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Iran's June 18, 2021 Elections

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Introduction and Executive Summary

On June 18, 2021, 59 million Iranians will be eligible to vote in the country's Thirteenth Presidential and Sixth City and Village Council elections. These elections will also include runoff elections for the Parliament and Assembly of Records. Notably, Iranians will select a new president, as term limits prohibit current president Hassan Rouhani from running, and will elect more than 127,000 council members. The executive transfer of power is expected to provide a moment when high-level questions such as Iran's security posture in the Middle East as well as its relationship to the United States, Israel and other international actors may be reassessed. Moreover, there is speculation that this presidential election could serve as a bellwether for an eventual transfer of power to a new Supreme Leader.

However, the elections also take place against the backdrop of heightened voter disaffection and calls for an active boycott, with turnout anticipated to be lower than in previous contests. The boycott movement is driven by a variety of factors, and reasons for supporting a boycott differ for members of the diaspora, who may be more inclined to view the entire system of governance in Iran as illegitimate, and for potential voters in-country. Citizens in-country may be more likely to abstain from voting based on perceptions that the ballot qualification process - for the presidential election in particular - has winnowed the field of candidates to an unacceptably narrow spectrum of ideological and political opinions that fail to offer voters real choices, as well as frustrations that successive governments have failed to address the socio-political problems that many Iranians face. While the presidential election may presage a shift in high-level policy in Iran, local elections may provide greater scope for average citizens to exercise a meaningful choice at the polls and elect leaders whose platforms are more reflective of their interests and concerns.

From June 1 to 15, 2021, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or 'the Institute') conducted a virtual pre-election analysis to examine conditions for these elections and to gather perspectives about the challenges and opportunities that they may pose. Iran does not invite or allow international organizations to observe the election process, nor are there legal mechanisms in-country for independent oversight of the electoral process by citizen monitors. As a result, the NDI statement is based on publicly available information and official sources in Iran; data and analysis from elections in the recent past; media reports; research from universities and think tanks; and a combination of face-to-face and written interviews with interlocutors in and outside of Iran, including journalists, former politicians and officials, political analysts and activists. It does not purport to be an exhaustive or authoritative assessment of the pre-election environment in Iran. What follows is instead an overview of some of the major issues at stake as they have emerged during the pre-election period, and a summary of some of the potential challenges that may emerge on election day and beyond. All activities were conducted on a strictly nonpartisan basis and without interfering in the electoral process.

Democracy is about more than an electoral process; yet elections provide an important window into systems of governance and possibilities for future democratic reform. Not only do political fault lines

emerge, but a country's commitment to basic human rights and freedoms - including those enshrined in international texts to which Iran is a signatory, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - is tested. Elections should enable citizens to freely determine who will govern on their behalf; this is far from the case in Iran. Nevertheless, every election can be analyzed and understood independently, and every election provides some opportunity for citizens to vote, even under constrained circumstances. Every election also provides opportunities, if seized, to lay the groundwork and institutional memory for the organization of more credible electoral processes should the broader political context shift.

NDI notes that, despite cosmetic changes to the conduct of elections - including the introduction of new technologies - many of the underlying challenges to democratic elections in Iran have persisted across multiple election cycles with little to no fundamental change occurring over the past decades. On June 12, 2013, NDI released a statement regarding [Iran's June 14, 2013 Elections](#). Many of the concerns identified in that document continue to affect the electoral landscape in Iran today. The present statement seeks to both complement and update the understanding of Iran's electoral process enumerated in this first 2013 statement, while placing particular emphasis on issues and challenges that have uniquely emerged around the 2021 elections.

Based on the pre-election period and the conduct of past elections, there are five significant issues that are of particular interest for those evaluating the 2021 process:

