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Middle East Brief

Iran's 2008 Majlis Elections:

The Game of Elite Competition

Dr. Farideh Farhi

The elections for Iran's 290-seat Parliament (Majlis)¹ that took place on March 14, 2008, were the eighth Majlis elections held since the inception of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Although 82 of the 290 seats contested had to be determined in the runoff elections held on April 25, a "conservative"² win was assured and expected from the outset.³

Given the extent of disqualification of reformist candidates, the issue in these elections was always how well the reformists and the more pragmatic conservatives critical of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policies and management style would do—and, conversely, how badly his supporters would do. The reformists were hoping for a stronger minority status, in terms of both numbers and influence, while the so-called more pragmatic conservatives were seeking a greater presence, particularly in leadership positions, as a means of creating a working majority in a more effective Majlis in comparison with the current one, which has been criticized for being weak and ineffective vis-à-vis a forceful president.

The results suggest that notwithstanding a conservative win, including a virtual sweep in the city of Tehran, the reformists did better than expected, and also that divisions within the conservative ranks continue to persist, enhancing the chances of the new Majlis playing a stronger role in reining in President Ahmadinejad's expansionist economic policies as well as his aggressive, and at times erratic, management style.⁴ Additionally, the results show that despite a concerted and successful effort to narrow the ideological range of candidates allowed to run for various political offices in Iran, competition among individuals and groups to gain access to the levers of political power remain unabated.

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The opinions and findings expressed in this essay are those of the author exclusively, and do not reflect the official positions or policies of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies or Brandeis University.

Finally, the turnout and voting patterns in large cities, particularly Tehran, suggest a degree of dissatisfaction that should be of concern to conservatives in general with respect to the 2009 presidential election in the unlikely event that reformists are able to set aside their divisions and enter that election unified, all rallying around an appealing candidate.

This dynamic assures the continued manipulation of the election process in an effort to reduce reformist chances and limit the competition to an intra-conservative affair. But it does not suggest a pre-determined outcome. Intense elite competition, albeit within a limited ideological range, remains the hallmark of Iranian politics.

Elections and the Islamic Republic

Amazingly, the latest Majlis elections were the twenty-eighth set of elections held since the Iranian Revolution. This number includes the first three elections held in the immediate post-Revolution year—regarding the change of regime, election of the Constitutional Assembly, and approval of the Islamic Constitution—and averages to about one election a year, even though in some years (for instance, in three war years) no elections were held, and in some Iranian calendar years elections for two separate offices were held at the same time or at two different times during the same year.

It was the extent of the resources required to mobilize for nationwide elections that led to the decision to hold elections for the Assembly of Experts (held approximately every eight years) and the municipal councils (held approximately every four years) together, in December 2006. Similar attempts were made throughout last year to synchronize the presidential and parliamentary elections, both held every four years. But the Guardian Council declared unconstitutional every legislative attempt to either shorten the president's term or lengthen that of the Majlis. The Iranian Constitution is explicit about the four-year duration of presidential and parliamentary terms—this is not the case with respect to the terms for the Assembly of Experts and the municipal councils—and on this particular technicality the Guardian Council has proven a stickler for the letter of the law. This means that, unless there is some sort of constitutional change—something the current Iranian leadership is unlikely to allow for now, out of fear that any tinkering with the constitution will open the door for further tinkering—yearly or almost yearly elections will be the name of the game in Iran.

The difficulty of mobilizing for elections also led to attempts to bring a degree of order into what could be considered an unwieldy nomination and election process. Minimum and maximum age limits as well as educational preconditions were introduced as a means to reduce the large pool of Majlis candidates, while the minimum age for voting was raised from 15 to 18 for all elections. Still, more than 7,500 individuals signed up to compete in the March elections, proving these elections, like past ones, to be massive exercises in campaigning, mobilization of voters, and election-related conversations.

In some ways, one can argue, elections in Iran have become yearly rituals through which the Iranian public is socialized into the values and institutions of the Islamic Republic. The extensive public conversation that surrounds the conduct of these elections allows for defense as well as criticism of the institutions of the Islamic Republic and in the process affirms their ongoing existence.

