

Ethnics' Votes Helped Pezeshkian to Win the Presidency in Iran

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

The low turnout in the past presidential and parliamentary elections warned the clerics in Tehran that their political base has substantially shrunk.

To deal with this problem, they passed Masoud Pezeshkian through the screening process of the Guardian Council to run for the presidency. They hoped to increase participation from the reformists and the ethnic population. Pezeshkian speaks Azari and Kurdish languages, in addition to Persian, which would increase participation. However, secular and nationalist groups have contended that screening of the candidates by the Guardian Council to preserve theocracy makes the elections irrelevant and have continuously boycotted the election. They wish to topple the clerical regime instead.

While Pezeshkian's candidacy did not bring more voters to the polls in the first round, yet in the second round, a large portion of the ethnic population votes in the northwest and some in the southeast helped him to win the presidency.

Participation in the first round was 39.9%, and in the second stage, 49.8%.

That meant, in both stages, most of the eligible voters did not vote. During his campaigns, Pezeshkian provoked ethnic feelings of the Iranians in the northwest provinces by giving speeches in Azari and Kordish, which are the mother tongues in those provinces, and said why the country's key positions were not given to them.

Image: An image of Saeed Jalili in an interview with the khamenei.ir website in 2021 (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)



About 10.5 million voted for Pezeshkian in the first round, which led him to go to the second round to compete with Saeed Jalili. In the second round, on July 5, 2024, Pezeshkian won 16,384,403 or 54.76% of the popular votes versus Jalili's 13.5 million (44.3%).

Pezeshkian and Jalili won the provinces almost equally. In 16 provinces, Pezeshkian got the highest votes, and Jalili in 15 provinces, but because of higher ethnic votes in four provinces, Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan, Pezeshkian won more votes. The total difference between Pezeshkian votes and Jalili in all 31 provinces was about 2,850,000 votes.

Pezeshkian became the ninth president of Iran and the third non-cleric.

Pezeshkian will become the oldest President of Iran at the age of 69 years and will be inaugurated on July 30, 2024. He is a physician by education. Pezeshkian used religion to advance his political career. During his university years, he joined Islamist student groups and established classes for teaching the Quran and the Nahjul al-balaghe, the primary books for Muslims. His political career includes being Minister of Health from 2001 to 2005, being elected to parliament five times, and serving as the First Deputy Head of the Majles from 2016 to 2020.

The winning of Pezeshkian does not necessarily benefit the Iranians, specifically the poor and working class. Some see him as a charlatan who takes advantage of Iranians' religious beliefs and ethnic roots to deceive them. They see his presidency as a threat from the Pan-Turkism and Zionists to Iran's territorial integrity. Pezeshkian's ethnic roots may stir ethnic population radicalism feelings and open the door to Pan-Turkism and their imperialist supporters who covet to partition Iran.

Image: Ali Khamenei



Pezeshkian wants to pursue the same theocratic rules as before and comply with the religious orders.

The same theocratic dictatorship will be imposed on Iranians. After his victory, Pezeshkian thanked Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, and said, “If he was not there, our names would not easily come out of the boxes,” and insisted on his loyalty to the Leader. Pezeshkian respects the Leader and implies that he must be the administrator of his orders. Assuming he is honest, not many changes are expected in the regime’s policies. The Leader has emphasized self-sufficiency policies and has said there will be no compromises with the US. Khamenei has indicated the same route as the prior President, Ebrahim Raisi: revolutionary Islam must continue. The Leader has emphasized that the new president must pursue the aims of the Islamic revolution. Furthermore, Saeed Jalili, who is head of the shadow government of the regime, informed Pezeshkian that the regime’s policies must continue. Jalili warned Pezeshkian that if he acted in a way that was not aligned with the policies of the regime, he would intervene to correct them.

Image: Javad Zarif



Conflicts have arisen over the criteria for choosing the upcoming cabinet.

Pezeshkian has said that instead of nepotism in the past, the criteria for the selection of his government members should be based on individual expertise. Pezeshkian has appointed the former foreign minister, Javad Zarif, to head the “Steering Council” of his cabinet. Zarif was educated in the US. While serving as an Iranian diplomat in the UN, he established friendly relations with some well-known leaders of the US Democratic Party, including John Kerry and George Soros. Zarif has come under criticism by some conservatives for his connection with the Americans. Mahmoud Nabaviyan, a member of the parliament, has said Zarif grew up in the land of infidels and is at the service of the American masters and behaves like a Jew for them. Also, Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of the daily Kayhan, criticized Zarif for his criteria for choosing the cabinet members, which he considered to be in contradiction with the constitution and explicit Islamic principles. He implied that Zarif follows the ideas that is propagated by the Zionists.

Pezeshkian lacks knowledge of social sciences and wants to rely on his advisers to make decisions on those matters. He wants to restart negotiations with the United States over Iran's nuclear program, promising to revive the 2015 agreement in exchange for lifting the West's sanctions against Iran.

However, despite the concessions made previously, the sanctions were not removed. Zarif has continued the same demagoguery that the sanctions can be lifted. However, that is not realistic, considering the upcoming presidential election in the US, as Joe Biden left the presidential race and endorsed the nomination of Kamala Harris for president. Most likely, Donald Trump will win the presidency; in that case, he will not easily settle the nuclear issue with Iran. Pezeshkian has stated to support the Islamic resistance movements against Israel, which the US opposes.

Moreover, the national defense industry could be compromised if concessions are made on Iran's nuclear and missile programs. Such concessions will weaken Iran's national security. Furthermore, lifting sanctions will help the wealthy merchant class to profit from trade at the expense of the shutdown of domestic industries. Opening the country's borders to luxury cars and other big-ticket items will only please the luxurious lifestyle in North Tehran.

Pezeshkian has no viable plan to solve the country's economic problems, specifically inflation, which is very high. He wants to pursue neoliberal economic policies, which lead to cuts in social welfare programs for the poor strata.

The West does not want to see the clerical regime fall because the alternative would be a secular government more professional and nationalistic, which will maintain a more robust front against foreign influence in Iran. Even though a non-cleric has replaced the prior cleric president, it will not make that much difference in the theocratic regime. Theocratic rigidity and enforcement of clerical rules will go on.

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