



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center**



Iran has elected a Majles: special edition on election results



Highlights of the week:

The ninth Majles elections, held last Friday, March 2, proceeded smoothly and without major incidents. This year the Iranian authorities did not block internet traffic or impose restrictions on sending text messages on the election day. Media sources in Iran reported that internet access speed was even higher on that day than it is at other times. The chairman of the security committee of the Tehran Province Election Headquarters reported that, in the days leading up to the elections, security forces had detained ten people who were planning to carry out acts of sabotage on orders from “foreign elements”.

According to official data released by the Ministry of Interior, 64.2 percent of eligible voters took part in the elections. The voter turnout was more than ten percent higher than it was in the 2008 elections, and the highest since the sixth Majles elections in 2000. In Tehran Province, where the voter turnout is usually relatively low, 52 percent of eligible voters exercised their right to vote, authorities said.

However, during and after the election day, the reformist opposition claimed that the voter turnout was significantly lower than that officially reported by the authorities. The Baztab Emrooz website also cast doubt on the reported voter turnout, saying that the figure given by the governor of Tehran Province on the number of eligible voters there was lower by 2.5 million than the number of eligible voters in the 2009 presidential elections, as reported by the Ministry of Interior.

The authorities and conservative media portrayed the high voter turnout as a victory for the Islamic republic and a crushing defeat for the West and the reformist opposition, which had called for a boycott of the elections. The conservative daily Keyhan argued that the high voter turnout in the elections sends a clear message to the West, and that if the United States was facing difficulties in its struggle against Iran before the elections, the difficulties will become much more pronounced in the post-election period.

The reputation of the reformist opposition took a major hit due to former President Mohammad Khatami's participation in the elections, despite his announcement several weeks ago that the political conditions rule out the possibility of holding fair elections. Khatami's participation in the elections was used by the conservative media to slam the reformist opposition and highlight its distress.

Hossein Nouraninejad, a journalist close to Khatami, reported earlier this week that, during a conversation he held with Khatami after the latter had voted, the former president told him that he had decided to vote after receiving some disturbing information about the post-election plans of radical elements within the regime. Sadeq Zibakalam, an intellectual closely affiliated with moderate reformist circles, argued this week that he was not surprised by Khatami's vote, and that both Khatami and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, had no choice but to take part in the elections. If

they had boycotted the elections, Zibakalam said, they would have lost any ability to influence the regime from the inside, playing into the hands of radical elements in the conservative camp.

An official response posted by Khatami on his official website this week said that his participation in the elections was based on the interests of Iran and of the reform movement, and stemmed from the conditions prevailing in the country. Not presenting candidates for the elections never meant boycotting them, Khatami said, adding that he took part in the elections to move Iran and the rights of its citizens forward, and in order not to give excuses to his ill-wishers.

After voting, Rafsanjani, who, as already mentioned, took part in the elections as well, implicitly referred to the electoral fraud in the 2009 presidential elections, expressing his hope that the election results will reflect the way the people of Iran actually voted. His statement drew strong criticism from regime supporters. A commentary article published by Fars News Agency said that his remarks allow Western media to slam Iran, and reflect his relations with the leaders of "incitement" (a term used to refer to the reformist opposition). During the election day Rafsanjani became the center of a media blunder when Iranian TV aired a live interview with a woman who called out "Long live Imam Khamenei, death to Hashemi Rafsanjani".

The election results show that, as could be expected, supporters of the Supreme Leader from the two major conservative fronts that ran in the elections have won an overwhelming 75 percent of all Majles seats. Analysis of the election results carried out by the daily Tehran Emrooz shows that over 50 percent of conservative candidates elected for the Majles are affiliated with the United Osulgarayan Front, about 45 percent of elected conservative candidates are members of the two main conservative lists, and 5 percent of elected candidates belong exclusively to the Steadfast Front. In addition to the majority of candidates who represent the conservative camp, about 50 candidates affiliated with the moderate right wing of the reformist camp or who ran independently were elected in a number of constituencies.

In Tehran, former Majles speaker Gholam Ali Haddad Adel came in first. He was number one on the United Osulgarayan Front list but also a member of the Steadfast Front list. After the votes were counted in Tehran, it became apparent that only five candidates won at least 25 percent of the votes. The other 25

representatives of Tehran in the Majles will therefore be chosen in another round of elections to be held in several weeks in Tehran and other constituencies where candidates did not receive at least one quarter of the votes. The second round of elections in Tehran will be contested between 50 candidates who made it to spots 6 to 55. Among them are 21 United Osulgarayan Front candidates, 22 Steadfast Front candidates, two candidates who belong to both lists, and five candidates running on the People's Voice list (which consists of the president's critics in the conservative camp).