- Candidates standing for election at all levels continue to be subject to an opaque vetting process that may be instrumentalized to unduly constrict voter choice. Candidates for the presidential election in particular were subject to rigorous scrutiny by the Guardian Council with many disqualified for seemingly arbitrary reasons. This has resulted in an even narrower than usual pool of candidates that each espouse similar political ideologies and views, thereby significantly limiting the choice of voters at the polls and calling into question the very principle of a free election.
- Iran still does not allow independent, domestic, non-partisan observation of election processes nor does it invite qualified international observers to monitor its elections. While there is a government-appointed body to supervise the work of the Ministry of Interior, that body is not independent. Lack of independent oversight can negatively impact the credibility of the process and erode public trust.
- Media outlets seeking to cover the elections have faced threats from government officials and security for addressing sensitive "red line" topics such as the election boycott movement. As a result, there is a sense that even non-official media within Iran have engaged in greater self-censorship than is typical. Although media coverage of the campaigns is extensive, it is therefore also lacking in depth and provides an uncritical and overwhelmingly positive view of the current regime and its electoral preparations. Lack of respect for international obligations to respect freedom of the press contributes to a lackluster campaign environment and reinforces voter disaffection.
- Iran still does not create or maintain rolls of qualified voters. Voters can cast their ballot at any polling station. The lack of a voters roll deprives election officials of an important check on illegal or double voting. Moreover, the ability to vote at any station necessitates the printing and distribution of excess ballot papers, which creates opportunities for ballot box stuffing and other forms of fraud. Existing procedural safeguards against multiple voting, including the biometric authentication of each voter's fingerprints and the inking of voters' fingers with indelible ink, are likely to be eliminated this election in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, further limiting checks on voting irregularity.
- Election results are not publicly posted at polling stations nor - historically - have final

election results been disaggregated by polling station, while the compilation of final results takes place behind closed doors and in the absence of independent supervision. This exacerbates a lack of transparency and diminishes public confidence in the overall process.

Despite the possible shortcomings, all elections offer some opportunity to express political opinion; Iran's 2021 contest is no exception. Iranian citizens have a chance - particularly at the local level - to make their views known through the ballot box, and international attention and scrutiny, along with local efforts, may increase the chance that their choices are respected, that the result reflects their true intent and future electoral exercises are improved for transparency and accountability.

Election Administration

The bodies responsible for election administration in Iran are specified in the constitution and other election-related laws including the *Law of Guardian Council Supervision over the Islamic Republic of Iran's Presidential Election*, the *Islamic Republic of Iran's Presidential Election Law*, the *City and Village Council Election Law*; and the *Law on the Presence of the Representatives of the Presidential Election Candidates' at Polling*, which outline the basic legal framework for the presidential as well as local council elections. Notably, however, the legal framework does not provide for the independent administration of elections. The Guardian Council is tasked with overall supervision of elections while logistical management of the process is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.

The 12-member Guardian Council was established to uphold the constitution and the laws of Islam (*Sharia*) in the Iranian political process. It includes six experts for religious law chosen directly by the Supreme Leader from ranking members of the clergy and six constitutional jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary. Once approved by the Iranian Parliament (known as the *Majlis*), members serve six-year terms and can be re-elected indefinitely. While the Ministry of Interior is responsible for executing and managing the logistics of the elections, if the Guardian Council is concerned about the preparations or conduct of the elections, it has the authority to invalidate or stop the process.

Immediately after the Minister of Interior announces the date of elections, governors establish boards in each province for the administration of the elections. The boards include: a Ministry of Interior representative; the head of the province's Judiciary Department; the chief prosecutor for the province; and nine civilian trustees. The boards are responsible for determining the number and locations for candidate registration and polling stations. Nine days before the election, these boards announce details such as voting hours and dates, polling station locations, and the electoral regulations in effect.

Under a 2013 amendment to the Presidential Election Law, Iran also established a Central Executive Election Board (the CEEB). The CEEB is formed five months before the end of the incumbent president's term and consists of: the Minister of Interior, who chairs the board; the Prosecutor General; the Intelligence Minister; a Member of the *Majlis* Assembly Board of Directors (who serves as an observer with no voting rights); and seven civilian trustees (nominated by the *Majlis* and approved by the Guardian Council). In practice, the CEEB serves primarily to oversee tabulation, with Amendment 6 of the 2013 amendment noting that the CEEB must not in any way interfere with the decisions or responsibilities of the Guardian Council around the elections.

No Legal Mechanism for Independent Observation

Iran does not allow for independent, non-partisan international or domestic observation at any stage of the electoral cycle, including during procurement of election materials, candidate registration, the adjudication of electoral complaints and disputes, and the campaign period. Since the mid-1980s independent, non-partisan, citizen observers, as well as international observers, have played a critical role in enhancing public confidence and increasing transparency of electoral processes around the globe. These contributions

have been codified in the *Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations* as well as the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation*. Both of these documents were launched at the United Nations, reflecting the global consensus of the central role of independent observation in conducting a credible election.

