

## Iran Has a Challenging Election Ahead

By

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June 01, 2013 "[Information Clearing House](#)" - The eleventh presidential election of Iran is scheduled to be held on 14 June 2013. The applicants for Iran's presidential candidacy registered from May 6 to 11. A total of 686 applicants including 30 women registered to run for president. After ten days of reviewing the applicants' backgrounds, only eight of them were selected on May 21, to run for president. The oligarchs in Tehran claimed the high number of applicants represented a symbol of democracy in Iran. But that is clearly not true. The regime chooses only the applicants who would serve its own ideological interests rather the people and such criterion contradicts the principles of democracy. There are many highly qualified secular candidates who want to run for president but none of them can meet the regime's ideological requirements. The screening of the applicants based on their ideologies is clearly against the democratic principles.

### Screening Violates the Constitution

The presidential candidates were selected by a non-elected body of jurists called the Guardian Council. This Council rejects any candidates whose records and ideas deviate from the regime's requirements without giving any justifications. The Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has repeatedly said that he has only one vote and does not have any power over selecting the presidential candidates. But that is not true since he actually chooses the candidates indirectly through the Guardian Council. This council has 12 members; six are chosen by Khamenei and another six are chosen by the head of judiciary who is appointed by Khamenei. According to Article 99 of the Islamic Republic's constitution as was revised in 1989, "The Guardian Council has the responsibility of **supervising the elections** of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the direct recourse to popular opinion and referenda." Consistent with this Article, the Guardian council should only "supervise" the presidential elections. **There is no provision here giving the Council authority to screen the candidates or disqualify them. Therefore, what the Guardian Council has done in this election is in violation of the Islamic Republic's constitution.** In a democratic election, the presidential candidates should be chosen by political parties and supported by their popularity among the people, but that is not the case in Iran because of the Guardian Council's screening process. In the elections held during the early post revolution years, there was no disqualification of the candidates as is now. In the first presidential and parliamentary elections, all parties, including the Left, ethnic, national and religious could introduce their candidates.

The candidates chosen in the present election have been: Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, the former speaker of the parliament; Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator; Ali Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's foreign policy adviser; Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the mayor of Tehran; Mohsen Rezaie, a former head of the Revolutionary Guards; Mohammad Gharazi, a former

telecommunications minister; Hassan Rouhani, a cleric and a member of Expediency Council ; and Mohammad Reza Aref, a former vice-president. All but the last one are close associates of Ali Khamenei. All candidates were selected from within the regime. All of them have been appointees of the regime in the past and none of them seems to have significant popularity among the Iranian people.

### **Class-Warfare Election**

In the run up to the June 14 election, there will be class warfare over distribution of power among three different groups that constitute the regime. The first group is the conservative wing of the clerical oligarchy that includes the Leader Ali Khamenei and his affiliates, the intelligence ministry, a part of the Revolutionary Corps, the Guardian Council, and the Larijani brothers who control the legislative and judiciary branches of the government. This group has also authority over the Islamic endowment funds and the charity organizations and naturally is supported by its own beneficiaries.

The second group is the so called “moderate” wing of the clerical oligarchy affiliated with the affluent and merchant (Bazaari) class. The center of this group is in the Expediency Council, a non-elected political arbitration body of the regime. Some members of this group have good relations with the West. Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani has headed this body for a number of years. He has kept friendly relations with the West and the client regimes of the United States in the region. Rafsanjani has used his influence in the regime to build an enormous personal wealth. His records in the regime include responsibility for many murders of political dissidents at home and abroad. Also there have been major corruption cases involving his sons. He registered for the presidential election a few minutes before an official deadline but ultimately was rejected by the Guardian Council. Before his registration, he was frequently boosted as a potential candidate to enter the race by the Western media, including the Persian BBC and the Voice of America. Even if he had been allowed to run, he probably would not have been a successful candidate. In the 2005 elections, he received a humiliating defeat versus the then candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Cleric candidates do not seem to have much chance to succeed in Iran’s presidential elections. The only cleric candidate in the last election, Mehdi Karroubi, earned a negligible, less than 1%, of the votes.

The third group is affiliated with the outgoing government of president Ahmadinejad. Because of its populist welfare policies, this group has gained support from the urban poor and rural dwellers. The clerics call this group whose members are a new class of educated professionals a “deviant current”, which means their ideas deviate from the core Islamic principles of the clerical oligarchy. The only candidate of this group is Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaei, a close associate of president Ahmadinejad and his former Chief of Staff. He was however rejected by the Guardian Council to run for president. The rejection has generated anger among his constituents. Mashaei would have been a serious challenger to other nominees and perhaps could win the election benefiting from Ahmadinejad’s support. The Leader, Ali Khamenei, did not favor Mashaei and forced President Ahmadinejad to remove him from the First vice

President position in 2009. Mashaei has in the past emphasized nationalistic slogans and that is not supported by the clerics. Mashaei's rejection will likely provide a challenge to the clerics by Ahmadinejad's popular political base, the urban poor and peasants. President Ahmadinejad said the decision by election overseers to disqualify his top aide from presidential candidacy is an act of "oppression" and he would take the case to the country's Supreme Leader. If the Leader does not eventually support Mashaei, he will probably appeal to his supporters to bring their demands on to the streets.

The conservative wing of the clerical oligarchy's total control over the regime is now challenged by the other two groups. Some opposition groups plan to boycott the election because they see the process as very far from being free and democratic. Where this class warfare among these three groups will lead the Iranian nation remains to be seen.

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