Current Majles speaker Ali Larijani, who ran in the United Front list, came in first in the Qom constituency. Larijani and Haddad Adel, both considered the Supreme Leader's allies, will likely run for Majles speaker in the coming months.

The fight between the president's allies ("the deviant faction") and the supporters of the conservative religious establishment was decided even before the elections themselves, when most candidates close to the president were disqualified by the Guardian Council during the vetting stage. It is likely, therefore, that the ninth Majles will be one unfavorable to the president during his last year in office. Amir Mohebian, a political commentator closely affiliated with conservative circles, speculated this week that the United Osulgarayan Front will enjoy a strong position in the ninth Majles. He noted, however, that it remains to be seen how it will compare to the Steadfast Front once the second round of elections is complete. In an interview given to the Fararu website, Mohebian estimated that, if both fronts win a similar number of Majles seats, the result will be an escalation of power struggles in the conservative camp that will manifest itself already during the election of the Majles speaker. He added that the president may try and mobilize support among the independent candidates elected to the Majles, and that in some cases these candidates may join forces with the Steadfast Front.

The ninth Majles elections, held last Friday, March 2, proceeded smoothly and without major incidents. The chairman of the security committee of the Tehran Province Election Headquarters reported that, in the days leading up to the elections, security forces had detained ten people who were planning to carry out acts of sabotage on orders from "foreign elements" (Mehr, March 2).

This year the Iranian authorities did not block internet traffic or impose restrictions on sending text messages on the election day. Media sources in Iran reported that internet access speed was even higher on that day than it is at other times. A number of Iranians

reported that, on the morning of the election day, they received a threatening text message saying that, unless they go vote, they will no longer be eligible for the cash benefits paid under the subsidy policy reform (<http://www.supportgolshifteh.blogspot.com/2012/03/blog-post.html>, March 2).



Voter turnout: regime, opposition give conflicting versions

According to official data released by the Ministry of Interior, 64.2 percent of eligible voters took part in the elections. The voter turnout was more than ten percent higher than it was in the 2008 elections, and the highest since the sixth Majles elections in 2000. In Tehran Province, where the voter turnout is usually relatively low, 52 percent of eligible voters exercised their right to vote, authorities said. The Ministry of Interior postponed the voting deadline five times to allow all Iranians waiting in line at the polling stations to vote. Conservative media claimed that the voter turnout in a number of constituencies was so high that there were no ballots left at some of the polling stations.

فاصله چشمگیر مشارکت در انتخابات مجلس نهم ایران با کشورهای مدعی دموکراسی



The significant difference between the participation in the ninth Majles elections and the “so-called democratic countries”
(produced by the Islamic Student Association of Shahed University in Tehran, <http://iusnews.ir>, March 4)

However, during and after the election day the reformist opposition claimed that the voter turnout was significantly lower than that officially reported by the authorities. During the election day Iranian web users and bloggers published photographs and videos allegedly documenting empty polling stations across the country. Iran Press News, an opposition website, reported that security forces prohibited photographers and journalists from taking pictures of empty polling stations. Foreign reporters in Tehran said that authorities restricted the movement of foreign journalists and monitored their actions during the voting.

Ardeshir Amir Arjomand, advisor to opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi and spokesman for the Council for Coordinating the Green Path of Hope, who resides outside of Iran, announced earlier this week that the voter turnout in the elections had been decided in advance by the authorities (Kalemeh, March 4).

This week the Baztab Emrooz website cast doubt on the reported voter turnout in Tehran, saying that the figure given by the governor of Tehran Province on the number of eligible voters there was lower by 2.5 million than the number of eligible voters in the 2009 presidential elections, as reported by the Ministry of Interior. Since it is unlikely that so many people left the province or passed away since the 2009 elections, the governor of the province has to address the difference in data on eligible voters between 2009 and 2012, the website said (Baztab, March 3).



This ballot reads, “Death to the corrupted regime that forces me to vote for a stamp in my ID” (from an Iranian woman’s Facebook page)

The authorities and conservative media portrayed the high voter turnout as a victory for the Islamic republic and a crushing defeat for the West and the reformist opposition, which had called for a boycott of the elections. The two major conservative fronts, the United Osulgarayan Front and the Steadfast Front, released statements of satisfaction with the high voter turnout, expressing their appreciation to the people of Iran for their “enthusiastic” participation in the electoral process. The United Front said in its announcement that the citizens’ participation in the elections is a sign of the dedication felt by the people of Iran to the values of the revolution and the regime, headed by the Supreme Leader. The Steadfast Front stated that the elections show that the pressure, the sanctions, and the psychological warfare used by Iran’s internal and external enemies only make the Iranian people more determined and more faithful to the revolutionary principles and values. The front’s post-election statement said that the elections reflect the victory of the Iranian people and leadership over the “world arrogance” led by the United States, Zionism, and their allies inside Iran. The conservative daily Keyhan argued that the high voter turnout in the elections sends a clear message to the West, and that if the United States was facing difficulties in its struggle against Iran before the elections, the difficulties will become much more pronounced in the post-election period (Keyhan, March 3).

