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THE ELECTION OF HASAN ROUHANI AS SEVENTH PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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Just a few weeks ago, most commentators in Iran and abroad were united in their belief that the Iranian elections would produce no real surprises. The 2009 elections seemed to have demonstrated the lack of scope for political dissent in Iran, and it was generally felt that a reformer who was not part of the establishment would have little or no chance of securing an election victory. One editorial in the *Washington Post* a day before the election even went so far as to predict “Mr. Rouhani, who has emerged as the default candidate of Iran’s reformists, will not be allowed to win”,¹ and the Washington paper was not alone in this belief. Many people in Iran shared the view expressed in the international press that the election would be won by a representative of the conservative camp. In Iran, it was Rouhani’s lack of popularity and the impossibility of clearly defining him as a reformer that contributed to a general sense of indifference towards him until shortly before the election.

So although his election as the seventh president of the Islamic Republic of Iran and successor to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was not initially greeted with great enthusiasm by large sections of the press, there was at least a sense of cautious optimism. Writing in the *Foreign Policy*, Vali Nasr notes how the “reformist candidate” Rouhani defied the odds and achieved a surprise victory just when the world

1 | “Iran votes Friday on a president, but the ballot is quite limited”, *The Washington Post*, 12 Jun 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-12/opinions/39923306_1 (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

had given up hope of any meaningful change in Iran. He comments that there is now cause for cautious optimism that broad popular support for Rouhani at the polls will translate into concessions at the international negotiating table, but that it is still Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's religious leader, who is likely to have the last word.² Rainer Hermann, writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, makes a similar point: "Four years ago it was still possible to manipulate the results of a presidential election to ensure that the hardliner Ahmadinejad would be re-elected. This time it was clear after the first round that the only reformist candidate was the clear victor: Hasan Rouhani."³

A frequent question being asked in the vast majority of responses to the election is not first and foremost how the result might affect the internal situation in Iran, but how it might affect Iran's nuclear programme. A common thread during this and earlier elections, and one that continues to run through many analyses even after this election, is the tension between an allegedly powerless president and an all-powerful religious leader – although these attributes are interchangeable. Many consider the views of the supposedly reformist Rouhani to be in direct conflict with Khamenei's conservative interests. Khamenei represents and is head of the existing system, while Rouhani is seen as a reformer at a time of tension between the Supreme Leader and the people, as though he himself has never been a part of the Islamic Republic's political structure.

When the results were announced and Rouhani was declared the victor with 50.7 per cent of the vote,⁴ the streets of Tehran filled with thousands of people who celebrated into the night. On 15 June 2013, the fourth anniversary of the mass protests of 2009, pictures began to circulate in

2 | Cf. Vali Nasr, "Regime Change Obama Can Believe In", *Foreign Policy*, 15 Jun 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/16/regime_change_iran_nuclear_weapons_deal (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

3 | Rainer Hermann, "Eine Chance für den Iran", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 Jun 2013, <http://faz.net/aktuell/politik/-12223882.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

4 | With a turnout of 72.7 per cent. Cf. Vezārat-e Kešvar, "Gozāreš-e nahāyī-ye yāzdahomīn-e dōre-ye enteḥābāt-e riyāsāt-e ḡomhūrī" (final result of the eleventh presidential elections), <http://moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&ID=ab52b9a8-e2a6-41e4-bbcc-15665125a6b2> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

the social media and the main news channels of the Persian-speaking diaspora (e.g. *BBC Farsi*, *Voice of America*, *Radio Farda*) for the first time since the last mass protests of 14 February 2011, showing large public gatherings with people dressed in green, and also this time in purple. It is very revealing to examine their publicly-expressed statements, materially and verbally. Some were shouting that they had finally got back the votes that had been stolen from them four years earlier,⁵ while in a reversal of the chant often heard in 2009, "death to the dictator" (*marg bar dīktātōr*), some were shouting "thanks to the dictator" (*dīktātōr, tašakkor*).⁶ Green was being replaced by purple, the campaign colour chosen by Rouhani's camp. One photo shows a placard proclaiming "We miss Neda" (*ġā-ye Nedā ħālī*) in the midst of the victory celebrations.⁷ The name of Neda Agha-Soltan, who was killed during the 2009 protests and became a symbol of the Green Movement, was written in red. This is the way the names of the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War are normally written on state-sanctioned street signs, posters and other printed materials. Chants of "Mousavi" and "yā Hoṣeyn, Mīr-Hoṣeyn" could also be heard among the crowd.⁸ An impartial observer could easily get the impression that, four years after the bloody repression of the 2009 election protests, there has now been a dramatic change and that the Green Movement has gained significant ground.

In a reversal of the chant often heard in 2009, "death to the dictator", some were shouting "thanks to the dictator".

5 | Cf. Facebook, 15 Jul 2013, <http://fb.com/photo.php?v=577669015617049> (accessed 15 Jul 2013); cf. Facebook, <http://fb.com/IranElectionNews> (accessed 15 Jul 2013); cf. eyewitness account of 16 Jun 2013.

