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Middle East Brief

Reading the Tea Leaves: Iranian Domestic Politics and the Presidential Election of 2013

Prof. Naghmeh Sohrabi

The 2012 parliamentary elections in Iran—the first since the disputed presidential election of 2009—have come and gone with some fanfare. In some respects, the story of the elections in the Western press was pre-written: The elections would be a battleground for the ongoing power struggle between Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Mahmud Ahmadinejad; people were going to stay home in protest; reformists were going to be shut out of participation; and the system was going to rig the election once again.

Within days after the first round of the elections, on March 2, and before the second round, held on May 6, headlines in the English-language press proclaimed the further consolidation of the power of Khamenei over Ahmadinejad, as seen in the victory of the former's allies over the latter's.¹ Predictably, the 64 percent participation rate announced by the Ministry of Interior was reported as far too high, as compared with previous elections, to be plausible.² The only "unexpected" news seemed to be the sight of former President Muhammad Khatami voting, confirming his status in some eyes as a traitor to the opposition's cause.

This Brief focuses on Iranian domestic politics in the context of the 2012 parliamentary elections and with an eye toward the eleventh presidential election in June 2013. Specifically, it lays out three developments that will be evolving in the last year of Ahmadinejad's presidency and that will likely affect the upcoming election: the continuing power struggle in Iran over the scope of executive powers; the emergence of the Paydari Front, which supports Ahmadinejad; and the role that the reformists may play in the 2013 presidential

election. The Brief concludes by assessing the likely combined effect of these developments on the 2013 election and by addressing the question of whether, in the context of the powerful role the Supreme Leader plays in Iranian politics, any of these three developments really matters—and if so, how.

One: The Power Struggle

The 2009 presidential election in Iran was a turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic in at least two ways. First, public perception of vote-rigging led to the largest and most sustained set of demonstrations against the system in the history of the Republic, and to the subsequent arrest and trial of many reformists and journalists. The ensuing crisis then became the occasion for the sidelining of prominent political figures, such as former Presidents Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Muhammad Khatami, along with presidential candidates Mir Husayn Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi, by the office of the Supreme Leader, the judiciary, the media, and other state organizations; and in its wake, what was dubbed the “Green Movement,” which by now operates mostly outside of Iran, was born. And second, by openly breaking with the Islamic Republic’s electoral tradition of controlled vetting of the candidates, but little rigging of the actual votes and by publicly siding with one candidate in this contentious dispute—Ahmadinejad—rather than acting as an arbiter, Supreme Leader Khamenei essentially shook the system to its core, causing aftershocks still felt today.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2009 crisis, it seemed that in Ahmadinejad, Khamenei had finally found a President whose agenda did not greatly diverge from his own. This notion of an alliance between the President and the Supreme Leader was strong enough to override signs that seemed to indicate otherwise: Ahmadinejad’s delaying for seven-days, in the summer of 2009, the forced resignation of his newly appointed Vice President, Rahim Mashaie, in direct defiance of Khamenei’s orders—whereupon he then turned around and appointed him Chief of Staff; his support of Mashaie’s heterodox and nationalist views regarding a superior Iranian Islam in the face of virulent opposition from the clergy in Qum; his constant clashes with Parliament; and his direct and indirect statements declaring the presidency the second most powerful office in the Iranian system, meaning that the other two branches—the judiciary and the legislature—had no right to place limits on the executive.³ All of these conflicts reflected a fundamental dispute over the distribution of power between one segment of the executive branch, led by the President, and other equally if not more powerful decision-making centers in the Iranian system, such as the parliament and the office of the Supreme Leader.

The conflict between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei first drew international attention in May 2011, when the two got into a very public spat over Haydar Muslehi, Iran’s intelligence minister. Khamenei reinstalled Muslehi despite Ahmadinejad’s acceptance of his resignation, as a result of which the President disappeared from his government office and from cabinet meetings for over a week. The public nature of this fight made it impossible to continue writing about Iranian politics as a battle between the reformists and the Green movement vs. the Supreme Leader and the political system as a whole. And so a new narrative was born: namely, that the Supreme Leader and the President were locked in a power struggle. Within this framework, the 2012 parliamentary elections were cast as the last battleground of this epic fight, one in which Khamenei and his factions finally vanquished Ahmadinejad and his allies.