Pre-Election Period

Elections are a process encompassing much more than just election day. In the Iranian context, a crucial factor is the role that the Guardian Council plays in candidate registration for the presidential election; it can curtail the ability of citizens to stand for office and limit the choices citizens have when voting for president. The *Majlis* plays a similar role in vetting candidates for local office, although most interlocutors contend that this vetting process has historically been far less restrictive, resulting in a greater diversity of candidates and choices at the local levels. Nevertheless, the legal existence of an opaque vetting process at the local level violates international best practice due to the potential for arbitrary and overly restrictive vetting. Moreover, anecdotal experiences from past local elections suggest that, while less restrictive than the national vetting process, the local vetting process has also at times impinged on citizens' right to run and resulted in arbitrary limits to voter choice.

Candidate Registration

Qualifications to stand for president are contained in Article 115 of the constitution, which states that the President must be elected from among religious and political personalities possessing the following qualifications: Iranian origin; Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past-record; trustworthiness and piety; and convinced belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country. Criteria to stand for local office are outlined in Article 26 of the *Law on the Organization, Duties and Elections of the Islamic Councils of the Country and the Election of Mayors*, and include: Iranian citizenship, a minimum age of 25 years, belief in Islam and the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader, allegiance to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, educational requirements dependant on the election, and (for men) proof of military service or of official exemption from military service.

Candidate registration is a complex process. Prospective presidential candidates must first register with the Minister of Interior, who then submits the names to the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council then reviews each presidential candidate's application to ensure they meet the constitutional requirements. The names of successful candidates are then sent back to the Ministry of Interior which, in turn, announces the official candidates. For this election cycle, a total of 590 people registered with the Ministry of Interior as prospective presidential candidates. Ultimately, only seven candidates were approved by the Guardian Council to stand for president. Most interlocutors contended that current Iranian Chief Justice Ebrahim Raisi is the clear frontrunner in the contest. By contrast, approximately 298,000 candidates registered for the city and local council elections, of which 266,831 were accepted.

Many interlocutors described the candidate registration and vetting as the most crucial phase of the electoral process, noting that it is at this time that the range of political choices offered to voters has the potential to be severely restricted. The black box nature of the vetting process makes it difficult for candidates to anticipate why their candidacies may be rejected; the delegation heard that some candidates are rejected in one election cycle only to be accepted in the next. Moreover, candidates do not typically receive documented reasons for the rejection. In addition to the formal challenges posed, some interlocutors noted that the candidate registration process also offers opportunities to exercise informal influence, as when the Supreme Leader advised Hassan Khomeini - grandson of former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini - not to put forward his candidacy. Recent news stories suggesting that the Ministry of Intelligence may have influenced the candidate vetting process ahead of the 2013 presidential election also suggest that actors other than the Guardian Council could play an

extra-legal role in the vetting process behind the scenes.

Voter Registration

The Ministry of Interior estimates that 59,310,307 people are eligible to vote in these elections. Unlike many other countries, Iran does not employ a voters roll for its elections; as such, there is no voter registration process and eligible voters are not issued voter cards. Rather, on election day, eligible voters can vote at any polling station using only their national identification card and their birth certificate, or *shenasnameh*, to verify that they are an Iranian citizen and 18 years or older. Automatic enrollment in the electoral process on the basis of national identification on the one hand removes many barriers to electoral participation and helps to facilitate high turnout. On the other hand, the lack of a voters roll removes a critical check on illegal and multiple voting. In many, if not most, democratic systems, a voters roll is produced and verified in advance. Voters are also usually assigned to a polling station in advance. Not being assigned to a station requires election officials to print and distribute excess ballot papers to ensure adequate supplies at all polling stations, which provides an opportunity for ballot box stuffing and fraudulent voting.

The delegation heard that the CEEB in theory uses each voter's national identification card number as a unique identifier to audit the results during the tabulation process and determine whether an individual cast multiple ballots. However, this process is not transparent. Moreover, several interlocutors noted that it is not uncommon on election day for polling officials to announce that only a national identification card or a birth certificate constitute sufficient proof of identity. If national identification card numbers are not systematically collected on election day, this would undermine the CEEB's ability to carry out such an audit.