Former President Khatami’s vote: severe blow to reformist opposition’s reputation

The reputation of the reformist opposition took a major hit due to former President Mohammad Khatami’s participation in the elections, despite the opposition leader’s announcement several weeks ago that the political conditions in Iran rule out the possibility of holding fair elections. Khatami’s participation in the elections drew strong reactions from regime opponents and was used by the conservative media to slam the reformist opposition and highlight its powerlessness and failure.

Official reformist opposition websites, which initially denied reports on Khatami's participation in the elections, were shortly forced to admit that he had, in fact, voted. Jaras, a website affiliated with reformist opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi, admitted earlier this week that Khatami's vote was contrary to the expectations of the Green Movement, and expressed his hope that the former president would soon clarify to the public the reasons that led to his decision to vote. However, the website stressed, citing reformist opposition sources, that the main issue was not the participation or non-participation of opposition supporters in the elections, but rather the elections themselves, whose results had been decided in advance (Jaras, March 3).

Khatami's participation in the elections provoked a great deal of anger from Iranian social network users, who accused the former president of betrayal.



Cartoon by Nikahang Kowsar (www.khodnevis.org, March 3)

Hossein Nouraninejad, a journalist close to Khatami, reported earlier this week that, during a brief conversation he held with Khatami after the latter had voted, the former president told him that the decision to take part in the elections was a difficult one for him to make, and that he was aware of its consequences. Khatami said that he decided on such a surprising course of action after receiving some disturbing information in recent days about the post-election plans of radical elements within the regime. He added that the domestic and international political conditions are highly complex, and that it is these conditions that influenced his decision. He denied that he had voted as a result of pressure exerted upon him or secret agreements with the authorities. When asked by Nouraninejad what he had written on the ballot, Khatami replied "the Islamic republic" (Khodnevis, March 3).

Sadeq Zibakalam, an intellectual closely affiliated with moderate reformist quarters, said this week that he was not surprised by Khatami's vote, and that both Khatami and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, had no choice but to

take part in the elections. By boycotting the elections, Zibakalam said, they would have been completely excluded from the circle of the regime and lost any ability to make a difference from the inside, thus playing into the hands of radical elements in the conservative camp. Zibakalam said that Khatami and Rafsanjani need to stay in the system to help promote the democratic process in Iran (Fars, March 4).

An official response posted by Khatami on his official website this week said that he understands and respects those critical of his decision to vote in the elections. He stressed, however, that any political move must be based on an understanding of the interests and conditions prevailing in Iran. The interests of the state and of the reform movement trump personal considerations, he said. Khatami also noted that avoiding the presentation of candidates for the elections never meant boycotting them, and that he had decided to let his actions reflect this position to avoid giving excuses to his ill-wishers and move Iran and the rights of its citizens forward (Kalemeh, March 5).

Fars News Agency reported that Khatami was forced to take part in the elections after he realized that the widespread public participation in the elections thwarted the plans of Iran's internal and external enemies to undermine and weaken the Iranian regime (Fars, March 2). The Farda website also discussed Khatami's participation in the elections and said that the former president understood that boycotting the elections would spell the end of his future political activity in the country, and that his participation shows that he prefers being the leader of a significant political group rather than the head of a trivial faction (Farda, March 3).

Voting and protesting: Rafsanjani votes, insinuates that presidential elections were forged

As already mentioned, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani took part in the elections as well. During a conversation with journalists, in an implicit reference to the electoral fraud in the 2009 presidential elections, Rafsanjani expressed his hope that the election results will reflect the way the citizens of Iran actually voted. The statement made by the chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council drew strong criticism from regime supporters. A commentary article published by Fars News Agency said that his remarks on the day of the elections allow Western media to slam Iran, and reflect his relations with the leaders of "incitement" (a term used to refer to the reformist opposition) in the past two years (Fars, March 4).

During the election day Rafsanjani became the center of a media blunder when Iranian TV aired a live interview with a woman who called out "Long live Imam Khamenei, death to Hashemi Rafsanjani". The TV station consequently had to interrupt the broadcast. In the

coming days, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is expected to make a decision on the make-up of the Expediency Discernment Council, which will decide on Rafsanjani's political future.