The vetting process that has been practiced by the Guardian Council since 1991⁵ has served as a means of demarcating the broad contours of permissible political criticism and actions—as by routinely identifying high-profile candidates who have been critical of various aspects of Islamic rule and who, though allowed to participate in previous elections,⁶ are deemed no longer acceptable. Elections have

also functioned as mechanisms through which evolving relationships among political factions that have both competed and shared power since the inception of the Islamic Republic are regulated and recalibrated.

But vetting is a rather chaotic process. There is room for flexibility, pushback, or even re-entry into the political system, depending on circumstantial changes. This is why the questions surrounding Iranian elections always go beyond winners and losers to embrace such matters as the percentage of people who voted (anything over 50 percent is considered a sign of the system's legitimacy), the extent of electoral manipulation through the vetting process, and the possibility of boycott by political factions who consider themselves unfairly treated.

Majlis elections also bring into political discourse concrete disagreements over economic and social policy at the national level as well as the more parochial concerns of a large number of provincial candidates. Historically, post-revolutionary Iranian parliaments have played only a supportive role, giving their stamp of approval to a foreign policy decided elsewhere (by the executive branch or the Supreme National Security Council, or in the office of the supreme leader).⁷ But they have played an important role in shaping the direction of economic policy, mostly by distributing projects—including subsidized housing, roads, and factories—to various districts at the prompting of provincial deputies, and by stunting or moderating the economic programs dictated by the executive branch.⁸

The current Seventh Majlis, which was seated in 2004, did play such a role vis-à-vis Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in its first year by rejecting several of his proposed ministers, particularly his nominee for the Petroleum Ministry. But it was increasingly perceived as weak and ineffective on economic issues vis-à-vis a forceful president. This is why almost all of the candidates in the March 2008 elections—conservative, centrist, and reformist—ran on platforms that called for a more effective Majlis that would offer better oversight with respect to Ahmadinejad's expansionist economic policies and at times incoherent management style.

The March 2008 Elections: Contending Forces and Stakes

The process of disqualification assured that the reformist and centrist parties could put up candidates for only about a third to one-half of the seats in the provinces, and many of those candidates were not well known. *Mohandesi-ye entekhabat* (election engineering) is the term used by reformists in Iran to describe the way in which the disqualification process is used to shape elections in favor of conservatives.

In the March 2008 elections, the percentage of highly partisan disqualifications effected by the Ministry of Interior-appointed Executive Electoral Boards was as

high as 31 percent. After much criticism and lobbying, the percentage of disqualified was reduced by the Guardian Council to 27 percent.⁹ (Historically the process has proceeded in reverse, with the conservative-controlled Guardian Council acting in the more partisan fashion.)

But notwithstanding the reversals, and given the large number of candidates, the issue is never how many are disqualified but who. In this election, almost all the high-profile candidates belonging to the more radical wings of the United Reformist Coalition¹⁰ were disqualified, while a larger number of the candidates belonging to its more centrist wing, along with the candidates of the centrist National Confidence Party, were requalified by the Guardian Council. In the city of Tehran, after the reversal of some disqualifications, the two major reformist groups did end up having lists for all 30 seats, but many of the candidates were, again, not well known. In addition, a lack of resources and control of the media by conservatives made campaigning very difficult.

This institutional engineering which privileged the more centrist candidates among the reformists was matched by a *political* engineering among the conservatives themselves. In the process of negotiations regarding conservative candidates, pro-Ahmadinejad conservatives were not excluded but their numbers were reduced, and many candidates identifying themselves as pragmatic or more centrist conservatives were included.

The impetus for these negotiations was a determination by conservative forces close to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad not to repeat the mistake they made in the municipal elections of 2006. In that year, individuals aligned with the president (who ran under the banner of the Pleasant Scent of Service party), confident about the popularity of the just elected president, chose to offer their own slate of candidates, particularly in large cities, and ended up with a weak showing relative to other conservative forces, and even to the reformists.