6 | Cf. eyewitness account of 20 Jun 2013. See also: Zahra Hosseini, "Iranians count on president-elect Rohani to bring change", Reuters, 16 Jun 2013, <http://reuters.com/article/2013/06/16/us-iran-election-idUSBRE95C1E120130616> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

7 | Can be seen on the Google Plus site of the conservative blogger Ahmad Zolalams, "šaraf dārand īnā?" (Do these [people] have honor?). See also: Smallmedia, "Iranian Conservative Bloggers: And the winner is...", <http://storify.com/smallmedia/iranian-conservative-bloggers-and-the-winner-is> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

8 | I.e.: Facebook, 16 Jun 2013, <http://fb.com/photo.php?v=618334931510417> (accessed 4 Jul 2013); Facebook, 15 Jun 2013, <http://fb.com/photo.php?v=646877958660305> (accessed 4 Jul 2013). Here can also be heard "pīrūz-e enteḥābāt ġonbeš-e sabz-e īrān" (Iran's Green Movement is the real winner of the elections).



Rouhani at a press conference after his election victory: "I will not forget the promises I made." | Source: © Amir Kholousi, ISNA, rouhani.ir.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

But who exactly is Hasan Rouhani⁹ and why has his election victory triggered such a reaction? A short 30-minute documentary aired on Iranian television during the election campaign¹⁰ gives some insight into how the presidential candidate sees himself. It shows pictures of a young man who took up his religious studies in 1960 at the age of twelve, qualified as a scholar of Islamic law in 1968 (*iğtiḥād*¹¹) and then enrolled at the University of Tehran to study Judicial Law. In one interview, Rouhani said it was in 1961 that he first visited the Imam Khomeini in his house in Qom. That year proved to be a pivotal moment in the

9 | He was born with the family name Fereydūn, which is a reference to the mythical king of the same name. The name Rouhani (Rowḥānī) on the other hand points to the more "Islamic" meaning of "spiritual" or "clergyman".

10 | Cf. "Promotional video of Rohani praise Rafsanjani and shows Khamenei stand in nuclear issue doubtful!", YouTube, 4 Jun 2013 http://youtu.be/9DNYZx__yuc (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

11 | The process of reaching an independent verdict by a Shiite lawyer using reason (*'aql*) and the principles of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), is what distinguishes him as a *muğtaḥid* from the laity who are bound by the principle of emulation (*taqlīd*). However, very few *muğtaḥids* practice their own *iğtiḥād*, but follow a superior *marğā' at-taqlīd* (source of emulation), such as Khomeini's teacher Hoseyn Borujerdi, for example. Like most politically active clerics, Rouhani, as a *Hoğğato 'I-Eslām va 'I-Muslimīn*, ranks below the level of Ayatollah.

run-up to the Iranian Revolution, as it was then that the death of Ayatollah Seyyed Hoseyn Borujerdi thrust his pupil Khomeini into the political arena. The TV programme also showed various SAVAK¹² documents relating to Rouhani's activities in Iran. As a result he came across as a good speaker and later travelled to Neauphle-le-Château, where Khomeini lived in exile from 1978 to February 1979, and then on to various other European countries as a representative of the Revolution. The documentary also refers to people such as Mehdi Bazargan, Hasan Khomeini and Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, with a view to portraying Rouhani as a revolutionary from the very beginning and positioning him close to the prime movers of the Revolution. It was therefore no surprise that the programme also focused heavily on the war years from 1980 to 1988. Like the Revolution itself, the "Sacred Defence" (*defā'-e moqaddas*) is an important part of the self-image of the Islamic Republic's elite and also a key element of the private and public culture of remembrance.¹³ Rouhani held various military positions both during and after the war, including Commander of the Iran Air Defence Force (1985-1991) and Deputy to the Second in Command of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1988-1989).¹⁴ In 1990 he enrolled at the Glasgow Caledonian University where he received a doctorate in 1999.¹⁵

- 12 | Organisation of Intelligence and National Security (*Sāzmān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Kešvar*), Iran's secret service from 1957 to 1979.
- 13 | Presidential candidate Saeed Jalili in particular, who lost a part of his right leg when serving as a *basiğ* volunteer during the Iran-Iraq War, attempted to set himself apart from his rivals by presenting himself as a "living martyr" during his campaign.
- 14 | His short official English biography from the *Center for Strategic Research* also mentions the following military positions: "Head of the Central Headquarters of *Khatam-ul-Anbia* Command Post, 1985-1987, Head of the Executive Committee of the High Council for War Support, 1986-1988, Member of the High Council for War Support, 1986-1988, Member of the Supreme Defence Council, 1983-1988." Cf. <http://csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtid=09&&depid=106&&semid=283> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).
- 15 | In 1995 submitted a paper for his MPhil entitled "The Islamic Legislative Power with reference to the Iranian experience". The subject of his doctoral thesis was "The Flexibility of Shariah (Islamic Law), with reference to the Iranian experience". Cf. "GCU congratulates alumnus Hassan Rouhani on his election as the next President of Iran", 19 Jun 2013, <http://gcu.ac.uk/newsevents/news/article.php?id=59642> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).



The testimonial "I vote" (left) was posted by thousands of Iranians on Facebook. Ayatollah Khamenei (right) meanwhile said he will not tell anybody whom he will vote for. | Source: (left) Negar Mortazavi via Twitter, <http://pic.twitter.com/F5MCp5704F> (accessed 15 Jul 2013), (right) khamenei_ir via Instagram, <http://instagram.com/p/aD1YQxrVbE> (accessed 15 Jul 2013).

