

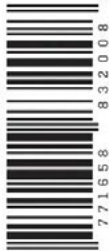
MONTHLY REPORT

# Iran Case File

June 2024

*Your window on Iran from inside and abroad*

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June 2024

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2024, Iran focused intensely on its presidential elections to navigate the aftermath of President Ebrahim Raisi's sudden death in a helicopter crash, with the elections dominating discussions across political, economic, ideological, and social spheres. This internal preoccupation also affected Iran's external engagements, as the international community awaited the election results with cautious interest, albeit with little expectations for radical shifts in Iranian policy orientations.

**Internally**, the electoral process, conducted over two rounds, reignited debates among Iranian elites on both domestic and foreign issues. A notable feature was the low voter turnout, revealing complex social dynamics, particularly among the youth, and their evolving relationship with the state. The emergence of a "reformist" candidate prompted a reassessment of the current's role and status in Iran, previously marginalized. The improved turnout in the second round sparked discussions on the Iranian establishment's reconsideration of its longstanding policy of electoral interference in light of the current extraordinary circumstances compared to previous elections.

**Economically**, the Iranian presidential candidates presented their economic agendas during their campaigns, albeit without clear and detailed strategies for managing the economy. Instead, they offered general assessments of existing economic challenges. Masoud Pezeshkian, who

emerged as the winner, articulated clearer economic policies which are set to be tested amidst potential hurdles in both domestic and international arenas.

**Ideologically**, the recent presidential elections foregrounded the historical issue of the exclusion of women from high office. This exclusion is justified by the ruling Shiite religious elites on the basis of religious doctrine, constitutional interpretations, and social norms. However, to protect the establishment, clerics and officials do not openly acknowledge the wholesale exclusion of women from the presidency. Instead, they attribute disqualifications to a purported lack of eligibility according to criteria set by the Guardian Council, deflecting from gender-based reasons.

In practice, however, the Guardian Council, influenced by traditionalist and hardline religious perspectives, employs a selective interpretation of the Constitution. This interpretation effectively prevents women from entering the presidential race, while framing societal resistance as reflective of patriarchal norms rather than institutional barriers imposed by religious authorities.

**Socially**, during the electoral campaign, attention in Iran was drawn to the issue of child labor, coinciding with the observance of the World Day Against Child Labor on June 12. Iranian media extensively covered this pressing issue, which is widely perceived as a consequence of broader

challenges, particularly the country's dire economic conditions.

**On the military and security fronts**, the electoral process proceeded without significant incidents of violence, as reported by security authorities that successfully thwarted some attempted disruptions. Meanwhile, Iran's military establishment continued to pursue its strategic objectives, focusing on advancing uranium enrichment and expanding its space and missile programs. Operations in low Earth orbit aimed at satellite launches, along with efforts to achieve higher orbits, were facilitated by assistance from Russia following the conflict with Ukraine.

**Iranian foreign relations with its Arab and regional neighbors** saw minimal engagement during the electoral period. In Syria, media attention on the Iranian ambassador and officials from the Iranian Cultural Mission in the country and their emphasis on Iranian citizens' presence at polling stations raised questions about the accuracy of their statements. Since their rhetoric did not match reality, this exaggerated portrayal of the Iranian presence in Syria prompted speculation about the underlying motives driving such media emphasis.

**Regarding Iranian interactions with international powers**, the coincidence of the Iranian elections with the US electoral cycle heightened discussions about bilateral relations. Despite regional tensions peaking after the Israeli conflict in Gaza, both Iran

and the United States have managed their differences without escalating into direct confrontation. The focus remains on managing conflicts, particularly concerning the nuclear file and Iran's regional behavior. While the Iranian election outcomes may not alter Iran's approach significantly towards Washington, the results of the US elections could potentially bring substantial changes. The prospect of frontrunner Trump, who holds starkly different views from Biden on Iran, returning to power underscores the potential for a shift in bilateral relations depending on the election outcome.

**Regarding relations with Europe,** the focus remained on human rights concerns and the nuclear issue. Iran

achieved a significant breakthrough with the release of Hamid Nouri, its first citizen accused of crimes against humanity in Sweden, a move that sparked international legal objections. Additionally, what seemed impossible happened on Tehran's terms as it refused to release the third Swedish citizen awaiting execution. Meanwhile, Iran has persisted in enriching uranium to 60% purity and has obstructed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, despite strict condemnation from the agency. These actions underscore ongoing tensions and international scrutiny surrounding Iran's nuclear activities and its compliance with international agreements and inspections.

# **DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

June 2024 developments in Iran have been largely influenced by the presidential elections, which represent a pivotal step towards moving beyond the phase of political uncertainty. This section discusses the following topics:

- The electoral process and its dynamics
- Economic policies being front and center at electoral debates
- The religious and constitutional factors contributing to the disqualification of female candidates in the elections
- The persistent issue of child labor
- Developments surrounding Iran's space and missile programs.

## Trajectory of Iran's 2024 Presidential Elections

Iran navigated a significant transitional period by holding presidential elections with two rounds of voting after none of the four candidates secured a decisive victory in the first round. The second round, which saw “reformist” candidate Masoud Pezeshkian emerge victorious, drew a higher turnout rate of nearly 10%. This underscores the crucial role the electoral process continues to play in influencing the behavior of both authorities and society. The ICF Political File for the month of June provides a breakdown of the various stages of the electoral process, including the first and second rounds of voting, and highlights their most significant impacts on the Iranian political landscape.

### Political Alignments on the Eve of the Presidential Elections

The Guardian Council approved six candidates: one “reformist” and the rest “conservatives.” Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi and Alireza Zakani, both aligned with the “hard-liner” current, later withdrew. However, the two prominent candidates, diplomat Saeed Jalili and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, continued their campaigns with both refusing to step aside for the other, leading to a split in the “conservative” vote bank. In contrast, Pezeshkian stood alone representing the “reformist” current. The decision to field

only one “reformist” candidate helped avoid internal conflict and competition among “reformists” and “moderates,” unlike the “conservatives,” who were divided. Consequently, the “reformist” and “moderate” factions were able to unite behind Pezeshkian.

