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Atlas of presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980-2017)

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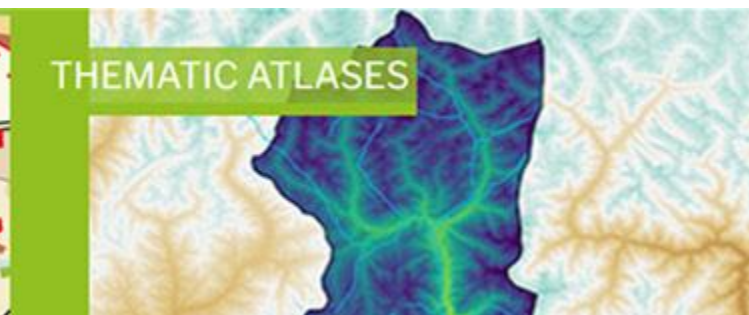
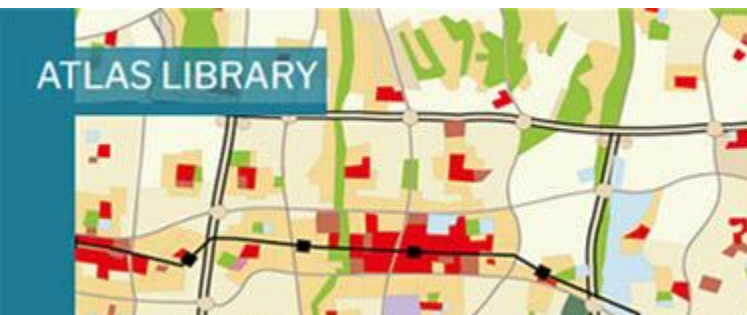
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Atlas of presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980-2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Introduction

Iran is a republic since 1 April 1979 (12 Farvardin 1358 on the Iranian calendar). Elections have become an institutionalized ritual and, too, the occasion for an authentic political battle between the forces bearing hopes that, born out of the revolution, have never disappeared despite political upheaval.

The revolutionary movement started in 1977 and gradually mustered against the imperial system most of the country's political and social forces. Immense crowds formed in public and took part in politics. Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shiite clergy played a decisive role by creating a revolutionary consensus that rallied quite different political groups: Communists, liberals, nationalists, technocrats and, of course, the clergy itself and various Islamist political movements, in particular those that adopted the ideas of a liberal, progressive strand of Islam (such as Ali Shariati's) — ideals that, through eclipsed, still echo through Iranian elections.

A consensus about the “republic”

The unity of the revolutionary movement was manifest at the time of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's departure in exile on 16 January 1979 and the overthrow of the imperial system on 11 February. In the referendums of 30 and 31 March 1979, 98.2% of voters were in favor of the state becoming a Republic. This signaled the start of the competition and then conflicts for taking power among the various ideological, political and social forces assembled around the revolutionary consensus. Although each of the words in the new regime's motto — “independence, freedom, the Islamic Republic” — is subject to diverging interpretations, there is, admittedly, a consensus, voluntary or involuntary, around the “republic” and, as a consequence, around elections.

Despite the repression and elimination of most opposition forces, politics is still a lively topic of debate in the country. Democracy is a struggle with no end, but the legal form of government in Iran is, beyond dispute, a republic to which Iranians adhere. Despite cases of electoral fraud, which are often covered up, the population unquestionably accepts elections as a means for settling political problems. Fraud is sometimes seen as inevitable, but it also sometimes sparks public protests, as evidenced by the slogan “Where is my vote?” during the demonstrations protesting the conditions of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reelection in 2009. Furthermore, hardly any of the opposition movements in exile call for a return to the monarchy.

The foundations of the political system

Under Article 56 of the Islamic Republic's 1979 Constitution, Islam is, along with the people, the source of legitimacy. In actual practice however, the organization of political power and the management of public affairs are often more pragmatic than ideological. Although religion is still strongly present in culture and in politics, Iranian society is undergoing secularization. The Shiite clergy's place in institutions and politics is a topic of ongoing debate within the population, governing circles and even the clergy. The constitution requires only that the Supreme Leader and minister of Intelligence be members of the clergy.

Elections at all levels

Power-holders at all levels in the Islamic Republic and even the Supreme Leader are to be chosen following an electoral process.

The Supreme Leader (rahbar) is elected by the Assembly of Experts (majles-e khobregān), itself elected by universal suffrage for an 8-year term. Under the principle of government by religious guidance (velayat-e faghi), the Leader sets general orientations for public policy and arbitrates cases of conflict at the state level. By validating the government's

decisions or refusing to do so, he directly intervenes in the everyday administration of the country. His duties, prestige and status make him an exceptional player in Iranian politics (chapters 8 and 9 of the Constitution).

The president of the Republic (ra'is-e jomhur), the country's highest authority after the Supreme Leader, is elected by direct universal suffrage (Article 114). As head of the executive, he directly oversees the government, since the reform of the Constitution approved by referendum on 28 July 1989 abolished the position of prime minister.

The 290 members of the legislature, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (majles shurā-e eslāmi), are elected by universal suffrage for four years. This assembly soon took a key place among the Islamic Republic's institutions, in particular under its president from 1980 to 1989, Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani. This parliament has compelled recognition as a force often dreaded by the presidents and ministers who answer to it.

In cases of conflict between the parliament, government and Guardian Council (shurā-e nehgabān), which sees to it that the bills of laws passed by parliament comply with the Constitution (originally based on the French model of the Constitutional Council), Article 112 provides that the "Nation's Exigency Council" (majma'-e tashkhis-e maslehat-e nezām) shall meet at any time the Guardian Council judges a proposed bill of the Islamic Consultative Assembly to be against the principles of Shari'ah or the Constitution, and the Assembly is unable to meet the expectations of the Guardian Council." Appointed by the Supreme Leader, the members of this Exigency Council settle disagreements between these institutions.

From 1979 to 2017, 38 elections — presidential, parliamentary, municipal, etc. — were held. Some of them did not arouse much interest, and turnout was low, whereas others focused on major issues that pitted political forces against each other.

Though foreseen under articles 100-106 of the Constitution, elections to fill regional and local assemblies (provinces, districts, municipalities and villages) were postponed indefinitely during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) but also out of fear lest countervailing powers emerge at the local level. The first municipal elections in 1999 under President Khatami aroused a surprising degree of enthusiasm. There were many candidates, and several women were elected. Despite their limited power, mayors have become

prominent local politicians who cannot be overlooked in contemporary Iran.

Elections under the control of the Guardian Council of the Constitution

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected directly by universal suffrage and may be reelected once, each term lasting four years (articles 113 ff.). He has to receive an absolute majority. If no candidate carries a majority, a second round of elections is organized with the two leading candidates.

Since the 2007 reform, Iranians, men and women 18 years old and older, may vote. Candidates are "persons" (rejāl: without specification of the sex) who are Shiites "well versed in the religion and politics". The minister of the Interior verifies the administrative acceptability of those who want to stand as candidates and organizes the election.