Alongside his military and academic activities, Rouhani was also a member of the Iranian parliament from 1980 to 2000 and in 1991 was elected to the Expediency Discernment Council (*mağma'-e tašhīṣ-e mašleḥat-e neẓām*), known as the Expediency Council.¹⁶ Since 1989 he has also been the personal representative of the Supreme Leader in the Supreme National Security Council (*šorā-ye 'ālī-ye amniyat-e mellī*). As Head of the Center for Strategic Research he is the official publisher of the periodicals *Rāhbord* (strategy),¹⁷ *National Interests*, *Foreign Relations* and the *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*.¹⁸ Rouhani became more widely known on the international stage when he was chosen as chief negotiator on Iran's nuclear programme and given the nickname "the diplomat sheikh".¹⁹ He is also a member of the conservative Combatant Clergy Association (*ğāme'-e-ye rowḥāniyyat-e mobārez*), with fellow members including Rafsanjani. This is not to be confused with the Association of Combatant Clerics (*mağma'-e rowḥāniyūn-e mobārez*), whose members include Khatami.

16 | Cf. n. 14.

17 | Cf. *Rāhbord*, Center for Strategic Research, <http://www.csr.ir/Center.aspx?Ing=en&abtid=08> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

18 | Cf. n. 14.

19 | Cf. "Profile: Hassan Rouhani", *BBC*, 18 Jun 2013, <http://bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22886729> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

Rouhani uses the various key moments in his story – from the beginnings of the Revolution to being a member of the political elite – to depict himself as a representative of the Islamic Republic’s traditional establishment who is well-connected to the military, the clergy and political decision-makers. As a politically active cleric who is less involved in the traditional religious duties of the mullahs (*‘ulamā’*), for whom the study of religious law and the execution of religious affairs are paramount, he is more akin to one of the “revolutionary clerics” who have increasingly emerged since the 1960s, who count Khamenei, Rafsanjani and Khatami amongst their numbers and who have formed a close symbiosis with the state.

KEY MOMENTS IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

In previous elections the successful candidates were always those who were able to present themselves as opponents of the establishment. To all intents and purposes, the establishment is a flexible entity that can be defined to suit the particular circumstances. In 2005, for example, Ahmadinejad was able to win a hard-fought election battle against Rafsanjani by making populist promises. He was quick to point out the class differences between himself, the pious son of a poor blacksmith, who still lived in a simple middle-class home, and Rafsanjani the former president and billionaire. A central pillar of Ahmadinejad’s success was his promise to break the power of the “thousand families”, who had controlled the country’s destiny for generations, and to honour “the original promises of the Revolution”.²⁰

In the run-up to this year’s presidential elections, it was assumed there would be a switch of roles and Rafsanjani would take over as president, especially in light of the Ahmadinejad government’s economic failures and Rafsanjani’s public criticism of them. Some of Rafsanjani’s own family members contributed to this impression. When his daughter Faeze was given a prison sentence in 2011 for

20 | Cf. Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge University, 2008, 193-194.

“propaganda against the Islamic Republic”²¹ there were growing rumours that Rafsanjani might stand for election, and the *éminence grise* suddenly became more prominent in the Iranian media. His new popularity was made possible by his alleged, albeit not publicly expressed, support²² for the Green Movement in 2009 and beyond. In many discussions, Rafsanjani was seen as the nation’s great hope because, as the only surviving “founding father” of the Islamic Republic, he was familiar with the country’s internal power structure and as a pragmatist he recognised the need for reform. When Rafsanjani finally announced his candidature on 11 May, this seemed to confirm everyone’s expectations. However, ten days later, the Guardian Council (*šurā-ye negāhbān-e qānūn-e asāsī*) barred him from standing as a presidential candidate, an event which was interpreted by many Iranians as a sign that Khamenei wanted to push through one of his own preferred conservative candidates over whom he would have more influence.²³

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But Rouhani also had to manage the balancing act between an irreproachable demonstration of loyalty to the Revolution on the one side and an expression of criticism that flirted with the limits of acceptability on the other, as became clear at certain points in his election campaign. Significantly, it was the more critical statements that found

21 | Six days after his daughter was convicted, Rafsanjani’s own website was also removed from the internet. Cf. “Iran schließt Internetseite von Ex-Präsident Rafsandschani”, *Zeit Online*, 30 Dec 2013, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2011-12/iran-internet-rafsandschani> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

22 | Cf. Muhammad Sahimi, “Rafsanjani’s Sermon, Split in the Leadership”, *Tehran Bureau*, 17 Jul 2009, <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/rafsanjanis-sermon-split-in-the-leadership.html> (accessed 15 Jul 2013).