During the election campaign, the name of former President Hassan Rouhani, under whose administration the nuclear agreement was concluded, was frequently mentioned. This reflects the nuclear issue’s ongoing prominence in Iranian foreign policy due to its link to longstanding sanctions troubling the country. There was a continuous attack on Rouhani’s government, particularly by Jalili and other “conservatives,” who were critical of the nuclear agreement. The election of Pezeshkian is seen as a continuation of Rouhani’s policies, especially after Pezeshkian appointed Mohammad Javad Zarif, the “reformist” architect of the nuclear agreement, as his foreign affairs advisor.

### The First Round

Opinion polls indicated that the “reformist” candidate would gain an advantage due to his support from key “reformist” figures and “moderates,” including former President Mohammad Khatami, Hassan Rouhani, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Expectations varied regarding the popularity of the “conservatives,” with a slight preference for Ghalibaf over Jalili. However, there was consensus that the chances of candidate



Mostafa Pourmohammadi were minimal.

The results of the first round closely matched expectations, with the sole “reformist” candidate Pezeshkian leading the race. Jalili secured second place, contrary to forecasts that favored Ghalibaf, who finished third, while Pourmohammadi came in last. As anticipated, none of the candidates achieved the required 51% majority, necessitating a second round of competition between Pezeshkian and Jalili.

The results of the first round demonstrated that the “reformist” current remains present and influential in Iranian politics despite setbacks in recent years. It showed that the current could reenter the political arena when given the opportunity.

The first round saw 24,535,185 votes cast, with a voter turnout of 40%, the lowest in the history of Iran’s presidential elections since the 1979 revolution. This voter turnout reflected the continuing downward trend in electoral participation, indicating the failure of the Iranian establishment’s efforts to boost turnout, including the Guardian Council’s approval of “reformist” Pezeshkian’s candidacy, who is not considered a particularly popular figure within the current.

Despite the supreme leader’s statement that “the participation of the people is part of the essence of the state and the continued existence of the Islamic Republic and its position in the world is linked to the participation of the people,” his calls for greater

turnout did not resonate, especially with the younger generations. This reflects the ruling establishment’s declining popularity and legitimacy due to its inability to draw support from key social segments such as Generation Z and civil movements opposing the system of governance.

The results also revealed a significant increase in invalid votes, reaching 4.31%. This suggests that a considerable number of voters chose to visit the polling stations but either left their ballots blank or did not follow the proper voting procedures. This action might be an expression of anger toward the regime’s policies or an attempt to avoid prosecution, dismissal from work, or accusations of not voting and hostility toward the system. This is particularly relevant in some institutions where employees are compelled to vote in various elections.

### **The Runoff**

The competition for the presidency intensified as the two candidates sought to secure the maximum number of votes. In this final stage, the return of the “reformist-hardliner” divide among the political elite became evident. “Reformists” and “moderates” maintained their support for Pezeshkian, while “hardliners” rallied behind Jalili after Ghalibaf announced his support for his former rival. Jalili focused on garnering votes from the “hardliner” current by engaging with parliamentarians to gain their backing. Meanwhile, Pezeshki-

an aimed to mobilize the silent majority or those boycotting the election, positioning himself as a beacon of hope to lift them out of the despair they have suffered for years.

The elections ultimately resulted in the victory of the “reformist” candidate for several reasons. Perhaps the most significant was the ruling establishment’s reluctance to engineer the elections in favor of the “conservatives” due to fears of negative repercussions following its previous exclusionary approach. This approach aimed to entirely exclude the “reformists” and ensure “conservative” dominance over state institutions. While this approach may have succeeded officially, it failed to transform the “reformist” popular bloc into supporters of the “hardliners.” Instead, it drove the “reformist” popular bloc to despair as political solutions could not be found from within the governing apparatus. Therefore, “reformists” found it increasingly difficult to mobilize their popular base and convince their supporters to pursue reform through the ballot box. This led the Iranian establishment to shift its focus to limiting the continued deterioration and escalation of crises resulting from the “hardliners’” appropriation of the presidency.

The low turnout rate in the first round starkly illustrated the worsening crisis of legitimacy faced by the ruling elite. This prompted Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to issue statements just two days before the vote, which effectively boosted the turnout

by nearly 10% in the second round, favoring Pezeshkian. Khamenei acknowledged the low turnout in the first round and encouraged citizens to participate in the second round. Importantly, he refrained from labeling all non-voters as “oppositionists,” attributing their lack of participation to preoccupation with other matters.<sup>(1)</sup> The supreme leader’s appeal for Iranians to vote reflects the ruling establishment’s efforts to restore its legitimacy both domestically and internationally, and its concern over the widening gap with the citizens, which could escalate into political unrest. Additionally, Khamenei’s statements could be seen as reassurance to those concerned about potential electoral fraud in favor of the “conservative” candidate, motivating “reformist” voters to participate.

### **Conclusion**

The presidential elections served as a crucial test of the Iranian establishment’s legitimacy. In the first round, the establishment was faced with a significant crisis as electoral participation declined to its lowest level in Iran’s electoral history, highlighting the deep dissatisfaction among the Iranian people. However, the establishment demonstrated its ability to influence the public by increasing voter turnout by 10% in the second round. Furthermore, these elections affirmed that the “reformist” current remains a significant player in Iranian politics despite facing challenges. Conversely, they reiterated

that the strength of the “hardliners” stems from its control over state institutions. It became evident that the “conservative” current’s electoral successes often require manipulation in its favor.

