

# A New Page in Iran's Political Landscape: The 2021 Presidential Elections

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*The 2021 presidential elections are already gaining momentum in Iran, and some prominent officials have already made their plans to take part in them. Whoever the next president may be, they have a lot riding on their shoulders following Rouhani's eight years, throughout which Iran was at its closest to the U.S when the JCPOA was signed, and at its farthest with fears of an impending U.S-Iran war during the summer. Iran also saw its fair share of unrest with the 2016-2017 protests, followed by this month's riots.*

The last elections saw the introduction of a new runner, Ayatollah Raisi, who was the head of Astan Quds Razavi at the time, and was appointed in March 2019 as Chief Justice, and began making sweeping reforms and pursuing corruption since assuming his position. At the time, in his first time running for President, Raisi managed to garner almost one third of the vote, an impressive feat.

However, with a median age of [30.8 years](#), Iran is a young country, and this has largely not been reflected in Iranian politics, not seriously anyway, but this year the youth movement in Iran has begun. Different governmental organizations and institutions have begun to [facilitate](#) the employment of a young workforce, while [increasing](#) youth employment. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has also stressed the importance of increasing youthfulness in government positions and political office. In February 11<sup>th</sup> 2019, on the revolution's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he announced the second phase of the revolution, [saying](#) that the young are to shoulder the burden of the revolution's future

"The continuation of this path—which is most probably not as demanding as the past—must be traveled with the willpower, vigilance, swiftness, and innovation of you, the young ones."

A few months later in May, in a meeting with university students and representatives of student associations, he urged them to work towards a brighter future, especially in the country's management in government, [stressing](#) that they must "*Prepare the grounds for the formation of a young and pious government*"

This youthfulness is now seeping into politics, and this is apparent as far as parliamentary candidates go for this year's elections ([youth registration](#) for the elections this year was very high). Following this trend, the next presidential elections will feature a number of young candidates, with some already working on polishing their image and gaining media exposure. These candidates are not only young, but from different political affiliations as well, the most prominent of which are Sorena Sattari, Mehrdad Bazrpash, and Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi. A look at their profiles might help shed light on what we stand to see in

the future.

Azari Jahromi, the young “star” minister of the Rohani administration, is the first minister from the post-revolution era at 37 years of age. He is using Internet and Communications Technology (ICT) in Iran as a means to achieve his end in the elections, while appealing to the youth, doing so through the creation of jobs in [startups and digital marketing](#) and through his [use of and focus on social media](#). However, his past in intelligence has made some [somewhat wary of him](#), but so far he has been able to avoid great criticism vis-à-vis his background.

Azari Jahromi was doing well at first but began to do poorly as of late. He and his team have been accused of misusing public funds, thus damaging much of the popularity he stood to gain among the youth. The accusations include a private plane being rented for him by telecommunications operator [Hamrah Avval](#), his procurement of [200 laptops](#) for the Iranian presidency through his connections with the same company and procuring insurance for his sister-in-law by way of telecommunications company [RighTel](#), on whose board of directors he had served before. Jahromi has also begun advertising for himself, an example of which includes the Foreign Policy article where he was [branded](#) the “Islamic Republic’s Emmanuel Macron”. Vaezi, the President’s first aide, is also aiding Jahromi and their relationship dates back years, as when the former was ICT minister, Jahromi was in fact his aide. When Vaezi became the President’s Chief of Staff, he was the one who introduced Jahromi to Rohani.

The second candidate is Sorena Sattari, a 47-year old scientist who graduated from Iran’s prestigious Sharif University of Technology with a PhD in Mechanical Engineering. Sattari is an Iran-educated scientist who was opposed to Ahmadinejad during the 2009 elections. Following Rouhani’s victory in the 2013 elections, he was appointed Vice President for Science and Technology.

Sattari’s focus at the moment is on the development of startup ecosystems and [supporting](#) knowledge-based firms, a business that has proven to be [very successful](#) in Iran. These types of firms raked in a revenue of \$14.2 billion in 2017-2018. He is also working on developing and implementing smart technologies in Iran to develop [smart cities and infrastructure](#), creating additional jobs for talented youth.

Sattari has so far proven to be a well-loved candidate among the youth. By focusing on the aforementioned business model, he has helped establish a healthy relationship between the government and startup companies. Like Azari Jahromi, he is known to be a technocrat who has, for the most part, been able to avoid political branding. However, since they work in such close fields, Azari Jahromi naturally sees him as a competitor with both of them targeting a similar demographic, and has been trying to hone in on startups in order to undermine him.

Jahromi and Sattari also have another challenger, Mehrdad Bazrpash. Bazrpash used to hold the position of Presidential Aide during the Ahmadinejad administration. At age 28, he managed some financial powerhouses, such as automotive manufacturer SAIPA between 2006-2008, a period during which he introduced [new car models](#) to the industry and brought [success](#) to the brand, whose market share [exceeded](#) its competitor’s Iran Khodro, for the first time.

A principlist, Bazrpash was elected to parliament in 2012 for a four-year term, wherein he

was also voted by MPs to be part of the parliament's governing committee. Being younger than the others, and having had such a full resume for someone his age, Bazrpash has his fair share of supporters in the principlist camp. Compared to the others Pazrpash has a more extensive political background, but since he has been relatively inactive in the political landscape in the past few years, after being pushed aside by Ahmadinejad (under the [influence of Mashaei](#), it seems) he hasn't had much media coverage, and has more work to do than his peers in the coming two years. Bazrpash is a very probable candidate for the presidential elections, and can even be a worthy contender if he increases his exposure in light of the absence of young principlist/conservative candidates.

The 2020 parliamentary elections in February will allow us to sense how things will go for the 2021 presidential elections. Things are bound to be very interesting, as the first generation of post-revolution Iranian is finally stepping onto the scene. We are witnessing the turning of a new page in the Iranian political landscape forty years after the revolution.

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