On the surface, this reading of the parliamentary elections was correct: Even before the start of campaigning, the Guardian Council had disqualified roughly one-third

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of the candidates, many of whom were believed to have been principlist supporters of Ahmadinejad. And in the final count of both rounds of the elections, the “United Front” (viewed by analysts as Khamenei’s faction) won the most seats. In the unprecedentedly intense battle for the speakership of the Parliament that immediately followed, Ali Larijani, the speaker of the previous Parliament (whose hostility toward Ahmadinejad is believed to date from 2007, when he resigned as Iran’s nuclear negotiator), defeated Ghulam Ali Haddad Adel, the candidate backed by the supporters of Ahmadinejad. Thus, for those looking for evidence of Ahmadinejad’s defeat in the real corridors of power, much seemed to be at hand. Yet this widely accepted framework suffers from two incorrect assumptions. First, the power struggle was not just between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei. And second, in the long game of Iranian politics, the 2012 parliamentary elections did not necessarily signal the defeat of the Ahmadinejad faction. In other words, it is not over yet.

More than any other president since 1989, Ahmadinejad has challenged not only Khamenei but also the entire Iranian political system, even though this was not so evident in his first term. Although Rafsanjani (President from 1989 to 1997) and Khatami (President from 1997 to 2005) faced at times virulent opposition to their economic and political-cultural reforms, respectively, as long-time insiders enjoying both a clerical and a revolutionary background, they worked from within the established political system itself. Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, took a less traditional path into the Tehran-based center of power: As a non-cleric, he was not part of the clerical networks and marriage ties that bound the members of Iran’s clergy to one another. Furthermore, his formative experience was not fighting the Shah (as was the case for politicians one generation older than he) but rather the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–88—and, in a negative way, the Rafsanjani-helmed reconstruction that followed it.⁴ For someone like Ahmadinejad, therefore, the entire post-Khomeini system of politics (excluding the Supreme Leader) could be—and at times rhetorically was—rejected. As such, the threat that Ahmadinejad poses is to the political system itself: in his attacks on and derision for the Parliament, in his not-so-hidden threats to expose the “real” corruption in Iran, and in his brazen attempts to expand the powers of the executive branch to far beyond what had been considered an acceptable level.

Yet the assumed defeat of Ahmadinejad’s faction in the parliamentary elections has done little to lower the tension between the executive branch and other political institutions in Iran. In early 2012, Ahmadinejad through an executive decree formed the “Committee for the Supervision of the Implementation of the Constitution” and appointed eleven members to it.⁵ The committee was designed as a way for Ahmadinejad and his allies in government to bypass laws passed by Parliament that they deemed as limiting the power of the presidency and the cabinet. This move

was based on article 113 of the Iranian constitution, which gives “the responsibility for the implementation of the constitution” to the presidency. The controversy that arose, and that continued after the elections, was related to the fact that this decree was tantamount to both a defiance of the Parliament and an overstepping into the Guardian Council’s prerogatives. The Guardian Council’s response reflected as much when it declared that article 113 did not apply to any institution whose responsibilities had already been defined by the constitution: including, the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts, the Parliament, and the judiciary. As such, they argued, the presidency cannot create such a supervisory committee.⁶ The government’s response was to point out that the constitution mentions the President’s authority and responsibilities forty times and those of the cabinet another twenty-three times, giving both a wide-ranging mandate.⁷

The power struggle in Iran today is not between two individuals. Rather, it extends to a “new guard” of political actors who believe that they are demanding of the Islamic Republic only what was promised to them and has not been delivered on account of Rafsanjani’s post-war economic policies and Khatami’s reformist agenda. This “new guard” more often than not came into the mainstream of the political system with Ahmadinejad’s election to the presidency in 2005 (or perhaps slightly earlier, with his election as mayor of Tehran in 2003). What is common among many of these politicians, such as Mojtaba Samareh-Hashemi, Saeed Jalili, Rahim Mashaie, and Ahmadinejad himself, is their absence in the 1990s from either electoral politics or Tehran-based political institutions. Some, like Muhammad-Reza Rahimi and Ahmadinejad, had been appointed by then president Rafsanjani as provincial governors, only to lose their posts in 1997 with the election of Khatami.

