try to mobilize voters?

- There was a massive propaganda campaign focused on voter turnout;
- Utilizing nationalist themes in the weeks running up to the election, the government tried to attract voters;
- In essence, emotionally, a segment of the eligible voters came to believe that non-participation was equal to “increasing the risk of more external pressure” – something that the average Iranian is hesitant to contemplate;
- The regime also timed various events to mobilize the voters, i.e.:
 - Public court session in the banking embezzlement case;
 - Announcement of a new round of nuclear negotiations;

And how high was voter turnout?

- There are so many contradicting data and signs that it is difficult to make a definite statement;
- It is clear that the regime as a whole wanted to derive legitimacy from the voter turnout;
- Each conservative faction also saw the election result as an instrument to consolidate their own power inside the country;
- However, turnout was way below Khamenei's desire of a "record voter participation" (see chart);

Participation in Majles Elections in %
of eligible voters



Calculated by using the official number of participants divided by total eligible voters (source: Ministry of Interior)

Some Observations

- The popular vote was very fragmented consequently the final results in many constituencies will be determined in a second round. For example, 25 out of the 30 seats in Greater Tehran will have to be determined in a run-off election;
- A few symbolic results can describe the overall mood in the population:
 - The President's sister, Parvin Ahmadinejad, lost in her hometown which is reflective of the President seriously losing popular support;
 - Some prominent reformist figures (M. Kavakebian, Ghodrat Alikhani ...) lost the election which could be indicative of the majority of reformist supporters staying away from the election;
 - Key centrists failed to mobilize votes (Ahmad Nateq Nouri and others) which can be seen as an absence of centrist supporters in the election;

Year	2000	2004	2008	2012
Turnout in Tehran	44%	33%	30%	39%?

Actual Results

- 225 Majles deputies have been elected in the first round and 65 seats will be decided in the second round;
- The top candidate of Tehran was Gholamali Haddad-Adel, former Majles Speaker and a close relative and confidant of Khamenei;
- The majority of candidates who were elected in the first round were from the overlap between the key political lists;
- Many sitting deputies who lost their seats have complained of “fraud and "unethical destructive conduct" in the elections;
- Even Parvin Ahmadinejad believes that the votes in her constituency were rigged;
- The Iranian Majles is usually made up of independent provincial deputies and political figures being elected in large towns and cities – it is still unclear which current will be the dominant voice in the Majles;
- Ahmad Tavakoli: “We still do not know which currents or groups will take shape (in the Majles) and which one will dominate.”

Political Analysis

- The Majles elections have underlined three phenomena:
 - The illusion of a united front among the conservative forces is dead;
 - Ahmadinejad has lost support among the society;
 - The Green Movement can still mobilize social and political forces;
- At the same time, the Green Movement decided NOT to push for street protests resorting to a political discourse;
- The fact that Ayatollah Khamenei has not commented on the outcome of the elections, is an indication that he is not happy with the outcome and is considering his options;
- Rafsanjani's comments underline that he feels emboldened after the elections;
- Ali Motahary's comments on the potential "impeachment of Ahmadinejad" is indicative that the anti-Ahmadinejad camp feels emboldened;
- Khatami's strategy in deciding to vote suggests that some negotiations have been underway to take the country out of the current crisis;

What could be the consequences?

- Khamenei could use the upcoming Iranian Nowruz as an occasion to end the house arrest of Moussavi and Karroubi and to release some political prisoners in an attempt to pave the way for reconciliation between factions;
- All in all, there are signs that key political forces would push for Ahmadinejad's marginalization and an overall moderation of the political discourse;
- The marginalization strategy could either happen through Majles or through the Judiciary;
- However, the Ahmadinejad camp won't let go of its power position easily and its actions may lead to further domestic tensions;
- At the same time, the outcome of the domestic developments will heavily depend on the prospect of an easing of external relations;

Is the Green Movement still a factor?