The key point in the electoral process is the right, since the political crisis in 1981 and the impeachment of President Seyyed Abolhassan Banisadr, that the Guardian Council of the Constitution has arrogated to choose the candidates allowed to run. Under Article 99 of the Constitution, this council has the responsibility of "supervising" all elections. It thus chooses de facto the candidates allowed to take part in legislative and presidential elections (but not municipal elections). Although hundreds of people express their intention to run for president, the Guardian Council of the Constitution draws up the list of those who will be allowed to do so, a list that often comes out of long negotiations with the highest authorities. There are usually from four to eight candidates on this list, some well-known figures (who will attract the most attention during the campaign) but others of lesser renown, tokens representing a variety of opinions. All candidates have to uphold the Constitution without any reservations.

The Guardian Council of the Constitution is made up of twelve religious jurists aware of "present needs and the issues of the day" (Article 91). They serve a 6-year term, but terms are staggered such that, every three years, half of them are chosen anew. Half of these twelve jurists are appointed by the Supreme Leader, and the other half by parliament from among jurists proposed by the "Head of the Judicial Power", who is appointed by the Supreme Leader. The Leader thus controls this very influential assembly of religious notables.

Despite this institutional framework, the electoral process is not fully locked up. Since 1997, elections place in competition candidates representing opposing tendencies within the Islamic Republic. Heated debates occur, and the result of a presidential elections is not predictable.

The presidential election: A high stake

In a context of political excitement and mobilization involving a wide array of political forces that had arisen out of the revolution, Abol-Hassan Banisadr won the first presidential election on 25 January 1980. For this election, 124 persons had declared their intention to run, 96 were allowed to do so, but only 8 were on the ballot.

The following elections were not the occasion for open debates. After the impeachment on 21 June 1981 of Banisadr, the elections of Mohammad Ali Rejai (assassinated on 2 August 1981), Ali Khamenei (1981-1989) and Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997) occurred without any opposition. Voter turnout fell, as low as 50.7% for Rafsanjani's reelection in 1993. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), given that liberal and left-wing opposition forces had been eliminated and that power was in the hands of Ayatollah Khomeini's immediate successors, the presidential election became a mere formality with a result known in advance, the official candidate often receiving more than 90% of the vote (95.1% for Khamenei in 1981).

In 1997, this situation changed: voter turnout was massive (79.8%), and Mohammad Khatami was elected. The moderate opposition to the newly established system turned out in droves for this election. In the hope of sweeping political change, it supported Khatami, a religious official who had resigned as minister of Culture and was known for his close ties with the revolutionaries originally grouped around Khomeini. No one had predicted the victory of this candidate who advocated citizen participation, liberalization and a "dialog of civilizations", and clearly opposed Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the "official" candidate who presided over parliament and whom the clerical elite and conservatives backed. Khatami's overwhelming victory was an upset. Since then, presidential elections have, every four years, become an occasion for open political debate during the (brief) electoral campaign, a debate that mobilizes (often festively) the supporters of the major candidates through meetings, demonstrations, posters, pamphlets and even televised debates.

The results of presidential elections in Iran clearly depict a political landscape shaped around two poles: conservatives strongly committed to the principles of the Islamic Republic and the power of the Supreme Leader; and "reformers" or "pragmatists" who also support the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. Besides these two forces, themselves splintered into factions, a less well-structured, more "populist" political trend emerged with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. There is also a "silent" but very sizeable opposition that tends to stay away from the polls but that becomes active under exceptional circumstances (Khatami's election in 1997, the protests against the 2009 election results or popular celebrations of an Iranian victory in an international sports event). The Supreme Leader, the president and parliament are the three rival, and complementary, constituents in this political landscape.

Seven presidents (1980-2017)

Since the foundation of the Islamic Republic, Iran has had seven presidents. After an initial period of instability (the impeachment of Banisadr and assassination of Mohammad Ali Reza'i), the following presidents — from Khamenei to Rouhani — have served two consecutive terms (even Ahmadinejad, who faced strong opposition in 2009). The highest authorities in the state want to prove that the Islamic Republic is stable, an argument that is decisive for promoting internationally the image of Iran and its political system.

Maps of Iranian presidential elections

This atlas of the presidential elections in Iran is based on official results published by the Iranian Interior Ministry. Data are not comprehensive (only voter turnout rate by region) before 1997 and more detailed, by district (shahrestān), from this date.

Given the political situation, these statistics regularly come under discussion as to voter turnout and the results obtained by such and such a candidate. For instance, the turnout rate is over 100% in some districts (shahrestān); and suspicions have more than once been expressed that the results were falsified, in particular for the first round in 2005 and even more so in 2009 for Ahmadinejad's reelection. Since the law allows voters to cast their ballot in any election precinct, this might account for cases when turnout equals or overshoots 100%, at least in districts with secondary residences, in particular around Tehran (e.g., Damāvand or Shemirānat). Although electoral fraud might occur locally or

nationally (rigged statistics), these practices have apparently not been significant enough to modify a presidential election's outcome.

As a consequence, the results of presidential elections reveal a real lineup of political forces and changes in it from one election to the next. For instance, during the first round in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came in second, a surprising result that deprived Mehdi Karroubi of the chance to run against Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani during the second round. This situation reflected two political trends: the emergence of a new, populist current in politics and the determination by the highest authorities to avoid, if need be by fraud, a direct opposition between two eminent members of the Shiite clergy. In 2013, Hassan Rouhani's election during a single round (but with only 50.5% of the vote) avoided a second round against Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, who had few chances of winning but would have (as in 2009) divided the majority in power.

When the results of presidential elections are interpreted on different scales or compared with sociological, economic or cultural data, a geographical analysis sheds light on the complexity of Iranian politics. This approach also raises questions about the weight of local and ethnic factors in the making of public opinion, the shaping of the vote and the crystallization of political forces (conservatives, reformers, etc.) around a sociological or geographical bedrock. By combining a geographical and diachronic analysis, this atlas of presidential elections brings to light geographical patterns that expose elements of continuity (e.g., the place of the provinces in central Iran that are Shiite, Persian-speaking and conservative) and also elements that signal the changes under way in contemporary society (e.g., the shift away from a town/country divide or the occasionally still strong place of local support for candidates in their home province).

Electoral geography is not well developed in Iran, where the mention of geographical differences is seen as support for irredentism. Recently however, election maps have been made but without any geographical analysis; the discussions accompanying them have mainly emphasized ideological factors or rivalries between persons. This first atlas of presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran proposes a view of elections that, if not different, is more complex, indicating shades of the political opinions that 80 million Iranians express in polling booths.