By contrast, members of the “old guard,” such as Ahmad Tavakoli, former presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, Ali Larijani, and even Karrubi and Mousavi, have held positions based in Tehran, close to the center of power, since the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. While the “new guards” interests may at times intersect with those of the “old guard” conservatives (particularly with respect to neutralizing the reformists), they are clearly not as invested in maintaining the shape of the political system that someone like Khamenei (who was President himself from 1981 to 1989), not to mention Rafsanjani and Khatami, were instrumental in creating. For them, political life truly began in 2005.

Two: The Paydari Front

This “new guard” manifested itself before, during, and after the 2012 parliamentary elections through the creation of the

Jebheh-ye Paydari or Resistance Front (translated also as the Durable Front or Steadfast Front, and referred to hereafter as the Paydari Front). This political alliance or faction was formed under the leadership of Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, a student of Ayatollah Khomeini who is doctrinally the closest ally of Ahmadinejad in Qum. Yazdi's entry into the heart of Iran's power structure has occurred in tandem with Ahmadinejad's presidency.

The Paydari Front claims to support the presidency of Ahmadinejad in every respect but in the President's unwavering support for his chief of staff (and brother-in-law), Rahim Mashaie. But for Yazdi and the Paydari Front, it is the events of 2009 (which they refer to as "the sedition") that serve as their main rallying point. Thus, in their online manifesto, the Paydari faction defines itself by its forceful opposition to both the reformists and "the seditioners" of 2009: "The members of this front are all those who have shown their complete loyalty to the school of the departed Imam [i.e., Ayatollah Khomeini], and in their lack of support or silence in the face of the sedition of 2009, have confronted the seditioners by taking up transparent positions. They have neither supported nor agreed with the deviancy movement, and are not followers of any false parties, such as the Westernized Kargozaran movement [associated with former President Hashemi-Rafsanjani] nor the anti-religious reformists [associated with former President Khatami]."⁸ Paydari's hostility extends to conservative principlists like Ali Larijani whom they accused even before the parliamentary elections of being *sakitin* [those who kept silent] in the "2009 sedition."⁹ Larijani responded on May 2012 by retorting: "Instead of addressing people's problems, which are inflation and unemployment, they're constantly raising other issues, like 'sedition' or 'deviancy.'" He went on to sarcastically ask which planet these "theories" came from.¹⁰

The difference between the Paydari Front and the rest of the political elite in power is a real one. It came to the fore most visibly in Paydari's absolute refusal to join the rest of the principlists before and after the 2012 parliamentary elections, and it is evident now in Paydari's stated desire to present its own candidate in the upcoming presidential election of 2013. In the run-up to the 2012 parliamentary elections, Paydari adamantly refused the offer of the larger principlist group, the United Front, to join them in presenting a unified Tehran list that would have two seats reserved for Paydari. This refusal paid off for the Front, which ended up with eight out of thirty Tehran parliamentarians instead of the allotted two that had been offered; Paydari also shared four other members, giving it a total of twelve.

When the final results of the 2012 parliamentary elections were tallied, it became clear that there had been a very large turnover: One hundred sixty-eight out of 268 MPs

were serving in Parliament for the first time, and one-third of them had run as independents. Additionally, 100 of the MPs were supported by the Paydari faction. The combination of the large number of unknowns and the sizeable Paydari faction made the election of the Parliament speaker subject to unprecedented competition. Despite calls from the main principlist groups to Paydari to put aside their differences and present a united front, Paydari threw its support behind Ghulam Ali Haddad Adel, speaker of the seventh Parliament from 2004 to 2008, against the speaker of the eighth Parliament, Ali Larijani—well known for his strong hostility toward Ahmadinejad and his faction. Larijani won with a large margin of votes, and all of the ninth Parliament's important positions and committee chairs were filled by his allies. Nonetheless, Paydari formed its own faction within Parliament, finalizing its break with other principlists.