23 | Until early February, Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian parliament, was the likely presidential candidate and favourite of Chamenei. This changed when Ahmadinejad played a video in parliament which showed Larijani’s brother Fazel engaged in morally dubious business activities. This caused an uproar in parliament and resulted in a summons for Ahmadinejad. Yeganeh Torbati, “Ahmadinejad accuses Iran speaker’s family of corruption”, *Reuters*, 3 Feb 2013, <http://reuters.com/article/2013/02/03/us-iran-politics-idUSBRE9120DG20130203> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

Rouhani criticises the activities of the Iranian security apparatus in daily life and asks: "Why is everywhere a surveillance zone? Streets, universities, schools, centres... We have to break this climate of security!"

their way onto his campaign website²⁴.²⁵ Clips from a speech²⁶ given on 1 June show Rouhani's supporters chanting for the release of political prisoners. In his speech, Rouhani criticises the activities of the Iranian security apparatus in daily life and asks: "Why is everywhere a surveillance zone? Streets, universities, schools, centres... We have to break this climate of security!"²⁷ His supporters respond by repeating their calls for the release of political prisoners and chant "Praise be to Mousavi, welcome Rouhani" (*dorūd bar Mūsavī, salām bar Rowḥānī*) and "Long live Rouhani" (*Rowḥānī zende bād*). Rouhani went on to call for more peaceful and better lives with greater freedom, security, prosperity and dignity for the people of Iran. He told his supporters this was "in your hands" and urged them not to be discouraged and to participate in the elections. After the audience once again calls for him to join a coalition with Mohammad-Reza Aref,²⁸ he promises: "This year, 2013, will not be like 2009 (*emsāl, ya 'nī sāl-e '92, sāl-e '88 naḥ'āhad šod*)."

On 13 May, Rouhani examined the issue of public surveillance (*fazā-ye amniyatī*) during an open discussion with students. A member of the audience was applauded when

24 | Cf. YouTube profile, [http://youtube.com/user/Rouhani Campaign](http://youtube.com/user/RouhaniCampaign) (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

25 | Of course statements and excerpts circulating in the social media can only serve as an indication, and indeed the role of the internet in protest movements is often overstated. Cf. Evgeny Mozorov, "Iran: Downside the 'Twitter Revolution'", *Dissent*, Herbst 2009, 10-14; Golnaz Esfandiari, "The Twitter Devolution", *Foreign Policy*, 7 Jul 2010, http://foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt (accessed 4 Jul 2013). Nevertheless, some statements circulating in the social media can be an important analytical tool as long as they are put into context and provide information on particular elements of the discourse.

26 | Cf. "Rouhani demands end to securitized atmosphere / youth affairs rep arrested", YouTube, 1 Jun 2013, http://youtu.be/NBX_VGddTYM (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

27 | "Čerā hame ġā fazā-ye amniyatī bāšad? ḥiyābān, dānešgāh, madāres, marākez... fazā-ye amniyatī rā bāyad beškanīm!" Cf. speech from 1 Jun 2013, n. 26.

28 | Mohammad-Reza Aref, the only candidate who was unanimously considered to be a reformer, withdrew from the race on 11 June on the recommendation of Chatami and for the benefit of Rouhani. Cf. "Iran's Mohammad Reza Aref quits presidential race", *BBC*, 11 Jun 2013, <http://bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22851764> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

he asked Rouhani what he planned to do in light of the house arrests of Mousavi and Karroubi. He replied that continuation of such a "rift" (*šekāf*) was not in "our interests" and that the upcoming elections would help to heal this rift. He said the new government also needed to create surveillance-free zones (*fažā-ye ġeyr-e amniyātī*). Rouhani added that within the space of one year the country could see the release not only of people held under house arrest but also of political activists who have been in prison since 2009.

During a discussion following a speech at the University of Tehran on 6 May,²⁹ Rouhani found himself being asked whether he considered the events after the 2009 elections to be a people's demonstration (*tažāhorāt-e mardomī*) or an insurrection (*fetne*)³⁰ that was imported from outside Iran's borders (*ke az ān sū-ye marž-hā vāred-e kešvar šod*). Rouhani gave a somewhat vague answer, saying the events were initially naturally-arising demonstrations by Iranians that people should participate in. He then remarked that in the course of an (unspecified) official meeting he had proposed a recount of 20 per cent of the votes and that the result should be applied to all the ballot boxes. But unfortunately this proposal attracted no support and in the meantime the demonstrations had continued, despite being declared illegal at the time. His comment that the issue of *fetne* arose before the elections with the

29 | Cf. „Rouhani's View on the Popular Protests after 2009 elections“, YouTube, 30 May 2013, <http://youtu.be/n0CluzrbPJK> (accessed 4 Jul 2013). This hall holds 750 people and was one-third full. After a speech which concentrated on the problems of the Ahmadinejad government, the audience was mainly interested in whether Rouhani – who was not particularly popular at the time – would withdraw his candidacy if Rafsanjani entered the race.

30 | The word *fetne* (arab. *fitna*) comes from the Koran, where it has connotations of "tribulation" or "temptation" and is associated with "loss of faith" or "aberration". In a political context, *fetne* has taken on the meaning of a religiously motivated civil war between Muslims. Cf. David B. Cook, "Fitna in early Islamic history", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd edition. So, for example, the early Islamic schism between Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawijja is a *fetne* par excellence. The protests after the 2009 presidential elections were repeatedly described by officials as *fetne*, relegating the protestors to the ranks of heretics and enemies of the faith.

allegations made on TV by “certain gentlemen” during the election campaign triggered tumultuous applause.³¹

Rouhani’s campaign reached a high point with its use of the highly symbolic song “My Schoolmate” (*yār-e dabestānī-ye man*) by Feridun Forughi. This song was sung during the Revolution, given a new context and new popularity during the student protests of 1999 and widely banned after 2009. A video³² shows an emotionally charged auditorium celebrating Rouhani’s entrance to the sounds of “My Schoolmate”. But once again there is clearly past evidence that Rouhani was an opponent of the student protests. On 15 July 1999 Elaine Sciolino of *The New York Times* wrote: “Hassan Rouhani [...] warned that protesters and rioters under arrest would be tried and punished for being ‘enemies of the state’ and ‘corrupt [sic] of the earth’ crimes [*mofsed fi ‘l- ‘arz*] that are punishable by death. Our revolution needs a thorough cleanup, and this will help advance the cause of the regime and the revolution,’ Mr. Rouhani told a huge crowd at Teheran University, which was also the scene of six days of student demonstrations.”³³

Old statements give evidence that Rouhani was an opponent of the student protests.

