On 18 February 2000, Iran held its 6th parliamentary elections after the 1979 revolution and the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The elections were yet another chapter in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite efforts of the Guardian Council (the judicial body responsible for ensuring the validity of elections), the elections were marred by irregularities and violations of democratic principles. The IRI's attempts to suppress the expressed will of the electorate were met with widespread popular resistance, which led to the opening of the new Majlis, the Iranian parliament, in March 2000.

The Third Consecutive Victory for the Reformists

In the recent elections, almost 70% (28.6 million) of 38.7 million eligible voters cast ballots. More than 6,000 candidates, including 504 women and 35 non-Muslims, competed for 290 seats in the Majlis-e Shura-yi Islam, or parliament. Five seats are reserved for non-Muslim religious minorities.

Despite efforts of the Guardian Council (whose principal responsibility is to ensure that all the sanctioned laws and regulations of the parliament conform to the Islamic standards and constitutional laws), to prevent reform candidates from entering in the race, the hard-line conservative candidates lost their 20-year-long majority hold in the Majlis to pro-Khatami reformists who unified their policies under reform slogans in 18 political parties and fronts. In the final months before elections, the Guardian Council (GC), along with conservative members of the 5th parliament, passed various laws in a rush move—mainly concerning the free press—aiming to block the elections to supervision of the Guardian Council (whose principal responsibility is to ensure that all the sanctioned laws and regulations of the parliament conform to the Islamic standards and constitutional laws).

Elections 'Iranian style'

Approximately 10% of the candidates (571 individuals) are out of the traditional realm of populates and figures who were rejected by the GC as 'unqualified' or 'not sufficiently religious' to sit in the Majlis. Of course, the reasons were political. The GC considered critics as 'outside'. Having foreseen this, reformists had many substitutes among the 6,000 candidates. Despite countermeasures by the conservatives, the primary poll indicates that in the first round some 150 seats were won by reformists (mostly from the Islamic Revolution Participation Front), 40 by conservatives, and 35 by independent candidates whose political identities have yet to be determined. Sixty-six seats were left to be filled in the runoff elections.

Of the 225 candidates who obtained the minimum requirement of 25% of the votes, the GC approved the election of 11 reformists and changed 2 in favour of conservatives in various cities. But the main difficulty was found in Tehran, where 29 out of 30 seats were won by conservatives. The GC placed an unprecedented 3-month hold on the election results. During this period, the conservatives launched a new set of oppressive measures to offset the overwhelming victory of pro-reform candidates. 1) Saeed Hajarian, the lead-nightfallen politician and architect of the Majlis, was shot and seriously wounded by right wing zealots. Two other reformists were killed and 3) Several reformist and prominent liberal writers and journalists, including two women (Merhanez Ian, an attorney and author of 2 popular novels, and Jahangirian, a prominent journalist) were arrested. 4) A plot to assassinate President Khatami was discovered.

After three months and just days prior to the opening of the new Majlis, the GC labelled the elections fraudulent and officially disannulling all 534 box results. The GC did announce the results, but with a few changes, including the cancellation of 534 boxes containing 736,666 votes. It was due to this that Rafsanjani was moved from 30th to 20th place. Azadeh Rahabi, a liberal reformist elected in 28th place, was eliminated; and Goudarzi, a candidate of the National Action Front, was moved from 33rd to 31st place. Rafsanjani, in a surprise move, gave up his seat under the pressure of public opinion. As a hopeful sign in the 5th round, the GC indicated that reformers had a chance to win several seats. However, the Guardian Council (GC) disapproved the election of 11 reformists. The majority hold in the Majlis to pro-Khatami reformists still waiting for official GC approval. The Majlis opened with only 257 of its 290 members.

Distinctly, in the recent elections, the first being the surprise presidential victory of Sayyed Mohammad Khatami on 22 May 1997. Secondly, in the municipal elections, pro-Khatami reform candidates had a landslide victory in city and village councils across the country. Thirdly, in the recent parliamentary elections, the pro-Khatami reform candidates had a majority of the 200,000 seats in city and village councils. The GC, which had a landslide victory. These three consecutive triumphs indicate a strong desire among the people for structural change, democracy and secularization in Iran.


Notes


4. See details in my article, ibid.

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