Campaign Environment

Interlocutors both within and outside of the country uniformly characterize the campaign environment as a lackluster one that has largely failed to excite the public. Among difficulties cited, some point to the health and safety measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have precipitated a shift to greater use of social media and online engagements as opposed to in-person rallies and events. Most of the presidential candidates seem to have adopted a hybrid campaign strategy that relies on social media much more than in the past, while also using traditional channels such as television and radio to conduct outreach to older and more rural voters who may be less likely to have access to the internet. Despite overall concerns about the lukewarm nature of the campaigns, some commentators viewed this successful shift to hybrid outreach as a potential opportunity, noting that 1.5 million voters in Iran are youth voters who will be taking part in their first electoral process. If candidates are able to successfully engage these youth voters online, this could help breathe new life into a political process that many view as stagnant and out of touch with the realities of everyday citizens.

Some interlocutors also noted, particularly at the local level, that many candidates have chosen to stand as independents in response to growing popular disaffection with the more traditional political divisions between conservatives, moderates and reformists. However, this has resulted in the proliferation of candidates who are untethered from any political party structure and therefore not accountable except in a limited way to voters. The delegation heard concerns that, as a result, many candidates have made sweeping promises that they are unlikely to be able to implement in practice, particularly regarding economic reform given the overarching concern of citizens around socioeconomic conditions. However, the delegation also heard that fiscal decentralization in Iran has progressively given local councilors more scope to address economic concerns, as local authorities increasingly have mandates and funds to make resource allocation and budgetary decisions that could impact on their constituents' daily lives. From this perspective, the more diverse candidate pools at local levels may offer voters opportunities to

exercise a more meaningful choice at the ballot box even if choices at a national level are restricted.

The delegation also heard some concerns about the potential for incumbents to abuse their current positions to carry out election campaigns using state resources. In addition, there are concerns that some candidates may be mobilizing to buy votes. Both of these concerns are difficult to document and verify in practice, especially given that the current electoral system does not enable independent oversight of elections by citizens. Political parties, who are at least allowed by law to recruit and deploy candidate agents to the polls on election day, often lack the internal structures and resources necessary to take advantage of this provision in a systematic way. Although abuse of state resources by any candidate would be of concern, there is a perception that there may be an inherent conflict of interest for presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi, in particular, to retain his role as Chief Justice during the campaign, especially given that any electoral complaints filed during the pre-election period would ultimately be adjudicated by the judiciary. Of further note, the Iranian legal framework requires candidates who already hold government office to resign from their positions before contesting in parliamentary or local elections; there is no such provision for candidates in the presidential election. Widespread concern that the electoral playing field is tilted could have an even greater chilling effect on voters' willingness to participate - whether or not concerns are grounded in reality.

Calls for an Election Boycott and Potentials for Low Turnout

Calls to boycott the electoral process have accompanied most recent presidential elections in Iran. Individuals may choose to boycott for a variety of reasons, but some seem motivated by a sense of disaffection from a political exercise that is seen as primarily designed to generate high turnout in support of an outcome that has been pre-engineered through the Guardian Council's rigorous and opaque candidate vetting process for presidential candidates. While interlocutors noted that the local elections generally provide voters with a greater diversity of choices as candidate vetting is instead done through the Parliament, calls to boycott the June 18 elections for the most part do not seem to make a distinction between the different elections that are taking place. Within Iran, journalists and media organizations that have provided coverage of the boycott have faced threats from security services. As a result, most speak only of the high percentage of voters that are anticipated not to participate rather than framing their coverage in terms of an active boycott movement. Calls to boycott instead spread through informal channels as well as through high-profile statements from a variety of political personalities from across the political spectrum, including former conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Outside of Iran, media outlets have more scope to cover the boycott movement.

Active participation in a boycott can be viewed as distinctive from failing to turn out due to apathy or to structural factors such as child or elder care duties or concerns about COVID-19 that may independently dissuade voters from showing up at the polls. Regardless of why voters fail to take part, the Iranian government seems to anticipate low turnout on June 18, and has begun to spread a narrative noting that low turnout does not necessarily indicate that an election process was illegitimate. Some interlocutors expressed the view that - unlike in many past presidential elections, where the regime cared greatly about high turnout to bolster executive legitimacy - current polling shows that a significant percentage of voters, perhaps as many as one-third, are on the fence about whether to participate in the elections and how to vote. This introduces a significant degree of volatility even in a system of restricted choice, and for this election cycle it may no longer be in the regime's interest for these undecided voters to take part. Interlocutors noted mixed messaging from prominent clerics, with some telling the populace that they have a religious duty to vote, while others tell the public that voting in particular ways - such as casting blank ballots - could be against their religious duties. Such contradictory signals around how to take part in the elections may muddy the waters and help persuade currently undecided voters to stay home.