On the one hand, in its brief existence, the Paydari faction has been defeated at every turn: It is a minority faction, and its candidates were shut out of all the important posts in the ninth Parliament. But if, as the Iranian analyst Abbas Abdi suggests, elections in Iran are the means by which various groups and parties present themselves in "society's political shop window [*vitrin-i siyasi jameh*],"¹¹ then Paydari's victory lies in its strong visibility in the shop window that is the Parliament.

Being in Parliament, even as a minority faction, could allow Paydari to evolve into an important factor in Iranian domestic politics, particularly in the upcoming presidential election.¹² Paydari's intention to become so is attested to by its maintenance of a live and active website, which it uses to distance itself from accusations of heterodoxy (or deviancy, as it is called in Iran) lobbed against some of Ahmadinejad's closest allies; to emphasize its support for the Supreme Leader; to expose what it regards as lies spread about the Paydari Front; and to reprint numerous speeches by Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi. The largest principlist group, on the other hand—the United Front—ceased its online activity shortly after its electoral success in May 2012. The difference between the online activity (or lack thereof) of the victorious parliamentary faction and that of the Paydari faction strongly points to the latter's long-term intentions to be an active player in the Iranian political game.

Three: The Reformists

What role, if any, will the reformists play in the 2013 presidential election? With almost a year to go before the election, there are currently three options being debated among the reformists: Should they boycott the presidential elections; should they present their own candidate; or should they create an alliance with what some reformists have taken to calling "the moderate principlists?"¹³

The option of boycotting elections is a particularly difficult one for established reformist figures, because the reform movement from its inception defined itself by electoral politics: by a belief in elections as a tool for gradual change in Iran. Born in the 1997 presidential election (having been conceived during the 1996 parliamentary elections, if not earlier), the reform movement made electoral participation the cornerstone of its motto of “rule of the people.” Khatami famously is the only President of Iran who upon coming to power in 1997 added City Council elections (allowed for in article 6 of the constitution but theretofore never implemented) to the Islamic Republic’s roster of elections. The question for reformists, then, is whether boycotting elections would not amount to an undoing of the entire reformist project as they understand it. This was one of the main reasons for Khatami’s (and, less unexpectedly, Rafsanjani’s) participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections. (It is said that Khatami, having decided to vote, wrote “Islamic Republic” on his ballot rather than the name of any particular candidate.¹⁴)

On a more practical level, and returning to Abbas Abdi’s notion of elections as political shop windows, not participating in the election would be tantamount to choosing invisibility. But if that option is rejected, the question for the reformists remains whether participation should be in the form of a separate reformist candidate or as part of an alliance with other political groups. And it seems highly unlikely that the Guardian Council would allow any well-known reformist figure to run in 2013, and equally unlikely that a lesser-known figure would receive enough votes to win even if the vote is not rigged.

The option that remains is the creation of an alliance between the reformists and the “moderate principlists.” The notion of “moderate principlists” is a new one that has gained some traction in the past year. “Moderate” is being used here in a rather limited sense as the opposite of “radical”: In the political context, it is used to principlists who, in the words of Tehran’s mayor, Muhammad Baqir Qalibaf, “have a rational and middle-of-the-road discourse.”¹⁵ With respect to the upcoming presidential election, it is used rather loosely to designate those conservatives like Mohsen Rezaie who have indicated that they are open to an alliance with “all moderate political groups, be they principlist or reformist.”¹⁶ This as opposed to the Paydari Front, whose rejectionist position vis-à-vis reformists was discussed earlier.