On 4 June Rouhani attended the funeral of Ayatollah Seyyed Jalal od-Din Taheri (1926-2013),³⁴ the former Friday prayer leader³⁵ in Isfahan. Taheri resigned from his post in 2002 as a protest against the instrumentalisation of

31 | Here, Rouhani is referring to the famous TV debate between former candidates Ahmadinejad and Mousavi, in which Ahmadinejad threatened to reveal shocking information about Zahra Rahnavard, Mousavi’s wife and prominent supporter.

32 | For a music video and translated lyrics in English, cf. “An Iranian Revolutionary Song: My Schoolmate”, *Payvand*, <http://payvand.com/news/09/jun/1152.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013). For Rouhani’s video cf. Facebook, <http://fb.com/photo.php?v=10151496252417947> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

33 | Cf. Elaine Sciolino, “Turning Tables In Iran, Crowds Back Old Line”, *The New York Times*, 15 Jul 1999, <http://nytimes.com/1999/07/15/world/turning-tables-in-iran-crowds-back-old-line.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013). See also “Iranian protesters face execution”, *IOL*, 14 Jul 1999, <http://iol.co.za/news/world/iranian-protesters-face-execution-1.5303> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

34 | Cf. “Ayatollah Taheri”, <http://ataheri.ir> (accessed 15 Jul 2013).

35 | Friday prayer leader (*emām-ġom‘e*) is an official appointment in the Islamic Republic.

religion for political ends³⁶ and in an open letter dated 30 June 2009 he declared the election of Ahmadinejad to be illegal.³⁷ During the funeral procession through the city the crowds chanted "Freedom" (*āzādī*), "Death to the dictator" (*marg bar diktātōr*)³⁸ and "Montazerī,³⁹ Taheri: the true clergymen!" (*rowḥānī-ye vāqe'ī: Montazerī, Ṭāherī*).⁴⁰ The impact of Rouhani's attendance at the funeral – a political issue in itself – was heightened still further by the fact that the funeral procession in Isfahan coincided with the official commemoration of Khomeini's death in Tehran, which was attended by all the other presidential candidates.

THE REASONS BEHIND HIS SUCCESS

Rouhani's success is based on several factors. These include his reformist rhetoric and aesthetic that united with the cohesive support of the reform camp and the associated desire for change amongst the public. He was also able to benefit from internal and external factors for which Ahmadinejad was blamed. At the root of this was an attitude of expectation that was anticipating victory by the principlist camp.

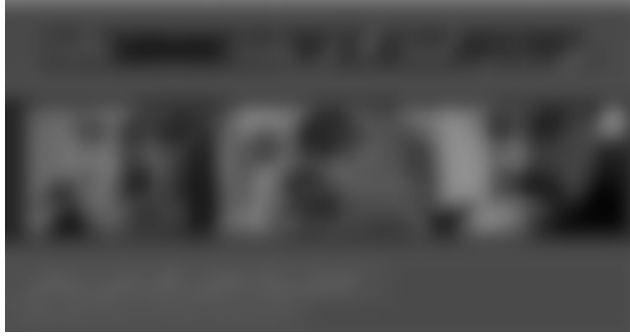
36 | Cf. "Video: Iranians chant 'down with the dictator' at funeral for top cleric", *Al Arabiya*, 5 Jun 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/06/05/Video-Iranians-chant-down-with-the-dictator-at-funeral-for-top-cleric.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

37 | Cf. "Āyatollāh Ṭāherī: taṣaddī-ye moğaddad-e ra'īs-e dowlat nā-mašru' va gāṣebāne ast" (The return to power of the head of state is usurpatory and illegal), *BBC Farsi*, 30 Jun 2009, http://bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090630_mg_brief_election_taheri.shtml (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

38 | Cf. "Iran 4 June 2013 – 'Death to Dictator' chants at Ayatollah Taheri funeral procession in Isfahan", YouTube, 4 Jun 2013, <http://youtu.be/z8gpJQsYf1M> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

39 | Grand Ayatollah Hoseyn-Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor, spoke out in 1988 against the mass executions of political prisoners and as a result was placed under house arrest. In 2009 Montazeri came out on the side of the demonstrators and issued a *fatwā* in response to questions from dissidents and his student Mohsen Kadivars in which he called the Supreme Leader illegitimate, claiming he was working with the government against religion and therefore people had a right to resist. Cf. Muhammad Sahimi, "Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's Fatwa", *Tehran Bureau*, 12 Jul 2009, <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

40 | Cf. YouTube, <http://youtu.be/-C9tdnTV0jo> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).