### **The Economic Implications of Pezeshkian’s Presidential Victory**

The victory of Masoud Pezeshkian in Iran’s recent presidential elections has reignited hope among a broad spectrum of Iranians, particularly with regard to the resolution of the country’s complex economic travails that have persisted for over six years. This includes efforts to revive the nuclear agreement, lift sanctions, reopen Iran’s economy to international trade and investment, and potentially improve socioeconomic conditions. However, the task ahead for President Pezeshkian and his “reformist” government is undeniably daunting. They inherit the legacy of former President Ebrahim Raisi, with accumulating economic issues, revealing the harsh realities and significant challenges that lie ahead for the new administration.

The ICF Economic File for the month of June focuses on the presidential elections through three main aspects:

The first analyzes the economic legacy left by Raisi.

The second provides an overview of the economic agendas put forth by the presidential candidates.

The third discusses the challenges that Pezeshkian will face in implementing his economic vision.

### **Raisi’s Economic Legacy**

After nearly three years into his incomplete presidential term, Raisi has left behind several pressing issues for his successor, including a raft of unfulfilled economic promises made by Raisi during his presidential campaign which sparked optimism at the time. Much of Raisi’s unrealized economic mandate related to reducing inflation, improving economic growth, stabilizing the currency value, and addressing critical issues like oil subsidies and corruption.

During Raisi’s presidency, the most notable achievement was the significant increase in oil sales, surpassing 1.4 million barrels per day, compared to less than 500,000 barrels per day in the later years of Rouhani’s presidency. This increase coincided with Joe Biden’s assumption of office in the United States, who, unlike his predecessor Donald Trump, took a less strict approach to sanctions on Iran. The Biden administration aimed to boost global oil supplies and lower prices, especially following the COVID-19 restrictions and bans on Russian exports. As a result, Iran managed to export approximately \$100 billion worth of oil from 2021 onwards.

However, economic growth under Raisi’s administration was sluggish. Even when it reached 5.7% last year, according to Iranian government statements, this growth followed

years of stagnation and contraction, failing to compensate for the GDP lag and setbacks in social welfare and per capita income. Moreover, economic growth relied significantly on a 22% increase in oil production. Raisi's government fell short of achieving its goal of creating 1 million jobs annually and reducing inflation to single digits, as promised during his electoral campaign. Instead, inflation soared in the first two years of his presidency, surpassing 50% and setting new records since the revolution. While inflation has since decreased to around 35% in recent months, it remains well above the targeted 20%.

In addition to the substantial increase in liquidity growth in Iran, averaging 40% annually, a critical decision in May 2022 to cease dollar subsidies for essential goods significantly contributed to inflation and a decline in citizens' purchasing power. This decision included lifting subsidies for importing flour and liberalizing prices for wheat, milk, eggs, poultry, and oils. With regard to foreign exchange, the value of the national currency declined significantly during Raisi's tenure against other currencies. The price of the dollar, for instance, rose by 160% over the 34 months of Raisi's presidency.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **An Overview of the Presidential Candidates' Economic Agendas**

None of the presidential candidates had clear roadmaps for managing the Iranian economy or practical solutions to put an end to its recurring

crises. However, some economic challenges and agendas were discussed during presidential debates.

"Hardliner" candidate Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf largely attributed the country's economic problems to the Rouhani administration. In a television interview, he called for "radical solutions" to issues like inflation, price fluctuations, and economic instability. Ghalibaf emphasized the need for prosperity and progress through investment and wealth creation, placing responsibility for the economic situation on Rouhani's government. On the other hand, "hardliner" candidate Saeed Jalili put forward ambitious economic goals, including the potential for achieving growth rates of 8% or higher. He advocated for leveraging the capabilities and potential of Iranian provinces to combat high prices and inflation, criticizing the increase in liquidity. Jalili also emphasized the importance of adopting a resolute economic approach to tackle inflation effectively.<sup>(3)</sup>

While the economic vision of "reformist" candidate Masoud Pezeshkian was more fully articulated, he emphasized several key points to improve Iran's economic situation. His focus centered on the imperative of lifting economic sanctions, which he viewed as pivotal to attracting essential foreign investment for the economy. Alongside sanctions relief, Pezeshkian advocated for accepting recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and fostering peaceful international relations.

Domestically, he supported “reformist” goals such as minimizing government and military interference in the economy to bolster the private sector and cooperatives. He also endorsed economic freedom, excluding the health and education sectors, and opposed price controls, compulsory pricing, monopolies as seen in the automotive industry, and restrictions on freedoms including the internet. Furthermore, he underscored the urgency of combating corruption, promoting social justice, and incentivizing development in deprived and border areas.<sup>(4)</sup> Pezeshkian’s vision holds promise for positive economic and social outcomes, contingent upon effective implementation to overcome challenges.

### **The Challenges Facing Pezeshkian in Implementing His Economic Vision**

The economic landscape is poised to witness internal tensions between the new “reformist” president and the “conservative” faction on various fronts. One of the most prominent issues is the interference of the religious establishment and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the economy, which Pezeshkian vociferously opposed during the presidential debates. However, implementing changes in this regard, unless the president’s orientations shift, may prove challenging. These institutions have remained deeply entrenched in the economy for over four decades since the revolution, backed by pow-

erful interest groups reluctant to relinquish their influence and gains. Past attempts by presidents like Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani to curtail their influence faced significant resistance and were largely unsuccessful. Thus, navigating these dynamics will prove challenging for Pezeshkian in pursuing his economic program.

Pezeshkian will also encounter significant challenges in implementing his vision concerning Iran’s acceptance of the FATF recommendations to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. This step is crucial for enhancing Iran’s transparency and addressing corruption issues which currently undermine its international standing. However, the Expediency Discernment Council has long opposed these measures due to concerns about the potential disclosures of Iran’s foreign financial transactions, and its networks that help in evading Western sanctions as well as its support for armed groups in countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Newly elected Pezeshkian faces a myriad of economic challenges ahead. These include combating high inflation, boosting local production and growth rates, and creating a more favorable business environment to stimulate economic activity. Enhancing both domestic and foreign investment will be crucial, alongside addressing the budget deficit and stabilizing the local currency, which has been depreciating. Additionally, resolving electricity shortages

caused by insufficient local gas supplies, tackling the housing crisis and addressing the decline in agricultural production due to drought are significant priorities. Politically, the resumption of nuclear negotiations with a view to expedite the lifting of economic sanctions remains an outstanding issue.