In the city of Tehran, for example, only two individuals from the Pleasant Scent of Service (one of whom was Ahmadinejad's sister) were elected to the 15-member municipal council, alongside 4 reformists and 9 other conservatives. This combination allowed Mohammad Qalibaf, who publicly identifies himself as a pragmatic conservative at odds with Ahmadinejad's policies and style, to continue in his job as the mayor of Tehran. More importantly, the relatively poor showing of Ahmadinejad's forces allowed the reformists and others to interpret (some say spin) the election as a defeat for conservatism, at least in its Ahmadinejad version.

To avoid a similar scenario, a political process was designed to bring the major legs of Iranian conservatism, including Ahmadinejad supporters as well as the old guards of the Islamic Coalition Party, together under the umbrella of the United Principlist Front (UPF), with the intention of offering a unified list of candidates throughout the

country.¹¹ Negotiations over which candidates should be put up in various cities went on for months, ultimately leading to lists that included candidates who were critical of Ahmadinejad's economic policies.

But as haggling over who should be on the various lists, particularly for the city of Tehran,¹² progressed, it gradually became clear that some of the other major conservative players—specifically, former nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani, current Tehran mayor Mohammad Qalibaf, and the former head of Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps and current Secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaie—were dissatisfied with the negotiations. Even the attempted intervention of the father figure of Iran's conservative movement, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, who sought to reach a compromise between the Ahmadinejad forces and others, came to naught; and Ali Larijani, the only one of the three major players who was running, ended up deciding to run from the city of Qom instead of from Tehran. More importantly, the so-called pragmatic conservatives ended up offering their own list of candidates under the banner of the Comprehensive Principlist Front (which was unofficially brought together in the name of the three key figures mentioned), assuring that the rift between Ahmadinejad and Qalibaf, manifested during the previous presidential and subsequent municipal elections, was not healed.

Signs of conservative factionalization became even more evident in the last days of the March 2008 elections, as exclusive lists from parties—or from groups such as Pleasant Scent of Service, which had participated in the negotiations—began to be publicized and distributed in several cities, including Tehran and Qom.¹³

Rifts among reformists were also not healed. The United Reformist Coalition, which ran its candidates throughout the country as former president Mohammad Khatami's "companions," was able to bring together three major reformist groups—the Islamic Iran's Participation Party, the Islamic Revolution's Mojahedin Organization, and Servants of Construction Party. But this coalition could not heal its rift with the more centrist National Confidence Party, which is associated with the former Majlis speaker and presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi. Although these two reformist wings put up many shared candidates throughout the country (including about half among Tehran's list of 30), their acrimonious verbal sparring in the pre-election period showed that "hyper-factionalization" is a problem of Iranian politics in general, not merely a conservative one.¹⁴

Finally, one important set of players—the ones associated with former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—participated in the election as a force for moderation, but did not do so with full vigor. To be sure, some individuals close to Hashemi Rafsanjani ran as members of Servants of Construction under the banner of the United Reformist Coalition. But many high-visibility members of his closely associated Moderation and Development Party, such

as Iran's former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani, decided not to run, perhaps worried about the barrage of personal attacks that would be hurled against them by Ahmadinejad supporters or the possibility that they would not be included in other reformist slates.

The weak presence of Hashemi Rafsanjani supporters, who had been reputed to be forming a third force in Iranian politics between reformists and conservatives in the name of "moderation,"¹⁵ assured that if there was going to be a challenge to Ahmadinejad's policies in the direction of moderation or pragmatism, it had to come from within the conservative ranks and not from outside of them.

The March 2008 Elections: Results

Given the obstacles they were up against, the reformists and the centrist parties actually did better than expected in the March 2008 elections—which should encourage them in terms of positively assessing their participation in the elections process and continuing their organizing efforts throughout the country. Although prior to the actual convening of the Eighth Majlis, it is extremely difficult to assess the exact strength of the reformist minority, according to the conservative Minister of Interior, reformists won 16.4 percent of the seats—47 or 48—throughout the country. (They had 39 seats in the Seventh Majlis).¹⁶ To be sure, by capturing only 1 seat out of 30, Tehran proved a major disappointment to the reformists. Nevertheless, they did better than before in the provinces, particularly in some of the bigger cities.