New "reform trinity": Rouhani's campaign twittered this picture in green and purple. The text refers to Ahmadinejad: "This is the spring that follows the winter." | Source: Twitter profile, Hasan Rouhani, <http://bit.ly/13euwpp> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

After the withdrawal of Mohammed-Reza Aref on 11 June, Mohammad Khatami declared his support for Rouhani in a video that was broadcast via the social networks.⁴¹ Along with Rafsanjani and many others,⁴² two Grand Ayatollahs who were critical of the regime threw their support behind Rouhani: Asadollah Bayat-Zanjani, who refused the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh*,⁴³ and Yusuf Sanei,⁴⁴ who came out on the side of the protesters in 2009.⁴⁵ In this way, and in contrast to the other candidates, Rouhani managed to unite a broad range of supporters who gave legitimacy to his reform-oriented rhetoric. The videos and photos shown

41 | Cf. Facebook, 11 Jun 2013, <http://fb.com/photo.php?v=10151500045292947> (accessed 4 Jul 2013). Since 2009 it has been almost impossible for Khatami to appear in the traditional media, cf. Leyla Shirazi, "Iran's Presidential Elections: The Live Embers of a Democratic Opposition Glow", *Jadaliyya*, 14 Jul 2013, http://jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12233/iran's-presidential-elections_the-live-embers-of-a (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

42 | Cf. "Iranian Reformist Groups, Figures Rally Around Rohani", *Payvand*, 13 Jun 2013, <http://payvand.com/news/13/jun/1081.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

43 | *Velāyat-e faqīh* ("governance of the jurist") is Khamenei's political-religious concept and the basis of his rule in Iran. For Bayat-Zanjani cf. Neil MacFarquhar, "Clerics May Be Key to Outcome of Unrest", *The New York Times*, 17 Jun 2009, <http://nytimes.com/2009/06/18/world/middleeast/18clerics.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

44 | Cf. "Prominent Iranian Ayatollah Yousef Sanei Slams Iranian Leadership over Handling of Protests", YouTube, 4 Sep 2009, <http://youtu.be/ceHREFzgp10> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

45 | Cf. "Reformists say Rohani leading in polls", *Radio Zamaneh*, 13 Jun 2013, <http://archive.radiozamaneh.com/english/content/reformists-say-rohani-leading-polls> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

during the election constantly emphasised Rouhani's proximity to Rafsanjani and Khatami.⁴⁶

A clip from his election video provides an example of the issues covered by Rouhani. Against a background showing people on the streets of Iran, Rouhani says: "People are asking: Why does Qatar process and use more than twice as much of its natural gas reserves than we do while our people live in poverty? People are asking: Do we only have the right to participate and be respected in the weeks leading up to the elections? People are asking: Don't we have any civil rights? We are all Iranians, we are all citizens, we should all have the same civil rights, there is no difference. This party, that party, this idea, that idea... This is not compatible with our constitution and our human rights. People are asking: Do we have to answer to every person on the street? Who are these people in civilian dress [members of the security services (*lebās-šahšī*)]? People are asking: Do our children have to go to Europe and work in a petrol station in order to live normal lives? People are thirsting for transparency in this country. People are thirsting for integrity."⁴⁷

With this, Rouhani addresses some of the reformists' central issues (*ḥaqq-e mošārekāt, ḥoquq-e šahrvandī*) while at the same time stressing national unity. And as was apparent

Rouhani made use of the aesthetic of the "green" protest and thus particularly benefiting from the widespread rejection of Ahmadinejad.

during the various stages of his election campaign, he is also making use of the aesthetic of the "green" protest and thus particularly benefiting from the widespread rejection of Ahmadinejad. Some of the main reasons for his success undoubtedly lie in the ambiguity of his statements that leave plenty of room for interpretation, along with the relative relaxation of the political climate that was apparent during the elections.

The first press conference after the elections made it clear how successful Rouhani had been at addressing people's concerns and awakening their hopes. A journalist thanked him for giving hope back to the nation and to journalists after eight difficult years. He replied that he had not given

46 | Cf. "Hassan Rouhani", <http://rouhani.ir> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

47 | Cf. "Promotional video of Rohani praise Rafsanjani and shows Khamenei stand in nuclear issue doubtful!", YouTube, 4 Jun 2013, http://youtu.be/9DNYZx__yuc (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

hope back to the people but that people had given hope back to themselves.⁴⁸

After successfully meeting people's expectations, Rouhani pointed to his life story to show that he also has the necessary experience to find solutions to the country's problems. He portrayed himself as a former successful negotiator who is in a position to find a diplomatic solution to the nuclear dispute and who understands and will focus on the country's current economic problems.⁴⁹ His experience seems all the stronger when he compares himself to Ahmadinejad. He blames Iran's economic woes on the latter's mismanagement (*sū'-e modīriyat*), but also on sanctions imposed by the West. In doing so, he is contradicting the oft-repeated statements in the quasi-state media that the sanctions have only had a marginal effect on the Iranian economy.

Rouhani's campaign slogan reveals startling parallels to the U.S. elections in 2008. Obama's campaign focus on "Hope" and "Change" really captured the mood of the times.