### **The Religious and Constitutional Dilemmas Surrounding the Candidacy of Women in the Presidential Elections**

The recent Iranian presidential elections sparked debate over two recurring and contentious issues: women's right to participate in the electoral process and the Guardian Council's historical rejection of the eligibility of women to stand as candidates. These topics have historically been focal points of ideological and doctrinal contention between "hardliner" and "reformist" scholars and politicians in Iran. This file aims to elucidate the ongoing intellectual and ideological disputes within Iran concerning the interpretation and application of these issues, particularly in light of the Guardian Council's role in vetting candidates.

In the recent presidential elections held on June 28, four female political activists submitted their candidacy papers. These included Zohreh Elahian, a "conservative" activist and former representative in the eighth and 11th Parliament; Hamideh Zarabadi, a former "reformist" representative in the 10th Parliament; Hajar Chenarani, who served as a representative

in Parliament during its 10th and 11th terms; and Rafat Bayat, a parliamentary representative during the seventh Parliament. However, the Guardian Council rejected their eligibility, thereby excluding them from the final list of candidates.<sup>(5)</sup>

There are several reasons for the ruling establishment's exclusion of women from running for office:

1. A religious and jurisprudential reason:

The ruling religious elites, including the supreme leader, jurists in the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts, and the Expediency Discernment Council, are traditionalist "conservatives" who uphold the traditional Shiite heritage and often oppose "reformist" initiatives. This stance was underscored by cleric Mohammad Taghi Fazel Meybodi, a member of the Assembly of Teachers and Researchers of the Qom Seminary, who stated, "Some members of the Guardian Council, following traditional views, believe that it is not permissible for a woman to hold the presidency of the country, similar to their stance on barring women from positions in the judiciary and the religious authority."

But the critical question remains: is the rejection of women's candidacy and their election a subsidiary jurisprudential issue or a fundamental necessity? According to the "reformist" viewpoint, this issue pertains to matters subject to interpretation and discretion (*ijtihad*), influenced by temporal and spatial factors, as well

as evolving customs. Therefore, it can potentially be changed or adapted. In contrast, the traditionalist perspective views it as an issue governed by definitive rulings that are not subject to change or alteration through *ijtihad*.

In a critique aimed at linking the prevention of women and Sunnis from reaching the presidency, Mola-vi Abdul Hamid, leader of the Sunnis in Iran, expressed his objection to the restrictions. He stated that barring “women and Sunnis” from registering and running for the presidency, as stipulated in Article 115 of the Constitution, contradicts both “Islamic law and international laws.” He highlighted a 45 year history in which three groups — women, Sunnis, and individuals of merit and ability outside a specific sectarian or political spectrum (Twelver Shiites) — have consistently been denied access to the presidency.<sup>(6)</sup>

Another crucial aspect pertains to the *hawza*. Traditionalist clerics within the *hawza* disapprove of women holding positions of power and exert pressure on the ruling elite in this regard. The ruling elite faces difficulty in overriding the *hawza*’s preferences due to their traditionalist religious background and close ties to the *hawza*. This dynamic reiterates the challenge of maintaining the core support base of the *hawza* while navigating contemporary political and social changes.

2. A legal-constitutional reason:

From a legal and constitutional perspective, Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei, former spokesman for the Guardian Council, noted before the 2021 presidential elections that “there is no legal prohibition, but there are cultural reservations.” He suggested that women could potentially assume the presidency in some era, citing the example of a woman holding a ministerial portfolio during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency.<sup>(7)</sup> However, Kadkhodaei’s statement appears diplomatic, given that the Guardian Council has not definitively interpreted the constitutional article to allow women’s candidacy, let alone their election. Traditionalists argue that positions like the presidency, judiciary and the religious authority involve guardianship and representation of the Infallible Imam, roles deemed inappropriate for women according to their interpretation.

The dispute among constitutional experts centers on the interpretation of Article 115 of the Iranian Constitution, which states, “The President of the Republic shall be elected from among religious and political figures who meet the following specifications...”<sup>(8)</sup> However, official translations of the Constitution by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies abroad use the phrase “religious political men” instead of “religious and political figures,” raising questions about the interpretation of the term “men.” In Persian, “men” can be translated as “personalities,” leading to debate over whether this

restricts eligibility to male candidates.<sup>[9]</sup> Despite requests for clarification, the Guardian Council has not provided explicit guidance on this term, potentially to avoid controversy that could undermine the “Islamic” government’s reputation, opting instead to maintain the status quo of rejecting women candidates without formally banning them.

### 3. A social reason:

In the social context, some argue that societal norms, predominantly masculine, contribute to the reluctance to accept a woman’s candidacy or presidency. However, others suggest that this narrative could be strategically amplified by the ruling establishment to justify its stance against women in presidential roles. If societal acceptance were the sole concern, the establishment might have allowed women to run and let society decide. Yet, the establishment’s refusal to do so suggests a deeper apprehension about women assuming the presidency. Moreover, neighboring models in countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia influence Iranian women’s aspirations for political rights, heightened especially after incidents like the killing of Mahsa Amini by security forces, which the establishment acknowledges and fears.

In addressing women, “hardliner” candidates in particular aim to leverage their votes while positioning themselves as champions of women’s rights. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, for instance, emphasized

in a gathering of women that “Women represent the foundational pillar of any country’s progress. They are pivotal to Iran’s development.” He further asserted that there are no inherent disparities between men and women in administrative domains.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Conclusion

The refusal of the ruling elite in Iran to permit women to participate in presidential elections stems from religious, constitutional and social factors, all ultimately rooted in their identity as traditionalist conservatives committed to preserving the sect’s heritage without reform or modernization. Many conservative jurists view allowing women to run as a form of secularization and Western influence that must be resisted. Yet, this ongoing rejection of women’s candidacy provokes discontent among women and youth, broadening opposition to the establishment and fostering criticism of its authoritarian control over public affairs.