The new Majlis will also have a larger contingent of deputies who were not on any major lists, and whose political affiliations and tendencies are not yet clear. Some reformists are claiming that many of these "independent" (*monfared*) candidates are actually reformists who did not identify themselves for fear of disqualification; the conservative *Kayhan* daily newspaper argues, on the other hand, that independents are traditionally conservative. Some independents are undoubtedly reformists, but the reality is that most of these candidates, being from smaller cities, are more interested in the pork barrel politics of bringing resources to their districts, and are easily led in one way or another depending on the direction of the leadership in the Parliament.

This is why the factor to watch in the coming months is the extent to which the pragmatic conservatives are successful in gaining enough support to vie for the leadership of the Parliament. Their presumptive leader, Ali Larijani, Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator, won handily in the city of Qom. But the extent of support for the leadership of pragmatic conservatives will only be determined once the new Majlis is seated in late May 2008 and secret ballot elections for leadership positions are held.

At this point, the only thing certain is that the large number of elected conservatives cannot be considered as constituting a unified bloc in the Majlis. To be sure, they did win handily: Out of the 287 seats whose results have already been decided, approximately 170 can be identified as won by conservatives whose candidacy was supported by the two major conservative lists. (Approximately 50 out of the 170 were shared candidates, who appeared on both major conservative lists.) But this number is deceiving insofar as it hides the divisions among the conservatives.

In the competition between the two conservative lists, the United Principlist Front (UPF) did better than the Comprehensive Principlist Front (CPF) throughout the country (winning 117 seats, as opposed to CPF's 96),¹⁷ suggesting that reports of Ahmadinejad's decline and lack of popularity may be exaggerated. But since the UPF was a coalition of conservative groups, including some critics of Ahmadinejad's economic policies who may shift to the pragmatic side once elections for leadership positions are held, it is not yet clear whether Ahmadinejad supporters or opponents will have the upper hand in the new Majlis. In fact, the odds are that his supporters will not, since candidates from the UPF—itsself, as we have noted, comprising more than just die-hard Ahmadinejad supporters—have so far been able to secure only 40 percent of the seats.

At this point, given the divisions not only between reformists and conservatives but also among the conservatives themselves, the forecast of a more fractured Majlis than the existing one is not unreasonable. But this same Majlis has the potential to move to the center—with pragmatic conservatives, independents, centrists and even perhaps reformists working together—given effective leadership on the part of pragmatic conservatives. This very modest expectation, however, if it were fulfilled, would apply only to improving the management of the economy and would not be expected to embrace challenges in the foreign policy arena—from which, as we mentioned above, the Majlis has historically shied away; nor would it extend to major shifts in the domestic political arena.

The only important political ramification of the potential rise of a more centrist/pragmatic conservatism in the Majlis should that come about, would be the challenge that individuals rightly or wrongly associated with it, such as Ali Larijani or Tehran mayor Mohammad Qalibaf, might pose to Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential election. But that election is more than a year away, and it is just too soon to start speculating about it. These individuals would have to raise their profile throughout the country (not only in Tehran) before the next election, proving themselves more popular than they have been in the past, in order to successfully challenge Ahmadinejad, especially considering the amount of time Ahmadinejad has spent in the provinces and in smaller cities over the past three years, courting voters and promising projects and economic resources. The seeming weakness of conservative support in large cities, suggested by electoral turnout and voting patterns,

underscores the need for those challenging Ahmadinejad to do well electorally outside of large cities.

Turnout and Voting Patterns: Signs of Conservative Weakness?

The most important sign of weak support for conservatives is the fact that in almost all large cities, very few candidates could garner beyond the 25 percent of cast ballots necessary to win in the first round. In the East Azerbaijan capital of Tabriz, for instance, only one candidate, a reformist (the only such who qualified), won by making the 25 percent threshold, while conservatives had to compete in the runoff for the remaining 5 seats. Runoff elections were held for all or a large percentage of the seats in Urumieh, Abadan, Ahwaz, Isfahan, Mashad, Kermanshah, Rasht, and Shiraz. Even in places where conservatives did win in the first round, many did so by barely garnering the required 25 percent.¹⁸ This is a worrisome sign for conservatives, given the extent of their access to advertising and the relative poverty of their opponents in this regard.

