

Iranian Elections: The 'Stolen Elections' Hoax

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"Change for the poor means food and jobs, not a relaxed dress code or mixed recreation... Politics in Iran is a lot more about class war than religion."
Financial Times Editorial, June 15 2009

Introduction

There is hardly any election, in which the White House has a significant stake, where the electoral defeat of the pro-US candidate is not denounced as illegitimate by the entire political and mass media elite. In the most recent period, the White House and its camp followers cried foul following the free (and monitored) elections in Venezuela and Gaza, while joyously fabricating an 'electoral success' in Lebanon despite the fact that the Hezbollah-led coalition received over 53% of the vote.

The recently concluded, June 12, 2009 elections in Iran are a classic case: The incumbent nationalist-populist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (MA) received 63.3% of the vote (or 24.5 million votes), while the leading Western-backed liberal opposition candidate Hossein Mousavi (HM) received 34.2% or (13.2 million votes).

Iran's presidential election drew a record turnout of more than 80% of the electorate, including an unprecedented overseas vote of 234,812, in which HM won 111,792 to MA's 78,300. The opposition led by HM did not accept their defeat and organized a series of mass demonstrations that turned violent, resulting in the burning and destruction of automobiles, banks, public building and armed confrontations with the police and other authorities. Almost the entire spectrum of Western opinion makers, including all the major electronic and print media, the major liberal, radical, libertarian and conservative web-sites, echoed the opposition's claim of rampant election fraud. Neo-conservatives, libertarian conservatives and Trotskyites joined the Zionists in hailing the opposition protestors as the advance guard of a democratic revolution. Democrats and Republicans condemned the incumbent regime, refused to recognize the result of the vote and praised the demonstrators' efforts to overturn the electoral outcome. The New York Times, CNN, Washington Post, the Israeli Foreign Office and the entire leadership of the Presidents of the Major American Jewish Organizations called for harsher sanctions against Iran and announced Obama's proposed dialogue with Iran as 'dead in the water'.

The Electoral Fraud Hoax

Western leaders rejected the results because they 'knew' that their reformist candidate could not lose...For months they published daily interviews, editorials and reports from the field 'detailing' the failures of Ahmadinejad's administration; they cited the support from clerics, former officials, merchants in the bazaar and above all women and young urbanites

fluent in English, to prove that Mousavi was headed for a landslide victory. A victory for Mousavi was described as a victory for the 'voices of moderation', at least the White House's version of that vacuous cliché. Prominent liberal academics deduced the vote count was fraudulent because the opposition candidate, Mousavi, lost in his own ethnic enclave among the Azeris. Other academics claimed that the 'youth vote' – based on their interviews with upper and middle-class university students from the neighborhoods of Northern Tehran were overwhelmingly for the 'reformist' candidate.

What is astonishing about the West's universal condemnation of the electoral outcome as fraudulent is that not a single shred of evidence in either written or observational form has been presented either before or a week after the vote count. During the entire electoral campaign, no credible (or even dubious) charge of voter tampering was raised. As long as the Western media believed their own propaganda of an immanent victory for their candidate, the electoral process was described as highly competitive, with heated public debates and unprecedented levels of public activity and unhindered by public proselytizing. The belief in a free and open election was so strong that the Western leaders and mass media believed that their favored candidate would win.

The Western media relied on its reporters covering the mass demonstrations of opposition supporters, ignoring and downplaying the huge turnout for Ahmadinejad. Worse still, the Western media ignored the class composition of the competing demonstrations – the fact that the incumbent candidate was drawing his support from the far more numerous poor working class, peasant, artisan and public employee sectors while the bulk of the opposition demonstrators was drawn from the upper and middle class students, business and professional class.

Moreover, most Western opinion leaders and reporters based in Tehran extrapolated their projections from their observations in the capital – few venture into the provinces, small and medium size cities and villages where Ahmadinejad has his mass base of support. Moreover the opposition's supporters were an activist minority of students easily mobilized for street activities, while Ahmadinejad's support drew on the majority of working youth and household women workers who would express their views at the ballot box and had little time or inclination to engage in street politics.

A number of newspaper pundits, including Gideon Rachman of the Financial Times, claim as evidence of electoral fraud the fact that Ahmadinejad won 63% of the vote in an Azeri-speaking province against his opponent, Mousavi, an ethnic Azeri. The simplistic assumption is that ethnic identity or belonging to a linguistic group is the only possible explanation of voting behavior rather than other social or class interests.

A closer look at the voting pattern in the East-Azerbaijan region of Iran reveals that Mousavi won only in the city of Shabestar among the upper and the middle classes (and only by a small margin), whereas he was soundly defeated in the larger rural areas, where the redistributive policies of the Ahmadinejad government had helped the ethnic Azeris write off debt, obtain cheap credits and easy loans for the farmers. Mousavi did win in the West-Azerbaijan region, using his ethnic ties to win over the urban voters. In the highly populated Tehran province, Mousavi beat Ahmadinejad in the urban centers of Tehran and Shemiranat by gaining the vote of the middle and upper class districts, whereas he lost badly in the adjoining working class suburbs, small towns and rural areas.