## Child Labor in Iran

The issue of child labor in Iran has emerged as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with economic, social, political and security dimensions, drawing attention from Iranian newspapers and websites throughout June. It remains a critical concern on the global agenda for social welfare, especially concerning children. This file aims to explore this hazardous issue and the obstacles that hinder radical solutions.



### **The Reality of Child Labor in Iran**

While the Ministry of Interior estimates around 2,600 working children, unofficial sources suggest the number exceeds 3 million.<sup>(11)</sup> Additionally, statistics highlight approximately 3.5 million marginalized children and over 700,000 migrant and refugee children in Iran. The forms of child labor vary widely, with reports from the Sahebkhobar website indicating that girls are often involved in street vending and flower shops, while boys commonly engage in activities such as garbage collection,<sup>(12)</sup> agricultural labor, industrial work, workshops, domestic chores, street vending, and car washing.<sup>(13)</sup>

There are numerous factors contributing to the increase in child labor in Iran, primarily stemming from poor economic, social, political and cultural conditions, alongside ineffective education policies.<sup>(14)</sup> Many families with working children face severe financial pressures, compelling them to send these vulnerable children to work on the streets in order to generate essential income for the household.

Child labor has exacerbated the plight of this vulnerable segment of society, depriving them of education and study opportunities while jeopardizing their physical and mental health. Working children face a range of challenges including exposure to various social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse from a young age, delinquency, exploitation, insecurity, low wages, and gender discrimination.<sup>(15)</sup>

### **The Government's Role**

Iranian authorities have emphasized the regulation and protection of working children and street children. According to Article 79 of the Iranian Labor Code, it is strictly prohibited to employ children under the age of 15. Employers found violating this regulation face penalties ranging from fines and imprisonment to the closure of their factories and cancellation of their permits.<sup>(16)</sup> Secretary of the Child Labor Working Group at the Ministry of Interior Ali Rezaei highlighted on June 12, World Day Against Child Labor, that the group aims to create sustainable employment opportunities for these vulnerable children through skills training and empowerment initiatives.<sup>(17)</sup> Additionally, the Iranian Children's Rights Society has played a role in advocating for legislation aimed at combating child abuse, resulting in the passage of a law imposing fines of 1 million riyals for offenders.<sup>(18)</sup>

Secretary of the Human Rights Commission of the Central Bar Association Mohammad Saleh Noghrehkar underscored the necessity of a coherent and participatory approach focusing on four fundamental aspects to effectively address the issue of child labor: objectives, organization, programs, and methods. The legal framework in Iran defines individuals under the age of 18 as children and adolescents who should not be engaged in labor. Emphasizing the principles outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which defines a child as any

person under the age of 18, Noghrehkar asserted that children should not be exploited as a means to support their families. He highlighted the existence of the Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Iran, advocating for its rights-based implementation.<sup>(19)</sup> Despite the involvement of civil society in advocating for child labor regulation, non-governmental organizations have shown limited interest in government plans due to past unsuccessful efforts and initiatives.<sup>(20)</sup>

To conclude, it is evident from the discussion above that the Iranian establishment faces significant challenges in addressing the issue of child labor. These challenges stem from the complex interplay between the country's dire economic conditions and the failure to ratify legislation and implement government programs. The effectiveness of these efforts is hindered by the lack of comprehensive coordination among relevant authorities and institutions, including those in legislative, security, media, cultural, social, educational, economic, and civil society spheres.

### **Developments in Iran's Space and Missile Programs**

Iran's progress towards an increased presence in space continues unabated owing to its strategic, geopolitical and scientific advantages. After Israel, Iran has become the most space-proficient country though both are separated by a wide gulf in technological expertise. This space race is an extension of the terrestrial conflict reflected in Israel's

ongoing targeting of Iranian military personnel in Syria, countered by Hezbollah and Houthi attacks using advanced missiles supplied by Tehran.

### **Tehran's Relentless Pursuit of Space**

Iran plans to launch two "significant" satellites before July 21, said Hassan Salarieh, the head of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA). "In less than two and a half years, 12 satellites have been successfully launched into space, and two more launches are planned by the end of the current administration to set a new record in Iran's space history," said Iran's Minister of Communications Issa Zarepour.<sup>(21)</sup> Tehran is said to be working to stabilize the technology for injecting satellites into low Earth orbit (LEO).

Zarepour claimed that two new biological capsules are under construction to "send humans into space." He did not set a deadline for crewed space flights. Iran's Defense Ministry sent three satellites simultaneously in January via the Sorayya satellite into orbit with an IRGC rocket. In February again, Iran sent a domestically developed imaging satellite, Pars1, into a 500-kilometer orbit from Russia's Vostochny spaceport using the Soyuz rocket. Like most space-faring nations, Iran's program is a hybrid of civilian and military applications.

An Iranian company claimed to achieve the capability to manufacture jet engine turbine blades for civilian and military aircraft. Tasnim News reported that a subsidiary of the MAPNA

group has enabled 28 McDonnell Douglas passenger planes grounded due to sanctions to return to service. Mani Rezvani, the un-named company's CEO, said foreign sanctions have impeded domestic airlines' access to jet engine blades, which are sold at exorbitant prices, resulting in 28 out of the 40 McDonnell Douglas passenger planes in Iran being grounded.