The Tehran numbers suggest an even more striking indication of conservative weakness.¹⁹ First, despite a reported rise in the number of voters throughout the country in comparison with the 2004 Majlis elections,²⁰ the city of Tehran actually witnessed a drop in the number of voters, from 1.97 million to 1.91 million—which is less than 30 percent of the reported 6.4 million voters who reside in the city.²¹ The change in the minimum voting age from 15 to 18 did reduce the number of identified eligible voters from 46.3 million in the 2004 elections to 43.8 million in the 2008 elections. But considering the fact that the number of actual voters increased from 23.7 million in 2004 to 24.2 million in 2008, the drop in the number of votes cast in Tehran cannot be explained by this increase in the age requirement.

More importantly, the low turnout in 2008, like that for the 2004 elections, continues to stand in contrast to that for the 1996 and 2000 elections, in which candidates were not vetted as extensively as in the 2004 and 2008 elections. The 1996 and 2000 elections recorded 71 and 67 percent turnouts, respectively. Reza Khatami, the leading candidate in Tehran in 2000, garnered over 1.8 million votes, almost equaling the total number of ballots cast in 2008 in the capital.

Second, this low voter turnout was accompanied by voting patterns that for the first time led to more than one-third of Tehran seats (11 out of 30) going to the second round. In fact, had there not been the unexplained voiding of more than 170,000 ballots, close to two-thirds of Tehran seats (19 out of 30) would have gone to a runoff. This is unprecedented in Tehran's electoral history, in which runoffs have occurred only occasionally.

Low election turnouts have traditionally benefited conservatives, who rely on a base of loyal supporters

who vote no matter what, in contrast to the more fickle reformist supporters, whose participation rate varies depending on the confidence they have in the impact of their vote and also reflects their dissatisfaction with the vetting process. But in Tehran, the conservatives did relatively worse than in the previous election despite the lower turnout. Gholamali Haddad Adel, the current Majlis speaker, was Tehran's top vote getter, as in the previous election, but his numbers slipped from 880,000 votes to 844,000 (48.5 percent of the valid ballots cast,²² which amounts to support from somewhere between 13 and 16 percent of eligible voters), despite the fact that he was on top of both the UPF and CPF lists. And his numbers were considerably better than those of 18 other elected conservatives who only managed to garner somewhere between 25 and 33 percent of the non-voided ballots.²³

Meanwhile, the reformists who did make it to the second round improved their numbers considerably relative to their performance in the previous election (with Majid Ansari, Tehran's reformist list leader, receiving almost 20 percent of the non-voided ballots, breaking into the top 30, and exceeding the vote he received in the 2004 election by almost 100 percent).²⁴ Unfortunately for the reformists, they could not bring out their supporters in the second round. With the number of participating voters reduced by more than half, the reformists could not sustain the votes they received in the first round and ended up with only 1 seat in Tehran. This reformist weakness in Tehran, however, could not hide the fact that the highest conservative vote getter in the second round received only 324,000 votes, indicating support from somewhere between 5 and 7 percent of eligible voters.

In short, the conservative lists as a whole experienced a drop in support vis-à-vis the voting in 2004, despite lower turnout and the conservatives' superiority in campaign advertising. This suggests a drop in the number of conservatives who actually came out to vote in Tehran even compared with the 2004 election, another election that was highly manipulated through the vetting process. And this decrease in voter turnout impacted conservatives across the board, both those supportive and those critical of Ahmadinejad's policies.

This is not a good omen for conservatives in general, even though they can and will continue to rely on electoral manipulation, divisions among reformists, and voter apathy as means to stay in power. Voter apathy generally benefits conservatives, but evidence that apathy may be on the rise among the conservatives' own committed supporters, at least in large cities, is something that will undoubtedly be noted, and not appreciated, in conservative ranks.²⁵

Looking Ahead

The intensity with which the elections for the Eighth Majlis were fought once again suggests that one of the strangest features of contemporary Iranian politics must surely

be the reality that despite the concerted and successful conservative effort to narrow the range of candidates allowed to run for various political offices, competition among individuals and groups not only remains unabated, but keeps intensifying.