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Atlas des élections présidentielles en République islamique d'Iran (1980 - 2017)










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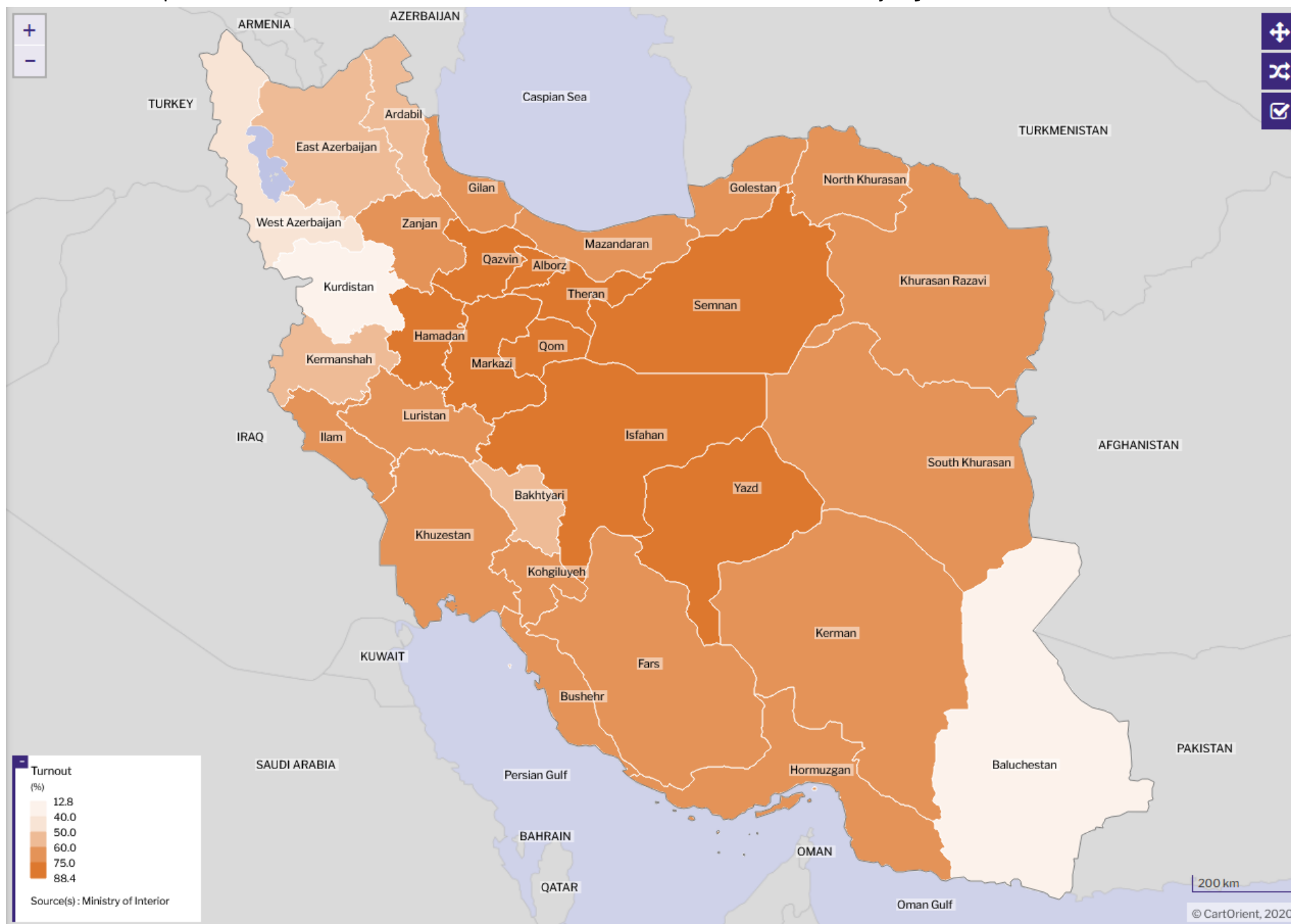
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The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Banisadr (by region, 1980)



The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Banisadr (by region, 1980)

Bernard Hourcade

The first presidential election in the newborn Islamic Republic of Iran was held on 25 January 1980, during a period of open debates and clashes between the political and social forces that had overthrown the Imperial regime and now recognized Ayatollah Khomeini's authority. In the midst of this political excitement, voter turnout was relatively strong: 67.4%.

Results of the 1980 presidential election in Iran

Registered voters	Voters	Percentage turnout
20 993 643	14 152 887	67,4 %

Candidates	Votes	%
Abol-Hassan Banisadr	10 709 330	75,7
Ahmad Madani	2 224 554	15,7
Hasan Habibi	474 859	3,4
Dariush Forouhar	133 478	0,9
Sadeq Tabatabaei	114 776	0,8
Kazem Samii	89 270	0,6
Sadegh Ghotbzadeh	48 547	0,3
Blank and spoiled ballots	358 073	2,5
Total	14 152 887	100

Abol-Hassan Banisadr was elected by a large majority following a single round of voting. His score of more than 75% reflected this moment of revolutionary consensus. Exiled for a long time in France where he moved in Third World circles and organized the reception of Ayatollah Khomeini in Neauphle-le-Château, this sociologist, son of an ayatollah from Hamadan, was a liberal, socialist and fervent Muslim. Supported by the leader of the Islamic revolution and open to international affairs, Banisadr was very representative of the political currents that swelled the revolution in 1979.

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province. This map exposes a few soft spots in the revolutionary consensus that, nationwide, placed Banisadr in the president's office.

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected directly by universal suffrage and may be re-elected once, each term lasting four years (articles 113 ff.). At the time, Iranians, men and women 15 years old and older, could vote. Candidates were men or, in theory, women who were Shiites well-versed in the religion and politics.

An election during a period of revolutionary fervor

After the announcement that a presidential election would be held, 124 persons filed to be candidates. Following an examination of the compliance of these candidacies with election laws, the Ministry of the Interior allowed 96 to stand for election. Nonetheless, only eight actually took part in this first presidential election. Besides Abolhassan Banisadr, there were: Admiral Ahmad Madani, an Islamist and law-and-

order candidate; Hassan Habibi and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, who had spent a long exile in France and were close to Ayatollah Khomeini in Neauphle-le-Château; Darius Forouhar of the National Party of Iran, a former minister in Mehdi Bazargan's provisional government; Sadegh Tabatabaei and Kazem Sami, liberal Islamic activists; and Mohammad Mokri, a Kurd and linguist who was a refugee for years in France and the first ambassador from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the USSR.

Turnout varied depending on the province

The high turnout (more than 75%) in the central provinces — Shiite, Persian-speaking and, above all, urbanized and literate — revealed the strong impact there of the revolution in 1979, in particular in Isfahan and Tehran. In contrast, the population on the country's (geographical, economic, cultural, religious and political) periphery kept its distance from this mobilization (Hourcade, 1980). The low turnout (less than 50%) in the provinces with a large Sunni population (Baluchestan and especially Kurdistan) would become recurrent. However it did not reflect support for the ousted monarchy but, instead, a critical attitude toward the new, steadfastly Shiite power-holders and a recurrent assertion of an identity and of claims for economic and political justice — even though these claims were recognized during the revolutionary period (and Article 15 of the Constitution grants a special status to provincial languages).

This unequal geographical distribution of voting patterns highlights the center-periphery contrast, a pattern that, inherited from the Imperial regime, corresponded in the main to the map of literacy drawn from the 1986 census (Hourcade et al., 1998). It seems to diverge from the new republic's rhetoric about a national consensus, universality and political unity.