In an attempt to overcome the hit taken by the reformist opposition's reputation when a number of top reformist figures, mainly Khatami, took part in the elections, the Jaras website reported this week that several top clerics affiliated with the reformist faction did not vote. According to the website, the non-participating top clerics include Ayatollah Hossein Vahid Khorasani, Ayatollah Seyyed Abdolkarim Mousavi-Ardebili, Ayatollah Yousef Sane'i, Ayatollah Sadeq Shirazi, Ayatollah Ali-Mohammad Dastgheyb Shirazi, and Asadollah Bayat Zanjani (Jaras, March 2).

Predetermined results: right wing wins; political power struggles among conservatives will likely continue

The election results show that, as could be expected, supporters of the Supreme Leader from the two major conservative fronts that ran in the elections have won an overwhelming 75 percent of all Majles seats. Analysis of the election results carried out by Tehran Emrooz, a daily affiliated with Tehran's Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, shows that over 50 percent of conservative candidates elected for the Majles are affiliated with the United Osulgarayan Front, about 45 percent of elected conservative candidates are members of the two main conservative lists, and only 5 percent of elected candidates belong exclusively to the Steadfast Front (Tehran Emrooz, March 5).

In Tehran, former Majles speaker Gholam Ali Haddad Adel came in first. He was number one on the United Osulgarayan Front list but also a member of the Steadfast Front list. After the votes were counted in Tehran, it became apparent that only five candidates won at least 25 percent of the votes: Haddad Adel, Ali-Reza Marandi, and Mas'oud Mir-Kazemi, who belong to both conservative lists, Mohammad Hassan Abu-Torabi Fard from the United Osulgarayan Front, and Morteza Aqa Tehrani from the Steadfast Front. The other 25 representatives of Tehran in the Majles will therefore be chosen from the 50 candidates who made it to spots 6 to 55 in another round of elections to be held in several weeks in Tehran and other constituencies where candidates did not receive at least one quarter of the votes. The second round of elections in Tehran will be contested between 21 United Osulgarayan Front candidates, 22 Steadfast Front candidates, two candidates who belong to both lists, and five candidates running on the People's Voice list (which consists of the president's critics in the conservative camp, headed by Majles member Ali Motahari) (Asr-e Iran, March 4).



Current Majles speaker Ali Larijani, who ran in the United Front list, came in first in the Qom constituency. The victory achieved by Larijani and Haddad Adel, both considered close allies of the Supreme Leader, probably marks the beginning of a political battle between the two top officials for the position of speaker of the ninth Majles.

The fight between the president's allies ("the deviant faction") and the supporters of the conservative religious establishment was decided even before the elections themselves, when most candidates close to the president were disqualified by the Guardian Council during the vetting stage. It is likely, therefore, that the ninth Majles will be one unfavorable to the president during his last year in office.



Based on the partial election results published so far, Amir Mohebian, a political commentator closely affiliated with conservative quarters, speculated that the United Osulgarayan Front will enjoy a strong position in the ninth Majles. He noted, however, that it remains to be seen how it will compare to the Steadfast Front once the second round of elections is complete. In an interview given to the Fararu website, Mohebian estimated that, if both fronts win a similar number of Majles seats, this could lead to intense power struggles in the conservative camp that will manifest themselves already during the election of the Majles speaker. If the Steadfast Front estimates that it enjoys considerable influence in the Majles, it may run Morteza Aqa-Tehrani as its candidate for Majles speaker, who would then race against Haddad Adel and Ali Larijani. The top commentator also noted that President Ahmadinejad

may try and mobilize support among the independent candidates elected to the Majles, and that in some cases these candidates may join forces with the Steadfast Front (Fararu, March 4).

Ahmadinejad took a big hit on the personal level when his sister Parvin was not elected to the Majles for Garmsar Province. Following her defeat, the president's sister said that some of the candidates in her constituency had violated the law, and that she intends to appeal the results of the elections. She said that while she has no intention of questioning the fairness of the elections, the law must be upheld (Asr-e Iran, March 3). The Mashregh website said that the president's sister's defeat is an indication that the elections were clean (Mashregh, March 4).

In addition to the majority of candidates who represent the conservative camp, about 50 candidates affiliated with the moderate right wing of the reformist camp or who ran independently were elected in a number of constituencies. Some prominent reformist Majles members who served in the previous Majles were not reelected, including Mostafa Kavakebian and Qodratollah Alikhani. Elections were also held for the five Majles seats reserved for religious minorities (three seats for Christians and one each for Jews and Zoroastrians). The Jewish seat once again went to Jewish Majles member Ciamak Moresadegh, who won over Mas'oud David by a majority of 2,934 out of 3,240 votes.