Media

Election season in Iran is usually characterized by the loosening of normal restrictions on civil society and the media to allow candidates to spread their messages and garner support. This year's elections have not witnessed the expected liberalization. Journalists have faced pressure from the prosecutor's office and officials with the Ministry of Intelligence to avoid coverage of red lines and, as noted above, those who have attempted to provide coverage of the election boycott movement have been threatened by security services. As a result, while media outlets provide extensive coverage of the election campaigns, this coverage has, in part because of the limited political choice, largely depicted the government and its preparations in a positive light while failing to ask critical questions or provide deeper analysis of key issues.

Traditional media outlets serve as the primary purveyors of civic and voter education about how to take part in the electoral process. Unlike in many other countries, civil society in Iran lacks political space to play a role in educating and mobilizing the public about the electoral process and candidates. As a result, information about the electoral procedures is primarily conveyed through mass media. Some interlocutors expressed concerns, however, that this is insufficient and that coverage of the election procedures often takes a backseat to time sensitive news items that are more likely to attract the attention of the public. As a result, a significant number of voters may rely on poll workers in the polling stations to explain the process to them or even to physically assist them to cast their ballots.

As noted above, social media is playing an outsized role in the conduct of this election campaign, in part due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Interlocutors expressed the sense that social media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides opportunities to engage youth voters in particular through creative means online. On the other hand, the government is also an effective user of social media and many platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are heavily filtered, and Twitter is largely seen as a platform for educated, politically active elites. Encrypted peer-to-peer texting applications such as WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram may also provide a means for Iranians to informally share information about the elections with one another or engage in political debate, but are also routinely throttled by the government. By contrast, ClubHouse - an invite-only social media application that enables users to participate in voice chat rooms with up to thousands of other users at a time - has become popular in Iran this election cycle and does not yet seem to face the same degree of government oversight and restriction. A novel feature of the platform is that it enables Iranians in the diaspora to engage directly in political conversations with peers in-country. Many reformist politicians have also been making appearances in Iranian chat rooms, providing a new way for citizens to directly engage with potential candidates or elected officials. However, the reach of the platform in Iran is unknown, but likely to be somewhat limited. The app was initially restricted to iPhone users with a beta version for Android users debuting only in May 2021; iPhones, however, are in limited circulation in Iran due to the United States sanctions regime (which prohibits their sale in-country) as well as lack of access to credit cards, which are a necessary precondition to register a telephone with an Apple ID. Nevertheless, the platform currently hosts numerous conversations about politics in Iran as well as the upcoming elections. For those who are able to access the platform, it may serve as an important substitute to in-person discussions and debates. Interlocutors contended that Instagram is also less subject to government restrictions.

In addition to limiting full use of most social media platforms in Iran, and contrary to previous election cycles, content produced by the Ministry of Interior and posted to its website is not currently accessible to individuals outside of Iran. This limits transparency of the electoral process and notably restricts members of the diaspora, as well as international policymakers and political analysts, from gathering and analyzing official government data around the elections.

Participation of Women and Other Historically Under-represented Groups

Iran has an active women's movement that has mobilized during this election cycle as in previous ones.

Nevertheless, interlocutors noted that, while a slight increase from 2017, only 8% of all candidates in the 2021 elections overall are women and none of the presidential candidates are women. Although issues of concern to women such as the wearing of the hijab have emerged during the campaign, some interlocutors expressed the view that these social issues are only of concern to a particular class of voter and that socio-economic issues are far more likely to predominate both in the campaigns and in the policy priorities of elected officials.

Religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Jews, and Sunnis are legally barred from standing for certain offices in the elections, notably president; by extension, ethnic minorities such as Balochs, Kurds and Turkmens are directly impacted based on their predominant religious practices. They may also be more likely to reside in communities with high levels of unemployment or to face other forms of discrimination in their daily lives. As a result, interlocutors noted that these communities may be less likely to participate in elections and may be more attracted to the call for an active boycott.

