

Iran's Presidential Election Goes to the Second Round

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*The first round of Iran's presidential elections was held on June 28 (Tir 8). Despite the government's high propaganda to encourage participation, the turnout was very low, as only 24, 535, 185 or **40% of 61, 452, 321** eligible voters voted to elect the ninth president of Iran, a historic low.*

In this early presidential election, six candidates, **Masoud Al-Pezeshkian, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, Saeed Jalili, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, Alireza Zakani, and Amirhossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi** were selected by the Guardian Council to run. Before the start of the voting, the last two withdrew from the election. The official results of the elections of 58,640 locations in 482 cities were counted. Final votes were:

- Massoud Pezeshkian 10,415,191 (42.5 %);
- Saeed Jalili 9,473,298 (38.6%);
- Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf 3,383,340 (13.8%); and
- Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi 206,397 (0.84 %)

The low turnout is evidence of anti-clerical rule.

Iranians are fed up with theocratic rules. Pour-Mohammadi, the only mullah, received less than 1% of the votes. According to the final results of the presidential election, none of the four candidates managed to obtain the majority quorum of 51%. Thus, the election must go to the second round, which will be held on Friday, July 5 (Tir 15). Out of the 24,535,185 votes counted, Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili will go to the second stage.

This is the second time in the history of presidential elections in Iran that the

president is determined in the second stage.

In 2005, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was leading in the first stage, but he lost the election in the second stage to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This time can be the same as Pezeshkian may lose to Jalili. Jalili's upper limit vote will be the same as in the first round, plus a part of Ghalibaf's votes. However, the upper limit of Pezeshkian's votes will not be much higher than the first round unless those who boycotted the election come to the polls.

Ghalibaf, who targeted the college-educated segment of the population, failed to get enough votes. This segment of the population mostly boycotted the elections. Also, emancipated women opposed him for being the head of the Parliament and approving the mandatory hejab law. This segment is unlikely to vote for Pezeshkian either, as they see him as a charlatan who wants to preserve the same Islamic rules. In earlier years of post-revolution, Pezeshkian made the hijab mandatory in hospitals and universities, while it had not yet become compulsory. Furthermore, Jalili is a religious person. He has the senior clerics in his backing. Also, some high-ranking professors at Iranian universities, such as Sharif University of Technology, have endorsed his presidency. His mission is to maintain the status quo. He probably will get most of Ghalibaf's votes as Ghalibaf has said he will support him. Also, most of the fundamentalists probably will vote for Jalili.

Pezeshkian is a candidate from the reformists' faction. "Reformists" do not want to change the system.

They want to reshape the same theocratic system that most Iranian nationalists hate and at the same time, yield to the American demands.

Pezeshkian, 70, was born in Mahabad to an Azerbaijani father and a Kurdish mother. He is a conservative ethnic Azari who has insisted his children speak Turkish at home. His victory may help Iran's enemies, who wish to partition Iran across its ethnic boundaries that have not really existed.

There were two debates between the two candidates on July 1 and 2. Economic growth, foreign policy, international trade, and energy were major issues in the debates. Pezeshkian did not present a consistent plan for how he wanted to run the country. He only criticized what had been done by the previous administration. The reformist candidate recited some verses from the Qur'an and Nahj al-Balagha to pretend he could use the same words as the clerics. Jalili discussed his plans for speeding up economic growth.

Pezeshkian pretends to maintain the theocratic rules while pursuing neoliberal economic reforms and returning Iran to the nuclear deal in the hope of lifting the economic sanctions.

However, this is wishful thinking; the nuclear issue is a pretext by the U.S. to weaken and contain Iran in the oil-rich region.

Even during the eight years of Hassan Rouhani's presidency, when Zarif was foreign minister and the nuclear negotiator, the U.S. offered to temporarily suspend the sanctions, not lifting them and never was a law passed by the U.S. Congress to permit lifting the sanctions. Pezeshkian has chosen Javad Zarif as his foreign policy advisor. Some see Zarif as a demagogue flunky of America who never delivered on his promises.

If the nonvoters come to the stage, they may increase Masoud Pezeshkian's chance of presidency. Otherwise, with the help of Ghalibaf's votes, Jalili will win the presidency. In

either case, theocracy will continue to exist, and opposition to the regime by the secular political group will continue.

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Featured image: An Iranian family casting votes for parliamentary elections in the city of Esfahan (Isfahan)

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