Iranian elections remain colorful and rather passionate exercises in elite competition. They also represent important revelatory moments with respect to the pushes and pulls of Iranian politics. In this election, the focal point of competition moved from a contest between reformism and conservatism to one between pragmatism and ideology—a competitive configuration that only makes sense only with Ahmadinejad's presidency and his strident stances as a backdrop.

This will also be the likely configuration in the 2009 presidential election—and if the 2008 Majlis elections are a sign of things to come, that election will also be hard fought, highly partisan within narrow ideological confines, and unpredictable in terms of outcome. Ultimately, it will be about maintaining a certain balance in governance among political rivals committed to the sustenance of the Islamic Republic.

Endnotes

1 These 290 seats represent 207 districts; 5 seats allocated to religious minorities. Districts with large populations have multiple seats. The largest and nationally most important district is the city of Tehran, which has 30 seats.

2 "Conservative" is no longer a preferred term in Iranian political discourse. *Usulgara*, which can be clumsily translated as "principlist" is the term now used to refer to an array of forces that previously identified themselves as conservative, fundamentalist, neo-fundamentalist, or traditionalist. It developed as a counter to the term *eslahgara*, or reformist, and is applied to a camp of not necessarily congruous groups and individuals. (The same applies to the reformist camp.)

3 In the first round, in the elections for 208 seats the candidates receiving the highest number of votes all received the minimum 25 percent (of total ballots cast) required to be seated in the Parliament. The Guardian Council, however, voided three of these results for alleged improprieties. Elections for these 3 seats will be held later, and the new Majlis will begin with 287 members.

4 Ahmadinejad's management style has included wide-ranging claims of executive privilege as well as the disbanding of long-standing economic institutions such as the Management and Planning Organization, which he has brought under the direct supervision of the executive branch.

5 It was during the elections for the second Assembly of Experts, and despite much protest, that the Guardian Council interpreted its constitutionally assigned role of supervising elections to include the vetting of candidates. For a thorough analysis of this decision and the conflicts it generated, see Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), 2002.

6 For Majlis elections, vetting has routinely included the disqualification of sitting members of Parliament. This is not a recent phenomenon associated with the rise of reformists. It was invoked in the elections for the Fourth Majlis (1992), which led to the boycotting of that election by one of the two important

political factions of the time, the Association of Combatant Clergy, headed by Mehdi Karroubi, Mohammad Khatami, and Mohammad Mousavi Khoeiiniha. Some of the deputies who were disqualified for the Fourth Majlis elections were later qualified to run for the Sixth Majlis, only to again be disqualified from running for the Seventh and Eighth Majlis.

7 Foreign policy did play a role in the March 2008 elections, but only as a backdrop to the argument made by conservatives running on slates close to Ahmadinejad that his strident and aggressive foreign policy had been successful in comparison with the previous reformist president's policy of détente. Reformists were also routinely accused by conservatives, and even by Ayatollah Khamenei, of being weak appeasers at best and agents of foreign powers at worst.

8 This is, again, a long-standing tradition. For instance, the Fourth Majlis, despite being a moderate to conservative Parliament, ended up derailing the economic policies of then president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, seeing them as too inflationary and too reliant on external borrowing.

9 These are percentages officially announced by the spokesperson of the [Guardian Council](#)*

10 The United Reformist Coalition has three wings: the Islamic Iran's Participation Party, the Islamic Revolution's Mojahedin Organization, and the Servants of Construction party. Disqualifications mainly impacted the first two wings.

11 The United Principlist Front included eleven conservative groups and organizations, some of which have been critical of Ahmadinejad's economic and social policies.

12 The Tehran list is the most important list, since Majlis leadership generally comes from the capital and the Tehran list leader has a higher chance of becoming speaker. The competing Tehran lists, each comprising 30 candidates, are usually ranked by the respective parties or coalitions, but in the March 2008 elections the conservative haggling over who should be on the conservative list and how they should be ranked was so intense that it led to the alphabetical listing of candidates, with the exception of list leader Gholamali Haddad Adel, the speaker of the Seventh Majlis and the likely speaker in the upcoming Majlis.