The Iranian company has reportedly manufactured a prototype of the JT8D engine blades via reverse engineering two months ago and awaits approval from the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran. The first JT8D engine of a Boeing MD passenger plane equipped with Iranian engine blades is expected to fly soon. "The homegrown jet engine blades cost the manufacturer around \$8,000 compared to \$22,000 of Boeing's," Rezvani said.<sup>(22)</sup>

### **Vengeance Ahead or Mere Bluster?**

On June 3, 17 people were killed in an alleged Israeli airstrike in the Aleppo region, the most notable amongst the deceased was IRGC Brigadier Saeed Abiyar.<sup>(23)</sup> The Iranian media referred to the slain official as an adviser, a term for the Quds Force's military personnel in Syria. He had been stationed in Syria since 2012. Abiyar's funeral procession drew large crowds of mourners in Karaj. IRGC Commander-in-Chief General Hossein Salami said, Israel "will pay for the pure bloodshed in this crime and wait for an answer."<sup>(24)</sup> The rage and vengeance is yet to unfold but there are no signs of a repeat of the April 13 attack.

Another interesting trend has, however, unfolded in Iran's policy

towards its proxies in the Levant and the Red Sea. Tehran is now providing them with advanced weapons, some of which have yet to be commissioned in the service of its armed forces. Hezbollah has started launching missiles from the Iranian Almas family ATGM, particularly Almas 4. To refute allegations of weapons transfer, the IRGC is providing the Lebanese militia the projectiles with a different guidance system.<sup>(25)</sup> Similarly, the Houthis are firing Kheybar-Shekan 2, calling it "Palestine" in line with their excuse to attack merchant ships in the Red Sea. It is unclear yet if the version in the Houthis' hands comes with Iran's declared range of 1,800 kilometers.<sup>(26)</sup> In such an eventuality, Yemen's neighboring Arab states opposed to the Houthi insurgency must be alarmed at the ongoing supply line of sophisticated and versatile weapons on the pretext of avenging the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

### **Conclusion**

Iran's military policy rests on certain pillars with technological advancement and the propagation of sectarian Shiite mercenaries being the most salient. This month's launch of more capable imaging satellites is aimed at improving surveillance of rival states and keeping proxies up to date on emerging threats. Besides, Tehran has not stopped pushing the limits of its neighbors and adversaries' patience by providing advanced missiles and drones. In June, both Hezbollah and the Houthis caused renewed alarm by firing them.

## **IRAN-ARAB INTERACTIONS**

During June, Iran's relations with Arab countries largely remained calm, being limited to diplomatic engagements. However, the establishment of Iranian polling centers in Syria was a nuanced case. These centers, seemingly, not only facilitated the voting process for Iranians in Syria but also served as a means to project influence. This section examines:

- Iran's employment of polling stations in Syria to overstate its political influence and military presence.

## Iranian Polling Stations in Syria: Varying Signals and Significations — Between Political Propaganda and Displaying Military Dominance

Several articles and news reports highlighted that the number of Iranian ballot boxes allocated to Syria surpassed those in other countries with a significant Iranian presence, such as Russia and Turkey. Even countries under greater Iranian influence, like Lebanon, were allocated only three ballot boxes in various cities. This places Syria in an advanced position among the 137 foreign countries with Iranian embassies, ranking just behind Iraq and the United States in the number of Iranian ballot boxes.<sup>(27)</sup>

The numerical expansion of Iran's electoral ballot boxes in Syria, coupled with media exaggeration of the heavy Iranian presence at its polling stations, raises several questions about the purpose behind this strategy. This is especially perplexing given the current economic, political and security crises in Syria, which is not known for having a large Iranian community. Additionally, Iran is experiencing political and security challenges in Syria, with Iran-Syria relations marked by underlying tensions and the ongoing targeting of Iranian military leaders in the region.

### Syria and Hosting Iranian Ballot Boxes

During the first round of Iranian presidential voting, Syria hosted approximately 10 ballot boxes for Iranians

residing there. Seven of these were located in Damascus, with the rest in Aleppo, Latakia, and Deir ez-Zor.<sup>(28)</sup> The voting centers in Damascus were situated in the consular building of the embassy, the shrines of Sayyidah Zaynab and Sayyidah Ruqayya, the Zayn al-Abidin area, the Hay al-Amin area, and the Iranian community's office.

This round of voting was accompanied by significant media attention from various Iranian officials and representatives aimed at mobilizing greater participation in the electoral process. Iranian Ambassador to Syria and former Quds Force officer Hossein Akbari mentioned that approximately 12,000 Iranians live in Syria with over 6,000 eligible to vote. However, it is likely that this figure is an estimate, as there are no precise statistics on the Iranian population in Syria. Akbari also highlighted the distribution of ballot boxes to cover the whole of Syria, reflecting what he described as “the heavy presence of Iranians there.”

Akbari claimed an intensive participation of Iranian citizens in Syria in these elections, arguing that they had complete freedom to vote for the candidate of their choice. Meanwhile, the representative of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in Syria Hamid Saffar al-Harandi considered that “elections are the only way for the people who want the decision to be in their hands and choose whoever they deem appropriate to implement their interests.” The Iranian Cultural

Consulate in Damascus also played a role in mobilizing voters and enhancing their presence in the voting process, as it celebrated several occasions in Syria, including Wilayah Week, the Iranian presidential elections, and Eid al-Ghadir. In a similar vein, the Syrian media worked to strengthen Iranian propaganda, publishing pictures showing the opening of polling stations for Iranian nationals in Syria to participate in the Iranian presidential elections in the centers approved by the Iranian embassy in several governorates of Syria.

These statements and promotional efforts to inflate attendance were consistent with the remarks of officials in Iran about local participation in the primary voting process. They also mirrored the promotional statements of the Assad government, a usual tactic of the Syrian government especially during reelection cycles for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, often used to mask popular frustration. This discrepancy suggests that the Iranian claims of significant voter turnout in Syria might not reflect the true situation. It is unlikely that there is a substantial Iranian presence in Syria, a country facing severe security conflicts and economic decline. Non-Iranian news reports did not show widespread participation,<sup>(29)</sup> contrary to the assertions of Iranian officials. This discrepancy raises questions about the political motivations and implications behind Iran's exaggerated portrayal of its electoral process on Syrian soil.