This map reveals some of the deep political contradictions in revolutionary Iran in 1980 that would be exacerbated by the Iran-Iraq War, which broke out on 20 September. This deep political crisis would put an end of the period of revolutionary consensus and lead to the impeachment of the Islamic Republic's first president, Abolhassan Banisadr, on 21 June 1981.

Translation : Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The results of the vote by province (*ostan*) or by district (*shahrestan*) for the various candidates were not released until 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Ministry of the Interior but can be found on *Iran Data Portal*.

(<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1980, there were 24 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the current division into 31 provinces.

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Related map(s)

The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)

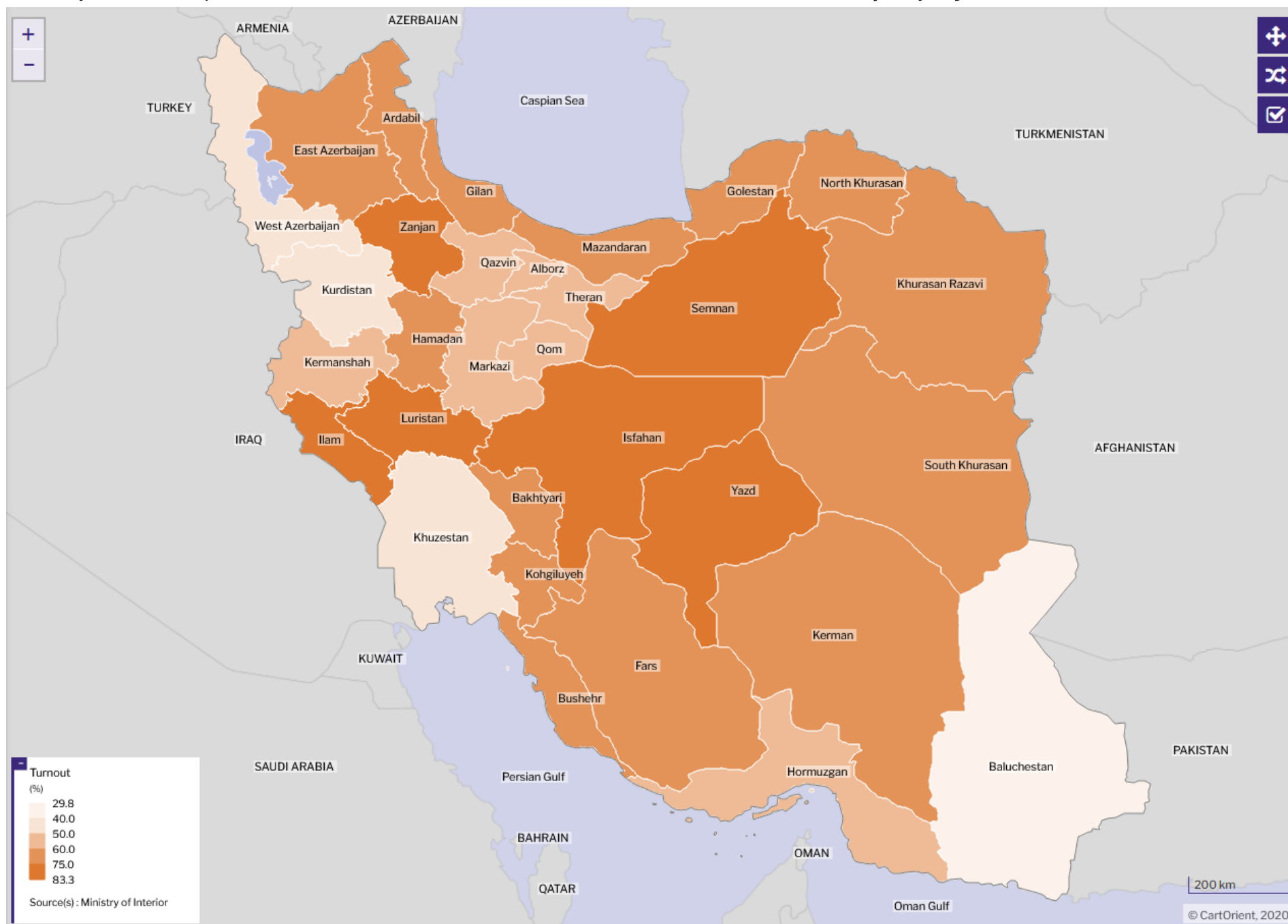
The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)

The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Banisadr (by region, 1980)", *CartOrient*. Online since 29 October 2019. URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/159/?lang=en>

The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)



The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)

Bernard Hourcade

The second presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran was held on 24 July 1981 during a quasi-civil war. At the request of Ayatollah Khomeini, parliament had impeached on 21 June President Abol-Hassan Banisadr, and there was fighting in the streets against leftist, in particular the People's Mujahedin of Iran, which was calling for an armed uprising. On 28 June a bomb killed several members of the Islamic Republic Party, including the very influential Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti.

Results of the presidential election in Iran on 24 July 1981

Registered voters	Voters	Percentage turnout
22 687 017	14 573 803	64,2 %

Candidates	Votes	%
Mohammad-Ali Rajai	12 779 050	87,7
Abbas Sheybani	658 498	4,5
Ali-Akbar Parvaresh	339 646	2,3
Habibollah Asgaroladi	249 457	1,7
blanks and spoiled ballots	547 152	3,8
Total	14 573 803	100

Mohammad Ali Rajai, the prime minister, won the election with nearly 90% of the vote. However voter turnout was lower (64.2%) than in the preceding presidential election

(67.4%). As the Iran-Iraq War was being waged under very hard conditions, political power would henceforth be concentrated in the hands of the *maktabi*, i.e., the activists “devoted to the religion” with boundless loyalty to the political line laid down by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province.

An election under the control of clerical forces

To deal with chronic instability, the clergy in power asked the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurā-ye nehgābān*), which had the task of “supervising” the election to be organized by the Ministry of the Interior, to select the persons who would be allowed to stand for election. This curbed debates and protests, and the presidential election thus became a legal formality for confirming the officially chosen candidate.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic provides that the president is to be elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of four years and may be reelected only once for a successive term (articles 113ff.). It also stated that all Iranians, men and women more than 15 years old, could vote. As for the candidates, in theory women as well as men, they have to be Shiite Muslims well versed in religion and politics.

Despite the foregoing requirements and political strife, 71 persons filed applications to become candidates. This suggests that the revolutionary and democratic momentum had not abated. However only four men were allowed to stand for election,

including Mohammad Ali Rajai, who was seen as the “official” candidate supported by the Islamic Republic Party. Born in 1933 in Qazvin, this former secondary school teacher of mathematics had long been an Islamist activist. Imprisoned under the shah, he was the exemplar illustration of the maktabi: modest, nationalistic, anti-Western, faithful to Ayatollah Khomeini and consonant with a traditional, popular Islam.

