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Opinion: Iranian elections remain as relevant as ever

Posted By [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) On June 11, 2013 @ 4:19 pm In [Opinion](#) | [No Comments](#)

As the presidential elections in Iran approach, many observers ask if there is any point in holding the elections in the first place, given that the real powers lie with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini.

The Iranian constitution details the powers of the supreme leader and makes it clear that he plays the key role on foreign and domestic policies. However, his powers are not unlimited. There is a clear division of powers in the Iranian system of government, proper checks and balances, mitigating the influence and concentration of power into the hands of one person or institution.

There are many examples of this system of checks and balances. While in most democracies the president can dissolve the parliament, this is not the case in Iran. The Iranian constitution does not allow anyone to dissolve the parliament.

Although the supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary, no one, not even the head of the judiciary, can intervene in or reverse a court judgment. Any disputes between the executive and the parliament over legislation are resolved by the Expediency Council.

Based on the Iranian constitution, the president has the second most powerful position after the supreme leader. The president nominates the members of his cabinet, but the nominations have to be approved by the parliament. The executive also selects and appoints the governors of the country's provinces, who carry considerable weight in their regions.

The national budget, drafted by the executive and approved by the parliament, also allocates funds to the Office of the Supreme Leader.

Finally, the Iranian supreme leader has less constitutional powers than, say, the US president. At least President Obama can veto Congressional decisions.

There is also a perception that the Islamic Republic has marginalized the concept of elections in Iran's political culture. However, this is, to a large extent, misleading. There have been ten presidential elections in Iran since the

Revolution, with presidents limited to serving two consecutive terms.

The following is the voter participation in all presidential elections that took place in Iran so far: 67.86%, 64.24%, 74.26%, 54.78%, 54.59%, 50.66%, 79.92%, 67.77%, 59.76% and 84.83% respectively. The average voter turnout since the Islamic Revolution has been 65.87%, while the first three elections attracted 68.79% and last three elections 70.79% respectively. This is clear evidence that elections remain an important part of the political process in the country.

There have been two schools of thought since the formation of the Islamic Republic, either battling to maintain the status quo or reform the system. What is ironic is that in the upcoming elections, the conservative candidates are all pressing for change, which is not their usual stance. This is an indication that the economic and social circumstances have propelled them to address the situation seriously and comprehensively. The dismal economic conditions will be one factor that will push ordinary Iranians to make their voices heard through the ballot box, increasing the chances of high voter turnout.

However, in the first presidential elections, there were 124 candidates registered and 123 were approved to run. In the upcoming elections scheduled for June 14, out of 686 registered candidates, only eight were approved, a meager 0.01%. Although this vetting process ensures limited competition amongst candidates, this trend is also present in maturing democracies, where two or three parties with their singular candidates dominate the electoral process.



[Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) ^[1]

Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian ambassador and spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators, is a research scholar at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School. His latest book is *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir*, published by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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