### **The Political Messages Iran Sought to Deliver From Syria**

The extensive distribution of Iranian ballot boxes in Syria and the efforts to amplify this presence sent multiple political messages intended for both domestic and international audiences. The contradiction between the statements made by Akbari about the freedom to vote and the broad participation of Iranians in Syria, and the video clips showing only a small number of voters, highlights this disparity. Moreover, Iranian statistics for the first round of voting indicated that only 2.8% of eligible Iranian expatriates participated in the presidential elections abroad.<sup>(30)</sup>

These statements can be explained by several factors. Firstly, they could be part of a propaganda campaign designed to present Iran as a democratic country that allows its citizens the freedom to vote even while abroad. This campaign aims to bolster the image of the Iranian establishment and its shaky legitimacy both in the eyes of the international community and among the Iranian populace.

The significant number of polling stations in Syria, despite the relatively small Iranian population there, contrasts with the presence of numerous Quds Force military commanders and members of Iran-affiliated militias who hold Iranian citizenship. This situation holds important political implications tied to Iran's regional strategies and military activities. Syria has long been a traditional area of influence for Iran and the Quds Force,

-serving as a major operational arena for pro-Iranian militias. Tehran aimed to convey a message to its regional adversaries by demonstrating its control and ability to maintain its influence in Syria, even amidst ongoing challenges, and to showcase its capability to organize elections in conflict zones.

### **Changing Presidents and a Well-established Foreign Policy Toward Syria**

Despite the victory of the “reformist” candidate in Iran, this will not alter Syria’s position in Iran’s strategic outlook. Iranian foreign policy regarding Syria and other regions of Iranian influence remains consistent, irrespective of changes in presidential leadership or political currents. This policy is firmly controlled by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). However, the tactics employed by different political currents may vary. During “hardliner” or “conservative” presidencies, Iranian foreign policy

typically exerts greater pressure inside Syria and intensifies the extremism of loyalist groups. Conversely, experiences under “reformist” Iranian presidents have shown that their presidential power is limited, with their foreign policy actions confined to strict boundaries set by the establishment and the IRGC. Therefore, no significant changes are anticipated in Iran’s policies toward Syria and other areas of influence in the region.

### **Conclusion**

Syria’s hosting of Iranian polling stations and the accompanying media hype from the Iranian ambassador and other officials in Syria are driven by several factors. These efforts primarily aim to bolster the position of the Iranian establishment within Iran by creating an illusion of a democratic process and political competition. Additionally, they seek to promote the image of the Iranian establishment abroad and signal the extent of Iran’s influence across all parts of Syria.

# IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL POWERS

Regarding Iran's engagement with global powers, Iran-US relations in June were particularly affected by the electoral climate in both countries. As they navigated their respective election periods, their interactions were further complicated by ongoing debates over regional issues and the nuclear file. The latter has also been a focal point of Iran-Europe relations, among other issues, including prisoner swaps and the accompanying European discussions on how to deal with Iranian transgressions. This section explores:

- The interplay between the presidential elections and Iran-US relations
- Iran and Europe: prisoner exchange and the IAEA report.



## The Presidential Elections and US-Iran Relations

It is clear that the Iranian presidential debates leading up to the first and second rounds of voting revealed varying perspectives among candidates regarding relations with the United States. Concurrently, the United States also witnessed presidential debates between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, where the Iranian issue featured prominently. The campaigns and debates in both countries underscored differing approaches to managing bilateral relations. This file aims to examine these positions against the backdrop of June 2024 developments and their potential implications for US-Iran relations.

### The Positions of Iran's Presidential Candidates Towards the United States

In the absence of cohesive electoral programs concerning relations with the United States, Iranian presidential candidates presented contrasting views on US-Iran relations. Masoud Pezeshkian, a “reformist” candidate, along with his foreign affairs adviser Mohammad Javad Zarif, advocated for lifting US sanctions and rejoining the nuclear agreement as a means to alleviate Iran's current crises through dialogue with Washington. Zarif defended the policies of the previous Rouhani government and countered opponents of negotiations and sanctions relief by attributing Iran's increased oil sales over the past three years to initiatives under the Biden

administration, rather than the policies of President Ebrahim Raisi. He also cautioned about the potential challenges if Donald Trump were to return to the White House, foreseeing a difficult situation for Tehran under such circumstances. These statements from Zarif prompted a response from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who implicitly criticized Zarif's stance by stating, “Anyone who is enamored with the United States and believes that progress in our country depends on American support will not make a suitable partner [in running the country].”

In contrast to Pezeshkian and Zarif's approach advocating for dialogue with the United States and sanctions relief, the positions of other presidential candidates varied significantly. Ghalibaf, associated with the “moderate” wing of the “conservative” current, expressed cautious openness towards dialogue with the United States and emphasized seeking paths to lift sanctions. However, his past actions, such as facilitating the ratification of the Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions during his tenure as speaker of the 10th Parliament in 2021, suggest contradictions in his current stance, particularly concerning the revival of the JCPOA under Rouhani's administration. On the other hand, Saeed Jalili, representing the “hardliner” faction of the “conservative” current, attributed Iran's economic crisis to US sanctions and advocated confrontation rather than engagement with the United States. Despite his past

involvement in nuclear negotiations, Jalili holds a negative stance towards the nuclear agreement, aligning more closely with the Raisi government's policy focused on resolving Iran's issues through non-negotiation means and distancing from Washington.<sup>(31)</sup>

### **The Iran Issue During the Biden-Trump First Debate**

During the inaugural debate between US presidential candidates Biden and Trump, Iran took center stage with its name cropping up 13 times, highlighting its significant role in the candidates' foreign policy agendas. The debate underscored stark differences in how each candidate proposed to handle Iran. Trump highlighted his decision to order the killing of Qassem Soleimani while criticizing Biden for not retaliating against Iran's attacks on US bases in Syria and Iraq. Trump claimed Iran was financially crippled under his "maximum pressure" policy, alleging it hindered Iran's support for terrorism and suggesting his presidency would have prevented attacks like those from Hamas on Israel. During the debate, Trump claimed success in imposing sanctions on all nations dealing with Iran, including China. He also accused Biden of paying a \$6 billion ransom to Iran for the release of five hostages, contrasting it with his administration's release of 56 hostages without payment. Biden responded by defending his policies, accusing Trump of inaction toward Iran's attack on the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq while he claiming success to

curb Iran's assaults after the provocative attack on the US base in Jordan and highlighting his efforts to mobilize global support against Iran's missile and drone attacks on Israel.