13 Candidates of these minor lists did not do well. For instance, Ahmadinejad-connected Pleasant Scent of Service candidates were decisively defeated in Qom and Qazvin by pragmatic conservative and reformist candidates, again suggesting a weakness in Ahmadinejad's hard-line support. Exclusive candidates of the Sweet Scent of Service also did badly in Tehran, although its list leader, Morteza Agha-tehrani, came in second. But he was also on the UPF list.

14 In the April 2008 runoff elections, the reformist parties did try to compete in a united fashion. The dropping of the "Khatami's Companions" logo from the reformist candidates' advertising allowed for a unified list of reformist and centrist candidates in Tehran. But it was too late, and only one of their candidates was able to win in Tehran.

15 *E'tedalgara* or "moderationist" is the term generally used to identify this third force.

16 Characteristically for Iran, how well each political inclination did is highly contested. Immediately after the April 25 runoff elections, the Minister of Interior announced that 69 percent of 287 seats had gone to conservatives (he made no differentiation), 16.38 percent went to reformists (including centrists), and 14.29 percent were won by independents (political inclination unclear). The numbers provided by reformist sources, however, suggest that reformists, as well as independents, did better (suggesting a bloc of 60 reformist and reformist leaning independents). My own correlation of candidate names and announced lists suggests that the Interior Minister's numbers tend to slightly underestimate reformist gains and more seriously underestimate the percentage of seats won by independents. (My count suggests they won over 20 percent.) But since the political inclinations of independents are difficult to assess, the exact strength of various tendencies will become known only when the new Majlis is seated and caucuses are formed.

17 These numbers take into account the 50 candidates who were shared. If the total numbers do not match it is because some of the provincial candidates on the CPF list were also listed on centrist and reformist lists.

18 In the city of Tehran, all but one candidate received less than one-third of the ballots cast; the exception, Haddad Adel, was able to garner 48 percent of the vote.

19 The counting of the Tehran vote was challenged by the two leaders of the reformist movement, Mohammad Khatami and Mehdi Karroubi, who lodged a written complaint about the counting of ballots in Tehran amidst talk of widespread ballot tampering on Election Day—intensified because, contrary to what was promised, many of the reformist observers were not allowed to be present when the ballots were being counted. These complaints did not go anywhere, and the Tehran results were confirmed by the Guardian Council. The complaints suggest that the conservatives did worse than the results suggest; but even if we accept the count in Tehran as accurate and not manipulated, it reveals a softness in conservative support as compared with the 2004 election.

20 Only 51.2 percent of the electorate participated in the 2004 Majlis elections, which was the lowest participation rate for Majlis elections in the history of the Islamic Republic. Although the Minister of Interior has mentioned a 60 percent participation rate in connection with the March elections, the total of 24.2 million votes cast, out of the announced number of 43.8 million eligible voters, suggests a 55.3 percent participation rate. Numbers and percentages for various elections can be found at the [Interior Ministry website](#)*

21 The number of Tehran voters is contested. On April 26, the Interior Minister suggested that the number of eligible voters in Tehran was 5.2 million, which would raise the percentage of participating Tehran voters to 37—still much lower than the rest of the country. The figure of 6.4 million voters was cited in the press prior to Election Day; but official numbers are usually suspect, because of the incentive to raise the percentage of participating voters. In the runoff elections, only 723,000 votes were cast in Tehran, amounting to between 11 and 14 percent of eligible voters. The announced participation rate for the runoff elections throughout the country was 26 percent.

22 This is 48.5 percent of the counted vote, which excluded the 170,000 voided ballots. If the total ballots cast are counted, Haddad Adel received only 44.2 percent.

23 For instance, Ahmad Tavakoli, the second top candidate in 2004 received 776,979 votes while in 2008, coming fourth, he received 568,459. For Tehran results in 2004, see ISNA, 26 February 2004. For 2008 results, see the [Interior Ministry website](#)*

24 The top reformist vote getter in Tehran in 2004 was Alireza Mahjoub who received 207,030 votes in the first round. Majid Ansari received 173,650 in 2004, in comparison to 346,261 votes he received in 2008. In the 2008 runoff elections, Ansari's vote dropped to 226,694 while Mahjoub became the only reformist candidate from Tehran who made it to the Eighth Majlis with 260,296.

25 In fact, it has already *been* noted, on the conservative website [Tabnak](#)*

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