Rajai was elected, after a single round of voting, with more than 87% of the vote, whereas the other candidates were left to play the role of extras:

- Abbas Sheibani, a moderate and respected member of the Freedom Movement of Iran;
- Ali Akbar Parvaresh, a member of the very conservative Islamic Coalition Party;
- Habibollah Asgaroladi, who defended conservative values and the interests of the bazaar.

Geographically fragmented voting patterns

On the national scale, the official voter turnout rate was high (64.2%), though a little lower than during the previous presidential election. It varied, depending on the province, between 30% and nearly 85%, a variation attesting to widely different political sensitivities. In some provinces, the turnout rate was barely credible owing to voting fraud or to the tight control exercised over voters.

The geographical distribution of turnout rates had changed significantly since the first “consensual” election in 1980. In the province of Tehran, it fell 20% between January 1980 and July 1981. At the time, this province included the provinces of Qom and Qazvin (Rajai’s home). This low turnout (56.5%) reflected the critical stance adopted in the capital city, if not other big metropolitan areas, toward the new Islamic regime, even though the province had been a leading player in the revolution.

Some voting patterns in this second presidential election could already be observed during the first in 1980. For one thing, abstention was very strong in most of the peripheral provinces with large numbers of Sunnites, Kurds, Baluchi or Arabs dwelled: as high as 70% in Baluchestan. This pattern would hold during subsequent elections. For another thing, the central provinces turned out in high numbers to vote. This too has become a constant in Iran’s political geography. It is related to the real or purported

religious conservatism of the Shiite, Persian-speaking population in the provinces of Kerman, Fars and Yazd and/or to the historical support from for the Islamic Republic in the provinces of Isfahan, Semnan and Hamadan.

According to the official statistics, people in Lorestan and Ilam also went in droves to the polls, but these statistics are a reason to doubt the results. In these provinces characterized by ethnic and religious diversity related to the coexistence of Kurds, Persians, Arabs or Bakhtiari, suspected voting fraud would be a constant during the 1980s.

Rajai’s term ended tragically. After serving a month as president, he, along with his prime minister (Mohammad Javad Bahonar) was killed on 30 August 1981 by the explosion of a bomb, an attack claimed by the Organization of People’s Mujahedin of Iran.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

Election results were not published by province (*ostan*) or district (*shahrestan*) till 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Iranian Ministry of the Interior but can be found on Iran Data Portal (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1980, there were 24 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the current division into 31 provinces.

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Cartographer(s)

Emmanuel Giraudet, cartographer, research associate, CNRS, Centre de recherche sur le monde iranien (CeRMI), Paris, France

Related map(s)

The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Banisadr (by region, 1980)

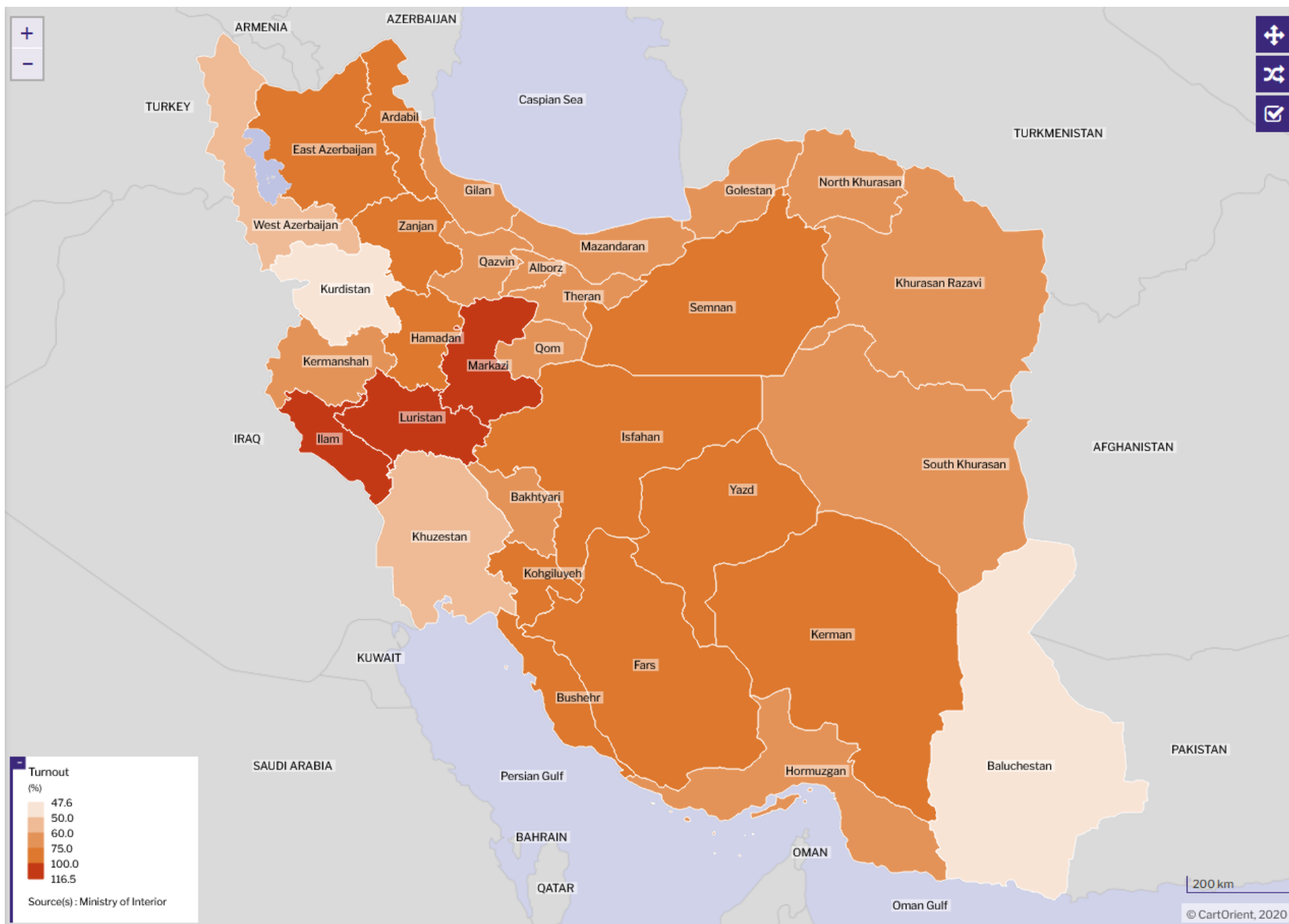
The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)

The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)

Average voter turnout rate in Iranian presidential elections between 1980 and 2017 (by province, 1980-2017)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)", *CartOrient*. Online since 17 January 2020. URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/160/?lang=en>



The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)

Bernard Hourcade

The third presidential election in Iran was held on 2 October 1981 after the assassination of Mohammad-Ali Rajai on 30 August, who had been elected president a month earlier. This political violence challenged the capacity of the Shiite clergy and maktabi (activists devoted to the religion and following the line laid down by Ayatollah Khomeini) to lead the country. The diverse political forces — liberals of the National Front from the era of Mossadegh, several Marxist groups, the Shiite clergy, Third World nationalists and human rights activists — were still strong and active. A consensus among them had formed the grounds for overthrowing the imperial system in 1979

Results of the Iranian presidential election of October 1981

Registered voters	Voters	Turnout
22 687 017	16 847 717	74,3 %

Candidates	Votes	%
Ali Khamene'i	16 008 579	95,0
Ali-Akbar Parvaresh	341 874	2,0
Reza Zavarehi	59 058	0,4
Hassan Ghafouri-Fard	80 545	0,5
Total	16 847 717	100

In this unstable situation, the decision was made to concentrate power in the hands of a very small group of men close to Ayatollah Khomeini, who had initially wanted the clergy to leave executive offices, such as the presidency, to laymen. The Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurā-ye nehgābān*) prevented protests by only allowing four persons to stand for election out of the 46 who, despite all the hurdles, had filed applications to run. Hojat ol-islam Ali Khamenei, the candidate designated as Mohammad-Ali Rajai's successor, carried the election with 95% of the vote.