The careless and distorted emphasis on 'ethnic voting' cited by writers from the Financial Times and New York Times to justify calling Ahmadinejad 's victory a 'stolen vote' is matched by the media's willful and deliberate refusal to acknowledge a rigorous nationwide public opinion poll conducted by two US experts just three weeks before the vote, which showed Ahmadinejad leading by a more than 2 to 1 margin – even larger than his electoral victory on June 12. This poll revealed that among ethnic Azeris, Ahmadinejad was favored by a 2 to 1 margin over Mousavi, demonstrating how class interests represented by one candidate can overcome the ethnic identity of the other candidate (Washington Post June 15, 2009). The poll also demonstrated how class issues, within age groups, were more influential in shaping political preferences than 'generational life style'. According to this poll, over two-thirds of Iranian youth were too poor to have access to a computer and the 18-24 year olds "comprised the strongest voting bloc for Ahmadinejad of all groups" (Washington Post June 15, 2009).

The only group, which consistently favored Mousavi, was the university students and graduates, business owners and the upper middle class. The 'youth vote', which the Western media praised as 'pro-reformist', was a clear minority of less than 30% but came from a highly privileged, vocal and largely English speaking group with a monopoly on the Western media. Their overwhelming presence in the Western news reports created what has been referred to as the 'North Tehran Syndrome', for the comfortable upper class enclave from which many of these students come. While they may be articulate, well dressed and fluent in English, they were soundly out-voted in the secrecy of the ballot box.

In general, Ahmadinejad did very well in the oil and chemical producing provinces. This may have been a reflection of the oil workers' opposition to the 'reformist' program, which included proposals to 'privatize' public enterprises. Likewise, the incumbent did very well along the border provinces because of his emphasis on strengthening national security from US and Israeli threats in light of an escalation of US-sponsored cross-border terrorist attacks from Pakistan and Israeli-backed incursions from Iraqi Kurdistan, which have killed scores of Iranian citizens. Sponsorship and massive funding of the groups behind these attacks is an official policy of the US from the Bush Administration, which has not been repudiated by President Obama; in fact it has escalated in the lead-up to the elections.

What Western commentators and their Iranian protégés have ignored is the powerful impact which the devastating US wars and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan had on Iranian public opinion: Ahmadinejad's strong position on defense matters contrasted with the pro-Western and weak defense posture of many of the campaign propagandists of the opposition.

The great majority of voters for the incumbent probably felt that national security interests, the integrity of the country and the social welfare system, with all of its faults and excesses, could be better defended and improved with Ahmadinejad than with upper-class technocrats supported by Western-oriented privileged youth who prize individual life styles over community values and solidarity.

The demography of voting reveals a real class polarization pitting high income, free market oriented, capitalist individualists against working class, low income, community based supporters of a 'moral economy' in which usury and profiteering are limited by religious precepts. The open attacks by opposition economists of the government welfare spending, easy credit and heavy subsidies of basic food staples did little to ingratiate them with the majority of Iranians benefiting from those programs. The state was seen as the protector and benefactor of the poor workers against the 'market', which represented wealth, power,

privilege and corruption. The Opposition's attack on the regime's 'intransigent' foreign policy and positions 'alienating' the West only resonated with the liberal university students and import-export business groups. To many Iranians, the regime's military buildup was seen as having prevented a US or Israeli attack.

The scale of the opposition's electoral deficit should tell us is how out of touch it is with its own people's vital concerns. It should remind them that by moving closer to Western opinion, they removed themselves from the everyday interests of security, housing, jobs and subsidized food prices that make life tolerable for those living below the middle class and outside the privileged gates of Tehran University.

Amhadinejad's electoral success, seen in historical comparative perspective should not be a surprise. In similar electoral contests between nationalist-populists against pro-Western liberals, the populists have won. Past examples include Peron in Argentina and, most recently, Chavez of Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and even Lula da Silva in Brazil, all of whom have demonstrated an ability to secure close to or even greater than 60% of the vote in free elections. The voting majorities in these countries prefer social welfare over unrestrained markets, national security over alignments with military empires.

The consequences of the electoral victory of Ahmadinejad are open to debate. The US may conclude that continuing to back a vocal, but badly defeated, minority has few prospects for securing concessions on nuclear enrichment and an abandonment of Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas. A realistic approach would be to open a wide-ranging discussion with Iran, and acknowledging, as Senator Kerry recently pointed out, that enriching uranium is not an existential threat to anyone. This approach would sharply differ from the approach of American Zionists, embedded in the Obama regime, who follow Israel's lead of pushing for a preemptive war with Iran and use the specious argument that no negotiations are possible with an 'illegitimate' government in Tehran which 'stole an election'.

Recent events suggest that political leaders in Europe, and even some in Washington, do not accept the Zionist-mass media line of 'stolen elections'. The White House has not suspended its offer of negotiations with the newly re-elected government but has focused rather on the repression of the opposition protesters (and not the vote count). Likewise, the 27 nation European Union expressed 'serious concern about violence' and called for the "aspirations of the Iranian people to be achieved through peaceful means and that freedom of expression be respected" (Financial Times June 16, 2009 p.4). Except for Sarkozy of France, no EU leader has questioned the outcome of the voting.

The wild card in the aftermath of the elections is the Israeli response: Netanyahu has signaled to his American Zionist followers that they should use the hoax of 'electoral fraud' to exert maximum pressure on the Obama regime to end all plans to meet with the newly re-elected Ahmadinejad regime.

Paradoxically, US commentators (left, right and center) who bought into the electoral fraud hoax are inadvertently providing Netanyahu and his American followers with the arguments and fabrications: Where they see religious wars, we see class wars; where they see electoral fraud, we see imperial destabilization.

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