### **Conclusion**

US-Iran relations continue along the lines of conflict management and calculated escalation. Despite Pezeshkian's victory as a "reformist" candidate in Iran's presidency, the country's policy towards Washington is unlikely to shift significantly. This is because ultimate decision-making power over relations with the United States rests with "hardliner" figures and institutions like the supreme leader, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and other extremists who monopolize this sensitive portfolio. Conversely, US policy appears more susceptible to change, with two presidents holding conflicting views on Iran competing for office. Iran may favor a Biden victory due to his less stringent approach, which allowed Tehran to mitigate isolation and soften the impact of sanctions during his presidency. However, Iran faces the unfortunate prospect of Trump gaining momentum as the election nears, particularly following a lackluster performance by Biden in the first debate. This is worrisome for Tehran, given Trump's tough stance on Iran and his previous policies. Internally and externally, the ruling establishment grapples with pressures and complexities, including issues like the nuclear file, regional conflicts of

interest, and navigating contradictory alliances on the global stage.

### **Iran and Europe: Prisoner Exchange and the IAEA Report**

From swapping European nationals for a former Iranian official convicted of crimes against humanity in Sweden to exchanging barbs with the E3 over the nuclear deal and the IAEA's report, Iran firmly adhered to its strategy of not appeasing the West but still securing its national interests in June.

#### **Sweden-Iran Prisoner Exchange Deal**

In its biggest coup in recent years, Iran obtained the release of Hamid Nouri who was arrested upon arrival in Stockholm in 2019 under the doctrine of universal jurisdiction.<sup>(32)</sup> Nouri was sentenced to life imprisonment in Sweden in 2022 for a role in the massacre of 5,000 people at Gohardasht prison near Tehran in 1988.<sup>(33)</sup> He is the first Iranian official convicted of crimes against humanity.

Detained since April 17, 2022, EU diplomat Johan Floderus was swapped for Nouri. The EU had kept Floderus' detention in Iran secret for over a year and a half until The New York Times broke the story of the Swedish citizen who was stopped from boarding his flight on espionage charges after a private trip in the country with his friends.<sup>(34)</sup>

Stockholm's failure to free Ahmadreza Djalali, the last known Swedish citizen in Iran (to whom Tehran

awarded the death sentence in October 2017), makes the exchange deal even more controversial. Iran had aired Djalali's "confession," of being a spy for Israel. Djalali and his family maintain that the "confession" was extracted under torture. Iran is keeping him in custody for a future deal with the Nordic nation or the EU itself.

The other released individual is a Swedish-Iranian dual national Saeed Azizi who was arrested in Iran in November 2023. He was sentenced to five years in prison by a Tehran court on charges of "assembly and collusion against national security."<sup>(35)</sup>

"They will use those people as bargaining chips to extract some sort of concessions from their home country. They have led to the release of convicted terrorists. They have led to billions of dollars of funds in exchange for the freedom of their nationals. It is an actually a business model and a highly profitable business model. There's very little reason for Iran based on this experience to not to do this again. There have been no consequences just pay offs," said Dara Conduit of the University of Melbourne.<sup>(36)</sup>

#### **Perpetual Row With the UN Nuclear Watchdog**

Amidst the tense situation in the Middle East, particularly the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza and the potential for a direct confrontation between Iran and Israel, the issue of Tehran's nuclear obligations remains unsettled. After several meetings and a re-

cent visit by the IAEA director general, the UN nuclear watchdog's Board of Governors passed a resolution pressing Iran to step up cooperation with the agency and grant access to inspectors.<sup>(37)</sup> Of its 35 members, only Russia and China opposed the resolution while 12 remained neutral. Iran is yet to cooperate with the UN agency about the sources of uranium traces found at two undeclared sites. The discovery came following Iran's decision to ban the IAEA's top enrichment experts on the inspection team in September 2023, a move Rafael Grossi condemned as "disproportionate and unprecedented."<sup>(38)</sup>

"The need for the Board to hold Iran accountable to its legal obligations is long overdue. Iran must urgently, fully and unambiguously co-operate with the Agency," the UK, France and Germany (the E3) said in their joint statement.<sup>(39)</sup>

At the same time, the Director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami rejected the IAEA's resolution in stern terms. He said the agency's demands must be within the framework of cooperation with Iran as "there is not any other subject that the agency may intend to pursue."<sup>(40)</sup> He was referring to the investigation into Iran's undeclared uranium sites.

Undeterred by sanctions and the IAEA's snubs, Iran enriches uranium

up to 60% purity, just a step shy of reaching 90% of weapons-grade level. Alarming, a senior official recently hinted at changing Iran's nuclear doctrine.

Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that "should Iran's existence be threatened, there will be no choice but to change our military doctrine."<sup>(41)</sup> In April, Kharrazi had boasted of Iran being technologically capable of building a nuclear bomb.

### Conclusion

The release of Nouri and the imprisonment of Djalali speak of the possibility that the policy of "prisoner bargaining" may become a strategy adopted by Iran to protect its officials. This could be achieved through luring more dual nationals and European citizens to Iran where they could be effortlessly detained. Democratic governments in the West succumb to manipulation fearing public backlash for leaving citizens unattended in a hostile foreign land. For Tehran, the premium rests with the officials and clerics following the supreme leader's directions. In a similar vein, Iran's blackmailing tactics of preventing the IAEA's obligatory inspections and monitoring of the nuclear program have been successful, with no adverse consequences to its nuclear progress. The latest IAEA resolution has also fallen far short of containing Iran.

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# Iran Case File

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