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province.

The literally unrivaled election of Ali Khamenei

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be reelected only once for a successive term (articles 113 ff.). At the time, Iranians, men and women more than 15 years old, could vote. Candidates were men or (in theory) women who were Shiites well-versed in the religion and politics. Given the preselection by the Guardian Council of the Constitution among those who had filed applications to stand for election, the October 1981 presidential election was a legal formality for officially installing the establishment's candidate.

The role of official candidate fell on Ali Khamenei, a 42-year-old religious leader. Imprisoned under the Shah and very active in Mashhad and Tehran during the revolution, he had been a member of the Council of the Revolution, which headed the

country after the Shah's ouster. Despite his lower position in the clerical hierarchy, he was appointed in 1979 as imam of the Friday prayer in Tehran by Ayatollah Khomeini, and secretary-general of the Islamic Republic Party. By the way, Khamenei would become Supreme Leader in 1989.

Khamenei's election with 95% of the vote in 1981 came as no surprise since the other candidates voluntarily played a role as "extras" in a merely formal election:

- Ali Akbar Parvaresh, a member of the very conservative Islamic Coalition Party had run for president in the previous election;
- Reza Zavarei, a jurist, had been vice-minister of the Interior in 1979; and
- Hassan Ghafourifard was a former governor of Khorasan Province.

Voter turnout: Strong but questionable

Despite the conditions for organizing the election, the official voter turnout rate on 2 October 1981 was higher (74.3%) than in the two preceding presidential elections. Out of fear of domestic chaos, voters might have been motivated to go to the polls at a time when the Iraqi army's invasion was menacing the nation's security. However turnout rose to improbable proportions in several provinces (more than 85%) and even reached 100% in Lorestan and Ilam, evidence of fraud, a fact not denied by the Ministry of the Interior.

In Iran, voters may cast their ballots in any polling station. For this reason, the arrival of tourists on the Friday of the election in sparsely populated valleys in the mountains could account for local turnout rates of more than 100%. However this explanation does not hold on the scale of big provinces. Though inconsistent and heterogeneous, the data on turnout do shed light on the geographical complexity of Iranian politics. While the statistics do not hide well-known oppositions in some provinces, the activists and institutions behind the government openly flaunted the law without risking any punishment in other provinces for rigging the election.

Diverse provincial voting patterns

Significantly, the map of voter turnout rates by province differs from that of the results of the two previous presidential elections. Voting patterns tended to differ from province to province more than in the past, when such differences reflected the

distinction between center and periphery. This distinction, a legacy of the country's social and political geography, had been very visible during the two previous elections and was still relevant. Abstention was higher in peripheral provinces where voters' religious or ethnic characteristics (being Sunnite, Kurd, Baluchi, Arabic...) are often correlated with a critique of the Islamic Republic and differ from the characteristics of the Shiite, Persian-speaking provinces in the center of the country, where the population is more implicated in national politics.

The complexity of voting patterns was increasing: some peripheral provinces had high official turnout rates whereas the rate of abstention in the Iranian heartland was, in some provinces, higher than the national average. Such was the case of the highly urbanized provinces of Tehran and along the Caspian Sea, where people are traditionally open to liberal ideas. This voting pattern would recur in later elections.

In the context of the Iran-Iraq War, the election of a cleric as president clearly signaled the end of the revolutionary period. Political power was concentrated around Ayatollah Khomeini, surrounded by a devoted group of young religious dignitaries, like the new presidents of the republic (Ali Khamenei) and of parliament (Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani).

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

Election results were not published by province (*ostan*) or district (*shahrestan*) till 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Iranian Ministry of the Interior but can be found on Iran Data Portal (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1981, there were 24 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the current division into 31 provinces.

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Cartographer(s)

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Related map(s)

The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)

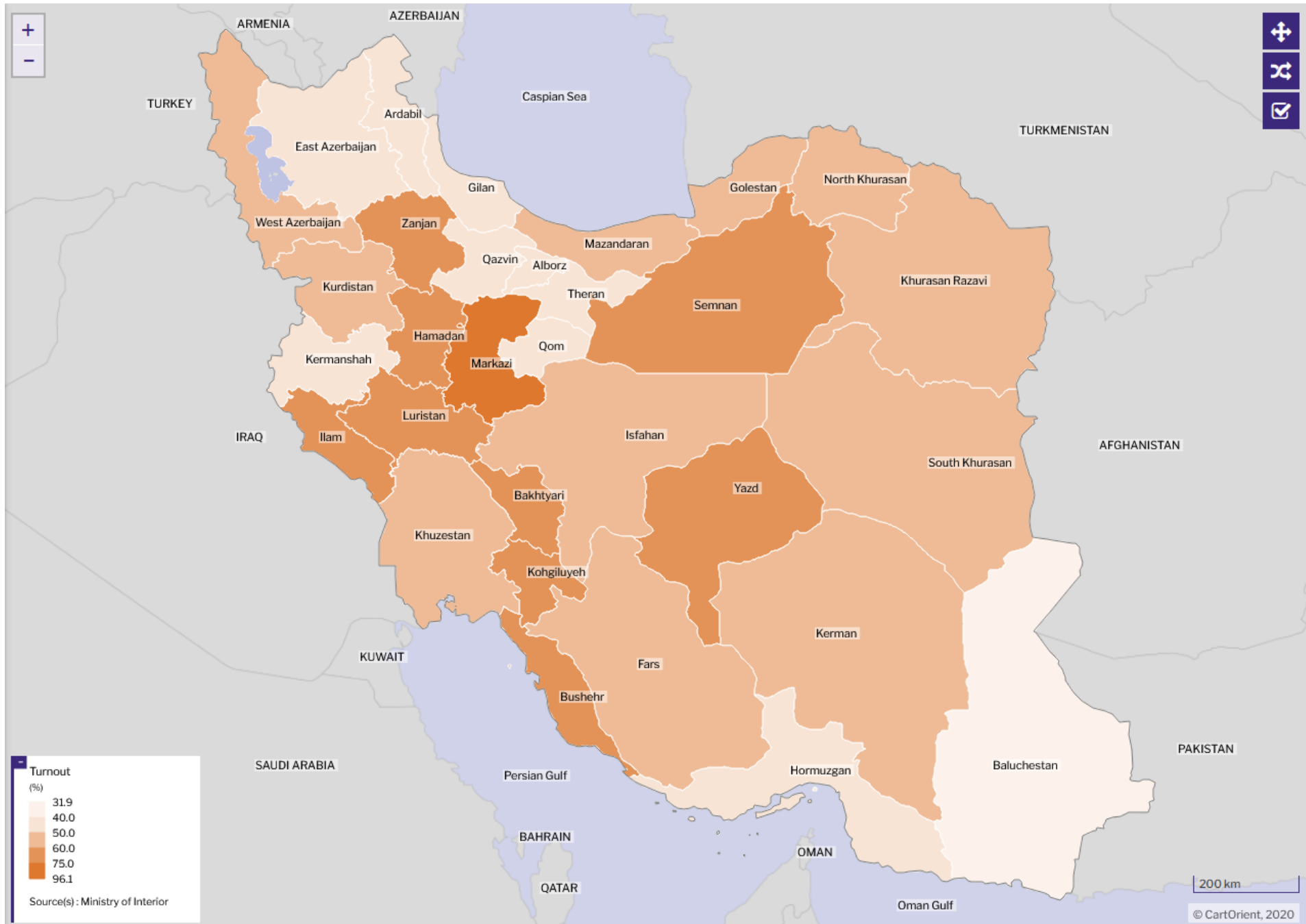
The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)

