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**Who won the Iranian elections?
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Who won the Iranian elections?

Luciano Zaccara

Although 53 out of 290 seats of the 10th Islamic Consultative Assembly are yet to decide, and the definitive data of the first round have still not been ratified by the Guardian Council, some conclusions may be reached about who has won and lost in these double elections, which also included the election of the 88 cleric members of the 5th Assembly of Experts, a collegiate body which has the important attribution of choosing, confirming annually, and even relieve the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As it has happened in other legislative processes, 2016's will be remembered by the controversy around the application acceptance process, which left most first and second line reformist candidates out of the legislative chamber, and many ultraconservatives such as Hamid Resaei also out of the electoral run by being rejected by the Guardian Council. Even more controversial has been the rejection of the application of Hassan Khomeini, grandson of the Republic's founder, allegedly due to his refusal to attend an aptitude exam to aspire for a seat at the Assembly of Experts, although most understood that his proximity to figures from the reformist and moderate environment, such as Khatami, Rohani or Rafsanjani, is the real political motivation behind his disqualification. Nevertheless, this year has had more

applications than ever in the Iranian legislative elections history, 12,123 against the 5,405 of 2012 or the 8,172 of 2004. It is also true that, despite being this occasion in which the acceptance rate was the lowest, only a 47.8%, the number of candidates which fought for the 290 chairs was 5,800, the highest of all, even more than in 2000, year in which the reformist gained control over the house.

The biggest peculiarity of the Iranian electoral system, which allows citizens to vote in any country's polling station, and the characteristics of the type of individual candidacies, mixed with a system of candidates lists proposed by political associations and electoral alliances, which are not open or closed lists as they are known in the European systems, make the results difficult to understand and analyze properly. International press has revealed the existence of three major lists in the legislative elections, the "principlists" or conservative, the "reformists and moderates", and a third, the "Voice of the Nation", which generally are conservative critics with the former administration of Ahmadinejad and which have supported some initiatives by the current president Rohani, among them the nuclear agreement. However, the lists, which are far more than these three, are ambiguous and flexible, allowing the same candidate to be in

more than one list at the same time. The case of Ali Motahari, leader of the Voice of the Nation and main candidate in their list for Teheran, is the clearest in this election, since his name has also been included in the reformist list, together with Reza Aref and other allies of Rohani, Rafsanjani and Khatami. Other conservative candidates allied with Ali Lariyani, current Parliament chief, also appeared in the reformist lists. Simply, since there are not enough reformist or moderate candidates, their squad leaders chose to include other independent or conservative candidates who shared a common support for the policies implemented by Rohani in these last two years. This means that not all that appear in the reformist lists are reformist in fact, not even that they have accepted to be in that list, as is the case of Motahari, who explicitly denied his agreement to be included or to invite reformists to join his own list.

Regarding the results, the official 62% participation rate has just been a little lower than the 64% in 2012, but quite smaller than the 71% in the Presidential Elections in 2013. Despite the noticeable apathy at the beginning of the electoral campaign, Iranians in the end massively go to the polling stations, even those who declared not to be interested, or even to be against the current system. Apparently, even despite the aforementioned controversies, there is still space for the political debate, which is visible in streets, universities, and in the written press. Specially the last one, which generally reflects the

views of the different factions and coalitions who take part in the electoral dispute, offering all types of comments, interviews, and pre-electoral statistics with little reliability, due to their political bias.

Iranian official television made an effort highlighting that the reformist list was able to sit 30 of their candidates for the Teheran district, which many foreign media reproduced as a reformist victory and the beginning of a change in Iran. Still, taking into account what was mentioned before, many of the “reformists” that appear in their lists cannot be considered as such. However, what is not a reformist victory but a conservative defeat is the fact that Hadad Adel, head of the conservative list and former parliament chief, lost his chair in Teheran, which means that at least the Capital’s popular support has drifted apart from the conservatives. Another aspect that must be highlighted is that Reza Aref, the only reformist representative *stricto sensu*, has been the county’s most voted candidate with 1,6 million votes, which strengthens him against the conservative political establishment.

Regarding the election of the Assembly of Experts, the composition of the 16 members list for Teheran is even more blurry, therefore its results are more difficult to evaluate. The two main lists, the conservative, led by Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Yazdi and Taqi Mesbah, and the “Hope” list, led by Hashemi Rafsanjani and Hassan Rohani, share seven candidates, which makes it difficult to assert there are real ideological

differences among them, except for the list heads. Among these seven, five obtained a seat, which further complicates the attribution of a victory to any of the two lists, since the same phenomena takes place in most districts.

However, the voting had some very significant data. Hashemi Rafsanjani, defeated by Ahmadinejad in 2005, losing all his popularity and remaining almost politically out after 2009, seems to have regained his charisma among Teheran's population as he has been the most voted candidate with 2,3 million votes, even more than the current President Rohani, who obtained 2,2 million or Aref himself in the legislatures. The veteran politician seems to have his thousandth opportunity to politically come back, and be able to influence both in the presidency and in the forthcoming Assembly of Experts, and presumably, in the eventual designation of the next leader in case it happens in the next eight years of the assembly's mandate. This also seems to be increased by the conservatives' defeat in Teheran, which could not obtain a seat in the assembly for their main two figures, Yazdi and Mesbah.

In conclusion, it has been a victory of the candidates and groups who support the current President Rohani, so it is expected a Parliament which will not oppose to his foreign policy and his foreseeable proposal of increasing the flexibility of the Iranian economy allowing foreign investment, but not an unlikely political opening as that encouraged by the reformist

president Khatami in 1997. Also, it has been a victory of the "centrists" in the Assembly which will guarantee a quiet transition in case of having to elect a new republic leader.

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