

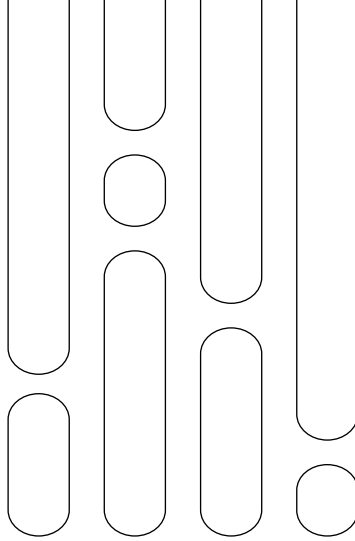
Position Paper

THE FIRST ROUND OF IRAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS — RESULTS AND INDICATIONS

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In the first round of Iran's presidential elections on June 28, 2024, no candidate emerged victorious. The four contenders included "reformist" Masoud Pezeshkian and "hardliners" Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Saeed Jalili, and Mostafa Pourmohammadi. Consequently, a run-off will take place between "reformist" Pezeshkian and "hardliner" Jalili. Although election day procedures went smoothly, the low voter turnout was disappointing for the Iranian regime. This report aims to analyze the election results, their implications and potential repercussions to understand the future political landscape of Iran.

What Distinguishes the Current Electoral Environment From Previous Ones?

The recent presidential elections in Iran took place during an extremely stressful period for the regime, exacerbated by the short preparation time following the sudden death of former President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in western Iran. These challenging circumstances might hinder the regime's ability to orchestrate the electoral process in order to ensure the victory of its preferred candidate, which is part of its strategy to consolidate "hardliner" leadership.

Conversely, the previous presidential elections in 2021, which saw the late President Ebrahim Raisi win, were conducted in an orderly manner without time pressures on the regime. This enabled Iran's ruling establishment to make the necessary arrangements and agree on a preferred candidate, facilitating Raisi's ascent to the apex of Iran's executive branch. In that election, Raisi's victory was almost a foregone conclusion, whereas in the most recent round, the regime's preferred candidate still remains vague and uncertain.

Additionally, unlike the previous round, the internal environment in the presidential elections held on Friday, May 28, 2024, played a significant role in the results. The pressing timeline to secure the presidency for the "hardliner" current left insufficient time to put adequate arrangements in place. Consequently, internal factors, such as widespread tension among a large segment of society over the political dominance of the "hardliners" and the regime's domestic and foreign policies, influenced the candidates' chances. This impact is evident in the final results announced by the Iranian Ministry of Interior.

Therefore, internal dynamics played a prominent role in boosting the prospects of "reformist" candidate Pezeshkian, leading him to make unexpected gains. This is in stark contrast to the significant decline in the "reformist" faction's influence in Iran in recent years due to the dominance of the "hardliners." Even if the runoff favors "hardliner" candidate Jalili, these elections

reveal the significant impact of the regime's electoral interventions on the "reformists'" chances of gaining power. This is evidenced by the fact that when the regime's interventions were hindered, the "reformists'" chances increased, leading to the elimination of Ghalibaf from the presidential race and the final contest between Pezeshkian and Jalili.

Unlike the previous round of elections, during which the regime sought to secure a successor to the supreme leader and conclude the conflict between the "hardliners" and "reformists" by engineering the electoral results in favor of the "hardliners" —specifically by ensuring Raisi's ascent to the presidency — the most recent elections were marked by uncertainty. The primary question before the voting was whether the "hardliner"- "reformist" conflict would resurface if the presidential battle was won by Pezeshkian, who is supported by Rouhani, Zarif, and the "reformists" advocating for effective and positive international relations. Alternatively, would the "hardliners" once again gain presidential power?

The recent elections were also distinctive in contrast to previous ones, as voters faced confusion over choosing between two prominent "hardliner" figures: Ghalibaf and Jalili. This division within the "hardliner" camp potentially fragmented their votes, whereas the sole "reformist" candidate benefitted from this division among his "hardliner" competitors to potentially make headway in the electoral contest.

Presidential Elections — Final Results

Four candidates participated in the early presidential elections: Masoud Pezeshkian, who garnered significant support from "reformist" and "moderate" leaders, and three candidates representing the "hardliner" faction: Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Saeed Jalili, and the cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi. Prior to the elections, two "hardliner" candidates, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi and Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani, withdrew from the race.

Due to low voter turnout and the Iranian regime's efforts to boost participation, the Ministry of Interior extended polling hours three times on Friday, June 28, 2024. Initially scheduled to end at 6:00 pm, voting was extended for two hours each time. According to the final results from the Ministry of Interior, a total of 24,535,185 votes were cast in the elections, reflecting a participation rate of 40%. This marks the lowest turnout level in the history of Iran's presidential elections since the revolution in 1979.

The results of the elections showed that none of the four candidates secured more than 50% of the total votes. "Reformist" candidate Pezeshkian se-

cured first place with over 10 million votes, while “hardliner” Jalili followed closely with approximately 9.3 million votes. “Conservative” contender and Parliament Speaker Ghalibaf unexpectedly came third with fewer than 3.5 million votes. Cleric and former Minister of Justice under Hassan Rouhani’s government Mostafa Pourmohammadi received the least votes, totaling less than 207,000. As a result, both Pezeshkian and Jalili will advance to the runoff stage scheduled for next Friday, July 5, 2024, as they garnered the highest number of votes in the first round. The following table shows the number of votes obtained by each candidate as well as the total number of invalid votes.