The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Banisadr (by region, 1980)

The 1989 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by region, 1989)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)", *CartOrient*. Online since 07 January 2020. URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/161/?lang=en>



The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)

Bernard Hourcade

The Islamic Republic's fourth presidential election was held on 16 August 1985. For the first time, the sitting president was a candidate for re-election. The Iran-Iraq War still loomed over Iranian politics, with no end in sight. The political situation was characterized by a crackdown on liberal and progressive opponents and by divisions and rivalries within the Shiite clergy.

Results of the 1985 presidential election in Iran

Registered voters	Votes	Turnout
25 993 802	14 238 587	54,8%

Candidates	Votes	%
Ali Khamene'i	12 205 012	87,5
Mahmoud Kashani	1 402 953	9,9
Habibollah Asgarrowladi	278 113	2,0
Blank and spoiled ballots	352 509	2,5
Total	14 238 587	100

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province.

Re-election without competition

Under chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be re-elected once. All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. Since 1981, the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurā-ye nehgābān*) has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates using political criteria. Out of the 50 persons who filed applications, only those who were the most loyal to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience the Supreme Leader) were allowed to stand for election.

The incumbent, Ali Khamenei, faced two candidates: Mahmoud Kashani, a highly respected jurist and professor, and Habibollah Asgarrowladi, an active defender of the values and interests of the bazaar who had previously run for president in 1981.

For the ruling class in Iran, the incumbent had to be re-elected in order to show that, despite the crises, the young Islamic Republic was stable and upheld its Constitution. As the system's candidate, Khamenei won by a large margin — more than 85% of the vote — in the first round of voting.

Massive abstention

For the first time since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, voter turnout was low, only 54.8%, a reflection of the absence of political stakes. Held under the central government's tight ideological control, the election could not yield results that reflected the lineup of political forces in the country.

As in 1981, the geographical pattern of voter turnout was very unequal. As usual,

abstention concerned a majority of voters in the provinces where the population was mostly Sunnite or spoke languages other than Persian — where there was criticism of the new power-holders who were so determinedly Shiite. The official turnout rate was only 31.9% in Baluchestan and 49% in Azerbaijan. But abstention was also massive in provinces where the population was mostly urban or literate, in particular Gilan (43.6%) and Tehran (48.2%). At the time, the latter province was vast, encompassing the cities of Tehran, Qazvin and Qom, all active centers in the revolution.

Voter turnout was exceptionally high in a few provinces (Markazi, Ilam and Lorestan); the only explanation for this is the tight political control there. Unlike in the October 1981 election, the Ministry of the Interior did not publish turnout rates of more than 100%.

Translation : Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The results of the vote by province (*ostan*) or by district (*shahrestan*) for the various candidates were not released until 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Ministry of the Interior but can be found on *Iran Data Portal* (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1985, there were 24 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the current division into 31 provinces.

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Cartographer(s)

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Related map(s)

The 1989 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by region, 1989)
 The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)
 The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)
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The 1989 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by region, 1989)

Bernard Hourcade

Held on 28 July 1989, the fifth presidential election since the establishment of the Islamic Republic occurred at a turning point in the country's recent political history – after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in July 1988 and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini on 3 June 1989, and at a time when the neighboring Soviet Union was undergoing upheaval, a precursor of its coming collapse. This election was organized the same day as a referendum for revising the Constitution (to redefine eligibility for the position of Supreme Leader, abolish the position of prime minister and set up a Supreme National Security Council). Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani carried this presidential election.

Results of the 1989 presidential election in Iran

Registered voters	Votes	Turnout
30 139 598	16 452 677	54,6%

Candidates	Votes	%
Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	15 550 528	94,5
Abbas Sheybani	635 165	3,9
Blank and spoiled ballots	266 984	1,6
Total	16 452 677	100

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province.

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be re-elected once (articles 113 ff.). At the time, Iranians, men and women 15 years old and older, could vote.

Rafsanjani's undisputed victory

This was the first presidential election following the long war with Iraq (1980-1988), a period when political discussions were blocked while the influence of two political forces grew: the Shiite clergy and the Guardians of the Revolution (*pasdaran*). Given their numbers and their part in the war, the Guardians of the Revolution had become a major force in politics, and played a leading role in the economy and national security. When discharged, these veterans received strong social and financial support (scholarships, reserved jobs, control over firms via, in particular, the trust Khatam ol-Ambya) and thus shored up their social and economic status. Meanwhile, the Shiite clergy had bolstered its direct control over politics. There was no doubt that political power was in the hands of the clergymen from Ayatollah Khomeini's inner circle.

In this context, only two out of the 79 persons who wanted to stand for election were authorized to run for president. The Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurā-ye nehgābān*) vetted the would-be candidates and, using political criteria, retained only two among those most faithful to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience to the Supreme Leader).

The election ended in an overwhelming victory by the system's candidate, hojat ol-islam Hashemi Rafsanjani, who carried more than 95% of the vote against Abbas Sheibani, who belonged to the very marginal Freedom Movement of Iran and had already run for president in July 1981.

Born in 1934 in Bahreman (near Rafsanjan) Kerman Province, Rafsanjani was a student of Ayatollah Khomeini in Qom. Active in politics and hostile to the imperial regime, he spent more than four years in prison before the revolution. Upon Khomeini's return to Iran, Rafsanjani figured in the Supreme Leader's inner circle and played a key role in most of the major decisions made during the first years of the Islamic Republic and during the Iran-Irak War. His outstanding knowledge of the country's social and political situation was bolstered by his service as president of parliament from 1980 to 1989; and it accounts for his successes as a businessman. After Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani's political skills were decisive for a power-sharing arrangement with Ali Khamenei, whom the Assembly of Experts elected Supreme Leader on 4 June 1989.