Rouhani's campaign slogan "Government of management and hope" (*dowlat-e tadbīr va omīd*) reveals startling parallels to the U.S. elections in 2008. After what proved for many Americans to be two terms of disillusionment under George W. Bush, Obama's campaign focus on "Hope" and "Change" truly captured the mood of the times. Of course these parallels hold a certain irony, as the Iranian elections were still filled with negative comparisons to the United States, which various official bodies accused of demonstrating democratic failings.⁵⁰

48 | Cf. "Part 2/2 of new Iranian president Hasan Rohani press conference obn Monday 17 June", YouTube, 17 Jun 2013, <http://youtu.be/LmVKaU1WY3E> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

49 | For example in a TV debate on 27 May 2013, in which he also criticised Iranian state television. Cf. "Full video of Hojatoleslam Rohani TV campaign including attack on Iranian TV", YouTube, 27 May 2013, <http://youtu.be/SXLPEhJBnS8> (accessed 4 Jul 2013); Arash Karami, "Iranian Candidate Gives Surprising Contentious TV Interview", *Iran Pulse*, 28 May 2013, <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2013/05/2099/iranian-candidate-gives-surprising-contentious-tv-interview> (accessed 4 Jul 2013); "Iran presidential rivals attack nuclear negotiator Jalili in TV debate", YouTube, 8 Jun 2013, <http://youtu.be/2hQKAR7Iz0w> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

50 | In this respect, official bodies and media have always used the model that has existed since the Revolution, whereby Islam in general and the "Islamic Revolution" in particular have been viewed as the precursors of an anti-hegemonist, anti-imperialist socio-cultural freedom fight. Even this criticism displays the purely formal understanding of •

Here, whether deliberately or not, Rouhani found himself moving closer to the Supreme Leader. Five days before the Iranian presidential elections, on the anniversary of the 15th Khordad (5 June 1963), Khamenei gave an address in Qom. It is noteworthy that he evoked national unity and mentions the word “nation” (*mellat*) 92 times. He added: “Since the Revolution we have had 30 or more elections; which of these have not been free? What other countries hold elections that are freer than those of Iran?”⁵¹ And on 12 June Khamenei tweeted: “My first recommendation is that you participate with passion at the ballot box, it is possible that some do not want to support the Islamic system, but it is your country that you want to support.”⁵²

The admission that there are some people who reject the Islamic Republic as a political system constitutes a significant change from the kind of atmosphere that was prevalent during earlier “planned elections”, which was a direct result not only of the events of 2009, but also of the exclusion of Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad’s close ally, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. The importance of opening up and reviving the political sphere in this way shortly before the election can certainly not be overstated.

It is interesting to take a look at *Kayhan*, the daily newspaper which is controlled by the Supreme Leader’s office. In an editorial piece, controversial managing editor Hoseyn Shariatmadari suggested Rouhani had been recognised by the Guardian Council and followed the same laws. But he went on to say that those who believed he could bring about some kind of great change were deluding themselves, as the Supreme Leader was still the main source of those laws. He claimed Rouhani won because he is a cleric who is genuinely respected by the people and who was able to profit from the quarrelling in the principlist camp. He also stated his belief that the economic situation had diverted people’s attention away from the

Editor Hoseyn Shariatmadari claimed Rouhani won because he is a cleric who is genuinely respected by the people and who was able to profit from the quarrelling in the principlist camp.

democracy on the part of the Iranian leadership that goes against the implied equation of democracy with the rule of law and respect for human rights that is normal in the USA and Europe.

51 | Cf. Ali Khamenei, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=21890> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

52 | Twitter profile, 12 Jun 2013, http://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/344721096437817344 (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

government's successes in other areas.⁵³ Other unattributed commentary pieces suggest the high turnout was a sign that the people place a great deal of trust in the system and a clear demolition of the arguments put forward by the Green Movement.⁵⁴ As Rouhani stressed in an interview on state television before the election, he personally would have no problem working with both principlists (*uṣulgarāyān*) and reformers (*eṣlaḥṭalab*), but he did have a problem with extremists (*efrāṭiyūn*). These words will no doubt be ringing in the ears of those considered to be the losers in the election when it comes to the redistribution of power.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The reactions of the national and international press, the demonstrations of support on the street and a positive reaction on the currency markets⁵⁵ are all evidence that there is a degree of trust and an easing of tensions within the country. However, it must not be forgotten that the political sphere has always been opened up to a limited extent in the run-up to elections. Elections in Iran have

always been used as a means of balancing out the power of the established political elite.⁵⁶

The high turnout can also be seen as a sign the Iranians have a strong desire to participate in the political process.

In this respect, the high turnout can also be seen as something of a double-edged sword, for as much as it is been touted as evidence

of the legitimacy of a disputed political system, it is also a sign the Iranians have a strong desire to participate in the political process, even if only to a very limited extent. This

53 | Cf. Hossein Shariatmadari, "Hamrāhān-e nāhamrāh", *Kayhan*, 17 Jun 2013, 2.