Ironically, the power struggle discussed in the first two sections of this Brief has led to a lowering of tensions between some of the reformists and some of the conservative groups who now clearly identify the real threat to the system as the radical “new guard” or the Misbah Yazdi/Ahmadinejad faction. An alliance, however, would require concessions on each side’s part. On the principlist side, it would require

a toning down of anti-reformist rhetoric, which would also mean ceasing to using the word “sedition” in relation to the 2009 post-election crisis; on the reformist side, a willingness to “forgive” the events of 2009, which would mean no longer referring to it as a stolen election.¹⁷

Evidence of a pact between these two factions can be seen in the rumors that Mehdi Karrubi, who has been under house arrest since February 2011, is soon to be released. What is significant here is that these rumors include the news (denied by the Karrubi camp) that Muhammad Khatami has met with Karrubi’s wife to emphasize the significance of the 2013 presidential election and to “express his hope that Karubbi’s positions after his release will not lead to divisions among the reformists.”¹⁸ In the context of the larger public debate among the reformists (which includes discussions regarding the relationship between the Green movement and the reformists) and of Khatami’s consistent belief that reform can come about only by working within the system, one can speculate that Khatami and perhaps other well-known reformists have agreed to participate in the political system in exchange for a de-vilification of their movement, and of its role in the 2009 crisis.

Looking Ahead: What of the 2013 Election?

Two important questions remain. The first is what is likely to be the combined effect of these issues on the 2013 presidential election. The second is whether any of the issues discussed above really matters, given the Supreme Leader’s power in the Iranian political system.

As far as the impact of the issues raised in this Brief on the 2013 presidential election, one has to consider the sort of impact we’re talking about. If we’re speaking of the likelihood of a democratic election in 2013, then the answer is not much. But in the context of Iran’s current political environment and perhaps even in terms of its long-term gradual change, the question needs to be addressed on three inter-related levels: the presidential candidates; the voting public; and the elections.

The candidates: The rise of the Paydari Front, particularly if it translates into the nomination of an independent candidate for President, may act as a further impetus for a reformist-moderate principlist alliance in the 2013 election campaign. If the desire of the non-radical principlists (which encompasses both conservatives and moderates) to defeat the radical populist Paydari (or any other Ahmadinejad-aligned) candidate outweighs the real and long-term differences they have with reformists, the alliance could lead to the nomination of a centrist candidate. Such a candidate would most likely neither adhere to the reformists’ plans for political reform nor vehemently oppose them. While names raised this early in the election cycle have not necessarily

been the candidates announced nine months later, the fact that Mohsen Rezaie, Ali Larijani, and Muhammad Baqir Qalibaf, all well-known conservative yet pragmatic politicians, are being discussed as possible nominees reflects the current mood of Iran's political elite.

The voting public: Voting has a different meaning for different segments of society, and some of these meanings are not necessarily reflective of democratic aspirations. Over the past thirty-three years in Iran, somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of the voting public always participate in elections, roughly 20 percent never participate regardless of the candidates, and the remaining roughly 20 to 30 percent participate when they sense that there is a real competition for their votes. It is this last segment that can be convinced to enter the political fray under the right conditions, and that has historically tilted elections in favor of reformist candidates.

The elections: The continuing conflict between the executive branch and the rest of the political system will undoubtedly have an effect on the election itself. As the 2009 election clearly showed, in a system like post-revolutionary Iran's, the course of elections is determined not only by very visible institutions such as the Guardian Council, but also by the sitting president's Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for carrying out and supervising the voting itself. In other words, a large-scale rigging of the 2009 vote would not have been possible without the cooperation of Ahmadinejad's Ministry of Interior. And because the Ministry of Interior is in charge of conducting elections in Iran, it plays a crucial role in the transition of power from one President to another. This gives the outgoing administration power, if not completely to shape elections, then at least to affect them in significant ways. But as discussed in this Brief, what has changed in the past three years is that the various groups who were once united in their desire to prevent another reformist presidency have become fractured, mainly along pro- and anti-government lines. The hostility expressed between these former allies raises the question of the extent to which Ahmadinejad, through the constitutional powers granted to his cabinet, will allow the transition of power in 2013 to be a smooth one.