- The Green Movement has come a long way from being a protest against the 2009 election results to being a unifying opposition movement;
- In 2009 it mobilized some 3 million protestors to come to the street, but today it could mobilize about 20 million Iranians in a political-intellectual framework;
- The other factor is that the Green Movement has developed a democratic discourse, i.e. it has accepted the fact that the other political parties / tendencies will have to have their own space (eg. in the meeting with Mojtaba Khamenei, Moussavi does not reject a dialogue, but states that he would only talk to Ayatollah Khamenei);
- If the regime moves towards a conciliatory discourse, the Green Movement would participate;

Important Processes

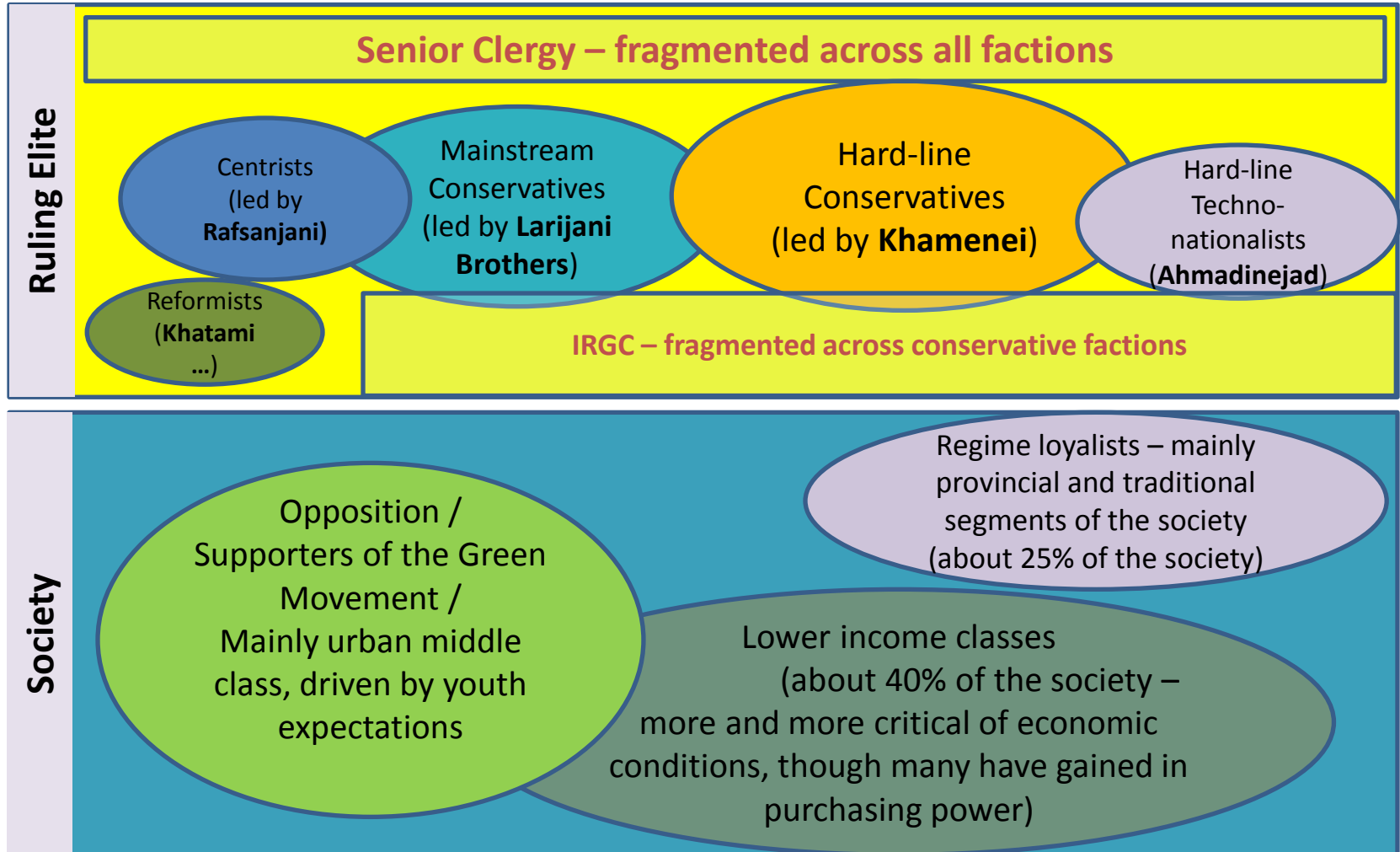
- Current international pressures, domestic infighting and economic tensions are reaching a new boiling point;
- Some analysts predict an implosion of the current political constellation, but it is too difficult to predict the impact of all the key processes on the final outcome;
- Iran's acceptance of a new round of nuclear negotiations is a signpost that Tehran wishes to de-escalate external relations;
- Regional shifts (especially the situation in Syria as well as Iran-Israel tensions) will compel both sides to look for a negotiated settlement in nuclear and other issues;
- Changes will not be quick and external pressures and internal turmoil are expected to continue over the next year or two;
- The outcome of the current turmoil will most probably pave the way for a more moderate environment in foreign and economic policies over the next couple of years;