54 | Cf. *ibid.*, 2-3; see also *World Journal of Economics*, <http://den.ir/~4raaw> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

55 | Cf. "Kāheš-e 10 dar-ṣadī-ye qeymat-e dolār yek hafte pas az e'lām-e natāyeġ-e enteḥābāt" (10 per cent fall in the dollar exchange rate one week after the election results were announced), *Radio Farda*, 20 Jun 2013, <http://radiofarda.com/content/b22-iranian-rial-climbs-ten-percent-new-president/25023319.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013); "Dolār dar bāzār-e āzād-e īrān be marz-e se hezār tūmān soqūṭ kard" (The dollar has dropped to close to three thousand Toman on the free Iranian market), *Radio Farda*, 23 Jun 2013, <http://radiofarda.com/content/b22-dollar-price-fell-down/25025322.html> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

56 | Cf. Farideh Farhi, "The Tenth Presidential Elections and Their Aftermath", in: Negin Nabavi (ed.), *Iran: From Theocracy to the Green Movement*, New York, 2012, 3-15, here: 4-5.

development suggests there is a complex political dynamic at play in the country which is in stark contrast to the commonly-held view that the Islamic Republic is enmeshed in some kind of fundamentalist gerontocracy. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the political process supports a limited and elite form of discourse that excludes almost all forms of opposition. As a result, democratic institutions and laws tend to take a back seat in favour of compromises by the elite. Therefore, the statements Rouhani made during the election campaign, his orientation towards a civil rights discourse and his open criticism of the security apparatus should be primarily understood as criticism of the enforcement of unquestioned claims to power. Even if this appeals to the people, it is always directed to competing factions within the elite of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, it implies a change of style rather than a paradigm shift in fundamental questions.

The most surprising result of this election is that Rouhani and his campaign have, at least temporarily, been able to reconcile large numbers of the Iranian people with the country's leadership, just four years after the bloody conflict between people and state, and in doing so have been able to overcome the crisis surrounding the Islamic Republic's legitimacy for the time being. The acceptance of actors classified as part of the Green Movement,⁵⁷ the emphasis on healing rifts and the signal from Khamenei that now is the time to put "Iran" first may even result in Mousavi, Karroubi and some of their supporters eventually being released from house arrest or prison. However, the price of this may be having to subordinate themselves to the "pragmatic" camp, and the state's leadership in particular, for the sake of "national unity".

The price of Mousavi being released from house arrest or prison may be having to subordinate to the "pragmatic" camp for the sake of "national unity".

If this were to happen, a new political reality could emerge where toned-down criticism of the regime and a monopolisation by the state could ultimately result in the status quo actually being reinforced. It is likely there will be some relaxation in the area of state control over the public

57 | Even Mousavi's daughters congratulated Rouhani on his election victory. Cf. Mir Hossein Mousavi, "Mir Hossein Mousavi's Daughters Congratulate the Newly Elected President of Iran", Facebook, 16 Jun 2013, <http://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=10151635254204454> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

domain, even if these changes prove to be largely cosmetic. But the key here is that all changes should be seen to come from the country's leaders, be accepted by all the recognised political camps and not be perceived in any way as some kind of reaction to "illegitimate insurrection". This would cause the questioning of the political system that came to a head during the 2009 protests to become less prevalent.⁵⁸

The Islamic Republic's leadership has significantly expanded its channels of communication and internet activity since the protests of 2009.

One final consequence of this will be the reinforcement of Khamenei's somewhat diminished authority. It is also important to note that the Islamic Republic's leadership has significantly expanded its channels of communication and internet activity since the protests of 2009. These days it is very adept at taking advantage of the full range of social media, as its Twitter,⁵⁹ Facebook,⁶⁰ and Instagram⁶¹ profiles clearly show. The Iranian leadership is also likely to profit from Rouhani's election victory when it comes to the crippling sanctions imposed on Iran and the threat of an Israeli military attack against its nuclear programme, both of which are the result of failure to make any progress in negotiations with the EU, the five veto powers at the UN and Germany (EU-5+1). The chances of a breakthrough in the EU-5+1 negotiations are very much dependent on the willingness of the EU-3 (Germany, France and Great Britain) and the USA to offer a solution that will allow the Iranian leadership to save face. In his first press conference, Rouhani made repeated references to the national rights and national honour that would need to be respected and maintained as part of Iran's relations with the international community.

58 | Kaveh Adel produced a cartoon that eloquently sums this up, "Political Cartoon: 'Shades of Change' By Kaveh Adel Iranian American Cartoonist", 21 Jun 2013, <http://kavehadel.com/blog/2013/06/political-cartoon-shades-of-change-by-kaveh-adel-iranian-american-cartoonist> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

59 | Cf. Twitter profiles of Rouhani, Rafsanjani and Khamenei: http://twitter.com/HassanRouhani_, <http://twitter.com/rouhani92>, <http://twitter.com/HassanRouhani>, <http://twitter.com/hashemi1392>, http://twitter.com/khamenei_ir (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

60 | Cf. Facebook profiles of Khamenei and Rouhani: <http://fb.com/www.Khamenei.ir>; <http://fb.com/Dr.Rowhani> (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

61 | Cf. Instagram profile of Khamenei: http://instagram.com/khamenei_ir (accessed 4 Jul 2013).

So once again we are witnessing the ever-changing cycle between reform and principlism. At this stage, Rouhani is not able to offer long-term political solutions to pressing social issues, nor can he guarantee an end to inflation and depression. However, the Islamic Republic, which has basically been in a perpetual state of emergency since its inception, has at least been able to demonstrate once again that it is not only capable of displaying a degree of political flexibility but is also capable of surviving.

This article was completed on 24 June 2013.