The second important question, however, is whether in light of the Supreme Leader's powerful role in the Iranian political system, any of this matters. For many, both inside and outside Iran, the answer is a simple and forceful no, and for very good reason. Khamenei was clearly behind the crisis of 2009, using it to fully consolidate his own, and the Revolutionary Guards', grip over Iran's political system. Many have argued that 2009 was the turning point for the Islamic Republic, when it moved from a theocracy with republican shading to a military dictatorship with theocratic shading. Within this framework there is no real choice, as all politics has been pre-ordained by Khamenei and his allies,

and the debates and disputes within the system are at best window dressing serving to hide the authoritarian nature of the regime. As such, according to this understanding of Iranian politics, taking seriously the developments laid out in this Brief is naive, as the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards will determine the outcome of this election, as they did in the case of the 2012 parliamentary elections, the 2009 presidential election, and some—or all—elections before that. And, so goes this argument, when it comes to Iranian foreign policy—the main point of concern for Western observers—election results, not to mention the details of internal bickering, are irrelevant. At the end of the day—on the nuclear question, for example—Khamenei is the ultimate decider, regardless of who occupies the second most powerful office in Iran.

But a closer look at the practice of politics in Iran punches several holes into this narrative. First, while Khamenei has the final say in Iranian politics, he does not have total power. There are far too many power centers in the system that would resist the kind of top-down totalitarian rule assumed by those who argue that elections in Iran don't matter. For example, neither the Revolutionary Guards nor the clergy in Qum, two important and powerful networks in Iran, are fully aligned with any one political faction. Each has its sources of money, its expansive networks of people, and its own interests. That until now their interests have coincided with Khamenei's (particularly in the case of the Revolutionary Guards), or that they have kept silent on issues when they have disagreed, should not be taken as a sign of the Supreme Leader's total power. Even on the nuclear issue, as noted by the political scientist Sadeq Zibakalam in the context of Ali Larijani's resignation as Iran's nuclear negotiator: "It is still the Supreme Leader . . . who has the last word in the nuclear case. But it is obvious that the leader does not make decisions in a vacuum."¹⁹

Second, the events of the past three years in Iran clearly demonstrate that while politics in Iran can be manipulated, they cannot be fully controlled. If one wants to argue that everything that has occurred in Iran over that period of time is by design—the intense political infighting, sometimes even among Khamenei's most loyal supporters; the crisis of legitimacy that arose in 2009, especially after allegations of rape in Kahrizak prison; the constant need for Khamenei to intervene in the fights between the executive and the legislature; the crushing inflation; and the overall malaise that has drained a large segment of the population—then one has to show what purposes these events have served for the Supreme Leader and his circle. In truth, that there is talk of a power struggle in Iran between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, regardless of whether Khamenei has emerged victorious from it or not, undermines the notion of a pre-ordained political system.

Finally, any interpretation of Iranian politics must explain why, if elections don't matter, three million people took to the streets in June 2009 asking for their votes to be counted. Regardless of whether from the outside the differences between the various candidates seem minimal and the office of the President seems powerless, with respect to the issues that concern the international community, it is clear that elections mean something to many people in Iran. The differences between Iran's three post-Khomeini presidents may seem negligible from afar, but from the point of view of the populace there have been real differences between them. For those who have been direct beneficiaries of Ahmadinejad's numerous provincial trips, for example, his presidency would have marked the first time they had interacted with their President, expressed their grievances, and in some cases even had those grievances addressed. For others, however, the answer to the "Are you better off now?" question is a resounding no, as their lives are diminished by high food prices and social insecurity (brought on, for example, by *basiji* searches for satellite dishes in private residences, which are technically illegal but omnipresent in Iran)—not to mention the high number of political prisoners, the stifling of civil society groups, and the overall level of political repression. In this context, one of the main unknowns with regard to 2013 is whether this segment of the electorate can suspend their disbelief, in the face of the memory of 2009 and the threat of another irregular election, and once again come to the polls.

Endnotes

The author would like to thank Prof. Arang Keshavarzian for his invaluable comments on an earlier draft.