Table No.1: The Number of Votes Obtained by Iran’s Presidential Candidates

Candidate	Affiliation	Number of votes	Percentage
Masoud Pezeshkian	“Reformist”	10.415.991	42.45
Saeed Jalili	“Hardliner”	9.473.298	38.61
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	“Hardliner”	3.383340	13.79
Mostafa Pourmohammadi	“Hardliner”	206.397	0.84
Invalid votes	—	1.056.159	4.31

Source: <https://2u.pw/6o2I2qZ3> & <https://2u.pw/smC2d9qK>

The results underscored a continued decline in voter turnout, signaling the failure of the Iranian regime’s strategies to bolster participation, despite the Guardian Council’s approval of “reformist” Pezeshkian’s candidacy. Additionally, there was a notable increase in invalid votes, amounting to 4.31% of the total. This suggests that many voters opted to attend polling stations but either left their ballots blank or did not adhere to voting requirements, potentially as a form of protest against regime policies or to avoid repercussions such as job dismissal or accusations of hostility towards the regime. This phenomenon is particularly observed in some Iranian institutions where employees are compelled to participate in elections.

The decision by both Ghalibaf and Jalili not to withdraw from the presidential race, despite calls for consolidation within the “hardliner” faction, resulted in the dispersion of “hardliner” votes. This fragmented support undermined their chances of securing a decisive electoral victory in the first

round. Consequently, Pezeshkian, backed by the “reformist” and “moderate” factions, managed to secure a place in the runoff against Jalili.

The Electoral Process’s Initial Indications

Arguably, this crucial first round of Iran’s presidential elections reveals the following trends:

The “Reformists” Regaining Political Momentum

The election results, with Pezeshkian securing first place, highlight the success of his presidential campaign in gaining support from both the “moderate” and “reformist” factions. This endorsement is significant considering the internal divisions within the “reformist” camp since the end of President Rouhani’s tenure. While the regime initially permitted “reformist” candidates to participate, Pezeshkian’s performance underscored their enduring political relevance and substantial popular backing.

The Regime Failing to Boost Participation

Although the Guardian Council engineered the electoral process to include all political movements, including both “reformist” and “hardliner” candidates, the decision to allow Pezeshkian’s candidacy was seen as a strategic move. Despite the supreme leader’s statements emphasizing the importance of public participation in maintaining the essence and global standing of the Iranian republic, voter turnout in these elections marked the lowest in Iran’s post-revolution history. This trend suggests that the supreme leader’s calls for participation, crucial for the regime’s future, did not resonate widely, particularly among younger generations, signaling a continued decline in the regime’s popularity and legitimacy.

Boosting Radicals Within the “Hardliner” Faction

While some polls suggested that Ghalibaf, considered the least radical within the “conservative” (“hardliner”) front, might have had a better chance compared to Jalili, the results showed the opposite. This outcome indicates that the “hardliner” faction holds greater influence among “conservatives” and enjoys broader support within their ranks. This trend aligns with the increasing dominance of “hardliners” across state institutions. If Jalili succeeds in the runoff, this would further entrench the “hardliners” monopoly on power.

Negative Public Opinion and a Failure to Contain Popular Anger

The election results show that the regime’s efforts to engage and win over critical segments like Generation Z and social movements opposing the

regime were unsuccessful. This failure was starkly evident in the turnout, with approximately 60% abstaining from participating, alongside over 4% of votes being invalid. These figures reflect not just a wholesale rejection of the candidates, but a broader repudiation of the entire regime. Essentially, they indicate significant frustration within Iranian society and highlight the ruling establishment's failure to address internal tensions and articulate the people's demands.

Failure to Represent Women and Opposition Forces

As has been the case since the 1979 revolution, women and individuals advocating for radical change have been prohibited from running in elections.

A Hotly Contested Runoff

Runoff elections are scheduled to be held next Friday between Pezeshkian and former nuclear negotiator Jalili, with several expected repercussions, as follows:

Greater Internal Polarization

The runoff between Pezeshkian and Jalili will intensify polarization within Iran. Representing opposite ends of the spectrum on issues like relations with the West, the nuclear file, internal politics, freedoms, women's rights and economic policies, their competition is likely to widen divisions within the regime.

Increased Mobilization Among "Reformists"

"Reformists" will seek to rally support from parties that abstained in the first round, including disillusioned "reformists" and younger generations skeptical of the electoral process and the regime as a whole.

Unity Within the "Hardliner" Front

With all competitors from the "hardliner" faction exiting the race, efforts within this faction will consolidate behind Jalili. Support from Ghalibaf, who came third, and other "conservative" candidates is expected to bolster Jalili's chances in the runoff, particularly if efforts to attract boycotting voters fail.

Regime Focusing on Turnout

The regime aimed for high voter turnout to bolster its legitimacy domestically and internationally. However, the low turnout in the first round was a setback. In the runoff, the regime, led by the supreme leader, will intensify efforts to increase voter participation to maintain its image and legitimacy.

Potential for Continued Boycott

A significant proportion of the population, approximately 60%, boycotted the initial round, demonstrating widespread skepticism and discontent with the electoral process. Convincing these voters to participate in the runoff will likely prove challenging, further complicating the regime's efforts to enhance legitimacy through electoral participation.

In conclusion, the regime's strategy to foster competition among its supportive currents failed to mobilize the masses, highlighting a growing awareness of the regime's manipulative tactics. This situation has significant implications, exposing persistent tensions and widespread dissatisfaction with the country's current state among the populace. It also reveals that there remains a noticeable gap between the public and all political currents, including the "reformists."

Moreover, voter apathy among younger generations, evident from their low turnout, suggests a potential for future unrest akin to the protests seen in Iran in recent years. Looking ahead to the runoff, it is likely that the unified "hardliner" bloc will pose a challenge to Pezeshkian's presidential ambitions as he endeavors to mobilize his supporters in pursuit of the presidency.



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