Economic Outlook

- Sanctions, subsidy reforms and continued budget deficit will all undermine the economic performance in the next 12 months – the Iranian economy will remain behind its actual potential;
- The higher than expected oil price will offer some leverage to the government, but the overall financial position will be critical;
- The Rial has officially been devalued – official rate now standing at Rial 12,260 to the US\$. The unofficial rate stands at Rial 19,000;
- The middle class are the main losers of the current subsidy reforms and economic misery and their situation will have a direct impact on the country's business interests;
- Therefore, economic interest groups (including the IRGC network) will push for a moderation in politics to safeguard their interests;
- Economic, demographic and social phenomena will all push for a new constellation of power and more moderate policies;

Domestic Scene

The size of shapes is indicative of the group's relative power in the current constellation.



How can the Iranian Crisis be understood?

Ayatollah Khamenei believes that there is no crisis and that the regime is solid with a few small adjustments and replacements.



However, there are analysts outside Iran who believe that the regime is about to collapse due to external and internal tensions.

The Real Picture

- It is more accurate to say that the regime is not about to collapse, but that the current structure is not sustainable anymore;
- What the events since 2005 (especially since 2009) have done in Iran can be summarized as follows:
 - Unification of the opposition forces under the umbrella of the Green Movement;
 - Fragmentation of the conservative forces to a degree that they had to issue 11 different lists for the Majles elections;
- The only event that can fix the current regime is a process of national reconciliation which will have to include the release of political prisoners and a new political process towards a more inclusive presidential election in 2013.



Signposts to Watch

- The new composition of the Expediency Council, especially the question whether Rafsanjani will be reappointed as the Chairman of this council;
- Moussavi and Karroubi's situation and a potential pardoning of some political prisoners before the Nowruz holidays;
- Final result of the second round elections, especially the final composition of the Tehran deputies. A domination of the top Majles leadership by the anti-Ahmadinejad camp will work against his interests;
- Questioning of the President and the potential for his impeachment which would be the final blow to his camp's desire to dominate the executive branch beyond Ahmadinejad;
- Ayatollah Khamenei's position, especially with regard to two issues, i.e.
 - who becomes the next Majles Speaker (two former speakers, i.e. Gholamali Haddad-Adel and Ali Larijani are both in a good position with Haddad-Adel being more accommodating to President Ahmadinejad);
 - Potential debate on Ahmadinejad's impeachment (in the past Ayatollah Khamenei has rejected such a prospect and it is still more likely that he would prefer the President finishing his current term);
- Nuclear negotiations: Now that the regime feels a greater degree of legitimacy, it could be more compromising in the upcoming nuclear talks;