- 1 [Neil MacFarquhar, "Elections in Iran Favor Ayatollah's Allies, Dealing Blow to President and His Office," *New York Times*, March 4, 2012,*](#) ["Ahmadinejad Rivals Winning in Iran Parliamentary Runoff Election," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2012.*](#)
- 2 See ["Ahmadinejad's Supporters Defeated in Parliamentary Election," *Voice of America*, March 3, 2012,*](#) and [Sajjad Savage, "Epic or Farce: Preliminary Assessment of Iran's Parliamentary Elections \(Part Two\)," *Jadaliyya*, April 10, 2012,*](#) for just two examples. The average participation rate for parliamentary elections in Iran is roughly 60 percent, with the highest rate of 71.1 percent recorded in 1996 and the lowest, 51.2 percent, in 2004. See also [Iran Data Portal, Princeton University.*](#)
- 3 [Muhammad Sahimi, "Ahmadinejad-Khamenei Rift Deepens," *Frontline* \(Tehran Bureau\), September 11, 2010.*](#)
- 4 In an earlier Brief, I explained in detail the trajectory of and reasons for Ahmadinejad and his faction's animosity toward Rafsanjani and his reconstruction policies in the immediate aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. See [Naghmeh Sohrabi, "The Curious Case of Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani," *Middle East Brief*, no. 38 \(Brandeis University: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, November 2009\).](#) For an excellent analysis

of the "fundamental split" between the generation that wanted to move on from the war and the rhetoric of the war and the generation that, having made immense sacrifices during the war, "watche[d] with distressed, and at times angry eyes" as post-Khomeini, post-war Iran moved away from "the essential values" of the war, see Farideh Farhi, "The Antinomies of Iran's War Generation," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 102.

- 5 ["Ahmadinejad Establishes Constitutional Watchdog," *Radio Zamaneh*, March 8, 2012.*](#)
- 6 [Mehrnnews.com, July 7, 2012.*](#)
- 7 [Fararu.com, July 20, 2012.*](#)
- 8 [Available on the Paydari Front's official website.*](#)
- 9 For example, see the Babul MP's accusations in November 2011 in [Haraznews.com, November 21, 2011.*](#)
- 10 [Farsnews.com, May 1, 2012.*](#)
- 11 Interview with Abbas Abdi, [Asriran.com, March 21, 2012.*](#)
- 12 This is not dissimilar to what happened in the parliamentary elections of 1996, when the newly formed party of Kargozaran managed to win, in coalition with another faction, roughly 120 seats. The party was created by a number of politicians close to then president Rafsanjani, including some of his former ministers, in reaction to the forceful conservative majority faction in the previous Parliament that had been blocking many of the President's economic plans. Kargozaran was not a majority in the fifth Parliament; but much like Paydari, it used its visibility in the Parliament to create a coalition with "the Left," who later became known as the reformists, thereby enabling one of the most important events in the history of the Islamic Republic: the 1997 election of Muhammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic. At the same time, there are many differences in the circumstances under which Paydari and Kargozaran entered the political battlefield: most importantly, Rafsanjani's strength in the political system in 1996 versus Ahmadinejad's in 2012. Nonetheless, these differences do not negate the similarities in the process by which a minority faction can gain power in the Iranian political system.
- 13 [Aryanews.com, July 6, 2012.*](#)
- 14 Interview with Abbas Abdi, [Asriran.com, March 21, 2012.*](#)
- 15 [Ipe9.com, January 15, 2012.*](#)
- 16 [Mehrnnews.com, June 27, 2012.*](#)
- 17 For some principlists, the condition for reformist entry into mainstream politics is a public denial of vote-rigging in that election. See, for example, the July 11, 2012 [Tir 21, 1391] interview with Muhammad Nabi Habibi at [Sharghnewsaper.ir](#) (authentication required to access content).
- 18 [Tabnak.ir, July 10, 2012.*](#)
- 19 [Antoine Blua, "Iran: Top Nuclear Negotiator Resigns," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 20, 2007.*](#)

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