Potential Election Day and Post-Election Challenges

In order for citizens to have an equal and reasonable opportunity to vote as well as for those votes to be counted fairly, clear and transparent procedures must be implemented uniformly at all polling stations. Drawing on assessments of previous Iranian elections as well as concerns raised during the course of the assessment, NDI has identified certain violations and/or deviations from international best practice that are likely to undermine public confidence in the election day proceedings and immediate post-election period. The following list is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Secrecy of the Ballot

In previous elections, concerns have emerged that many polling stations are organized in large open settings, such as a mosque, where many voters may vote at once and potentially in full view of one another. Polling stations are not provided with the voting booths or privacy screens that have been adopted in many other countries to safeguard secrecy of the vote. Although secrecy of the ballot is a well-established international norm for the conduct of democratic elections and is enshrined in texts of international law to which Iran is a signatory - including both the UDHR and the ICCPR - Iranian citizens may furthermore be inadequately informed about this standard and unaware that public voting infringes on their democratic rights.

Changes to Electoral Safeguards in Response to COVID-19 Global Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, interlocutors raised concerns that certain safeguards introduced to prevent multiple voting are likely to be eliminated for the June 18 elections. During legislative elections in 2020, polling officials deployed machines to electronically authenticate voters on the basis of both their national identification card and fingerprints. The fingers of successfully authenticated voters were then marked with indelible ink; all voters' fingers were checked to ensure that they did not already bear signs of indelible ink before voting. For the forthcoming elections, due to concerns with the safety of high-touch surfaces in the context of COVID-19, voters will neither be asked to electronically authenticate their fingerprints nor will their fingers be marked with indelible ink. The decision to eliminate these two steps to the previous voting process, although introduced in light of genuine health and safety considerations, would also eliminate important safeguards against multiple voting, particularly in the absence of a voters roll as noted above. However, each voter will still be asked to present both their birth certificate, *shenasnameh*, and national ID card at the polls and the national ID card will continue to be electronically authenticated. If the national ID card is not available, however, he or she will be asked to manually enter his or her national ID card number - thereby requiring them to touch equipment.

Introduction of Electronic Voting in Select City and Village Council Elections

In select city and village council elections, voting will - for the first time - take place through electronic voting. Introduced as a measure to increase the security and credibility of election processes, constituencies that are adopting the new electronic voting procedures will effectively require citizens to vote in two separate electoral processes using two distinctive means: casting paper ballots for the presidential election and using the new electronic system for the city and village council elections. Significant voter education may be necessary to ensure that voters understand and can properly navigate the two parallel processes on election day. As with any pilot exercise, particularly pilots to introduce unfamiliar technology to an election process, it will be important for the electoral authorities to clearly document and communicate successes and failures of the new system before taking a decision to expand upon this limited pilot for future elections.

Public Posting of Polling Station Level Election Results

In many countries, results from a polling station are posted for public inspection and copies of the official results are given to candidate or party representatives following the conclusion of the counting process. The immediate public posting of results increases transparency and enhances public confidence in the accuracy of the count. However, in Iran, candidate representatives are not entitled to a copy of the official count and results are not posted publicly at polling stations. Although this procedure should be revisited for future elections, interlocutors proposed - as a short-term measure to build confidence - that when final election results are announced the results should also be publicly posted at a polling station level on the website of the Ministry of Interior in a complete, timely and analyzable format.

Tabulation and Announcement of Electoral Results

The tabulation process in Iran is opaque. The electoral law does not allow for independent observation of this process by candidate representatives, non-partisan, citizen observers, or international observers to see how results from the approximately 70,000 polling stations are added together at different levels to determine the outcome of the various races. Similarly, the results are compiled behind closed doors with no candidate or independent witnesses present. Historically, this lack of transparency and lack of independent citizen oversight have contributed to significant citizen concerns regarding the accuracy of the official announced election results.

Objections and Appeals

Although legal mechanisms exist for candidates as well as citizens to dispute the election results in a particular polling station with the Guardian Council Secretariat or the council's representative in each region, there is no deadline for electoral authorities to render a verdict on such claims. The elections boards hold sessions with the representatives of the Guardian Council to examine complaints, attach a report, and forward them to the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, if the complaint is found to "lack evidence," the individual who submitted it may be prosecuted in court for defamation. These aspects of the electoral framework may have a significant deterrent effect on citizens' willingness to submit valid electoral complaints to the competent authorities.

About the National Democratic Institute

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

Since NDI's observation mission to the Philippines in 1986, the Institute has become one of the leading international nongovernmental organizations in the field of international election observing. NDI has conducted more than 200 international election observer missions including observation of elections in the Middle East and North Africa, including polls in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen.

The Institute has concentrated on providing accurate and impartial analysis through its observation missions in order to inform the international community and domestic actors of strengths and weaknesses in electoral and political processes and to offer, where appropriate, recommendations for strengthening democratic processes and electoral frameworks.

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