Closing a long period of warfare and austerity, Rafsanjani's pragmatic political program called for "reconstructing" the country. This presidential election was primarily an administrative formality. Rafsanjani was not yet identified as a reformer, nor associated with an economic, if not a political, liberalism, which would be advocated by the Executives of Construction Party (*hezb-e kārgozārān-e sāzandegi*). Rafsanjani would have more powers than previous presidents since the constitutional revision was approved and, under Article 124, the prime minister would be replaced with vice-presidents.

A low turnout: Weak legitimacy?

Voter turnout was anemic: only 54.6%, close to the percentage for Khamenei's re-election in 1985. The high abstention rate reflected the nearly total blockage of Iranian politics at the time.

Turnout by province provides evidence that the contrast between center and periphery had become less sharp. A more complicated geographical pattern was emerging in line with the changes in the political landscape that had occurred since Abolhassan Banisadr was impeached in 1981. Voter turnout in several central Iranian provinces that supported the Islamic regime (such as Yazd, Semnan and Markazi) was high. This also holds for Kerman (62.9%), the new president's home province. However the more urbanized and developed provinces in central Iran had high rates of abstention. Such was the case of Tehran, where only 49.5% of registered voters bothered to go to the polls.

Turnout was even lower in several provinces (e.g., Baluchestan and East Azerbaijan) on the periphery, where many people are Sunnites and are not native Persian speakers — a trend observed during previous elections. Nonetheless, official statistics reported a high turnout in a few peripheral provinces, poor and non-Persian-speaking, where voting fraud seemed to have been rife, for instance in Ilam (85.4%) and, to a lesser degree, Kurdistan (58%), where an insurrection had been under way since 1979, and Khuzestan (59%), which, though oil-rich, had been devastated by the war. Since these provinces were characterized by their strong opposition and high abstention, these statistics were a reflection of the tight control exercised by central authorities.

A final point to make from the map: voter turnout was lower in a majority of the provinces (13 out of 24) than the national average, itself very low. This signaled a deep crisis of legitimacy for the Islamic Republic. Aware of this, the newly elected president would actively pursue "national reconstruction" in a country that had come through a revolution and a war.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The results by region (ostan) or district (shahrestan) for the various candidates were not released following the 1989 election. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Ministry of the Interior but can be found on Iran Data Portal (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1989, there were 24 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the division (since 2010) into 31 provinces.

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Related map(s)

The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)
 The 1993 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by province, 1993)
 The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)
 Origine of the candidates in Iranian presidential elections (by region, 1980-2017)

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The 1993 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by province, 1993)

Bernard Hourcade

The sixth presidential election since the Islamic Revolution was held on 11 June 1993. The political situation was apparently calm, but in a context where the domination of politics and society, as well as the culture and economy, by the Shiite clergy and its allies left little room for other social or political forces. This blockage was tempered by a stronger economy owing to “reconstruction” and by the pragmatism of President Rafsanjani, the incumbent running for a second term with the backing of the Executives of Construction of Iran Party (*hezb-e kārgozārān-e sāzandegi*). Rafsanjani’s policies garnered support from the many engineers, technicians and administrators who (out of nationalism, pragmatism or resignation and despite the opposition of most of them to the regime’s Islamic ideology) were busy trying to revive the country’s economy. Rafsanjani was elected in the first round with 63% of the vote.

Results of the presidential election in Iran on 11 June 1993

Registered voters	Voters	Turnout
33 156 055	16 796 787	50,7 %

Candidates	Votes	%
Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	10 566 499	62,9
Ahmad Tavakkoli	4 026 879	24,0
Abdollah Jassbi	1 498 084	8,9
Rajab-Ali Taheri	387 670	1,9

Based on statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) in Iran. Although the vote for these candidates by district or even by province has not been released, we do have the data on voter turnout by province.

Rafsanjani reelected but not triumphantly

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected only once for a successive term. At the time, all Iranians, both men and women more than 15 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. Since 1981, the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurā-ye nehgābān*) has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates using political criteria. Out of the persons who file applications, only those loyal to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience to the Supreme Leader) are allowed to stand for election.

Despite the absence of clear political programs but perhaps out of the hope of a political opening once the economic situation would be improved, 128 persons filed applications to run for president. Besides Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, only three other candidates were allowed to stand for election:

- Ahmad Tavakkoli, who had held the position of minister of Labor;
- Rajab-Ali Taheri, a conservative, who had served in parliament; and
- Abdollah Jassbi, the very influential rector of the new Islamic university (*dāneshgāh āzād-e eslāmi*) created with Rafsanjani’s backing.

Given the conditions for the election, these candidates had little hope of winning.

Nonetheless, for the first time since the first presidential election in 1980 and despite the lack of an actual campaign, the presence of well-known candidates in the race stimulated interest in politics.

Rafsanjani won “only” 63% of the vote, as compared with 94.5% in 1989. Ahmad Tavakkoli, who criticized the government’s “business dealings”; came in second with a noteworthy 24%.

Low voter turnout

Voter turnout (50.7%) was lower than in any previous presidential election. This can be set down to a lack of voter confidence, to the blockage of the political system, and, in part, to the call for a boycott by the Freedom Movement of Iran Party associated with Mehdi Bazargan, a former prime minister.

By 1993, the years of war and revolution were slipping into the past. What stands out on the map of voter turnout rates by province are persistent but subsiding differences in provincial voting patterns. As in preceding elections, turnout was very low in the peripheral provinces (Sunnite or speaking a language other than Persian), where mistrust of the Islamic Republic still thrived: Baluchestan, Azerbaijan, Khuzestan and Gilan. However as much can be said about highly urbanized provinces, like Tehran. On this map, we also notice the massive abstention in Isfahan, where turnout was only 42%. In this historical bastion of the Islamic regime, the traditionalistic population provided volunteers to the militia (basijis or Guardians of the Revolution). Isfahan’s low turnout rate suggests an ideological opposition to the incumbent president’s pragmatic activism and business dealings.

In most provinces, turnout rates ranged between 45% and 55%, around the national average of 50.7% — even in Kerman, the incumbent’s fief, where turnout reached 54.7%. Turnout was higher in the provinces where support for the Islamic Republic had roots, for example Yazd and Semnan in the heartland. However the highest rates were, as in several past elections, in Ilam and Lorestan, where voting fraud recurred.

Despite the country’s apparent stability, this sixth presidential election seemed to

announce the end of an era and forebode the political shock that would occur in 1997: a very high voter turnout and the election of a reformer (Mohammad Khatami).

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

Election results were not published by province (*ostan*) or district (*shahrestan*) till 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Iranian Ministry of the Interior but can be found on *Iran Data Portal* (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

In 1993, there were 25 provinces. To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the current division into 31 provinces.

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Related map(s)

The 1989 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by region, 1989)

The 1985 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the re-election of Ali Khamenei (by region, 1985)

The 1997 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 1997)

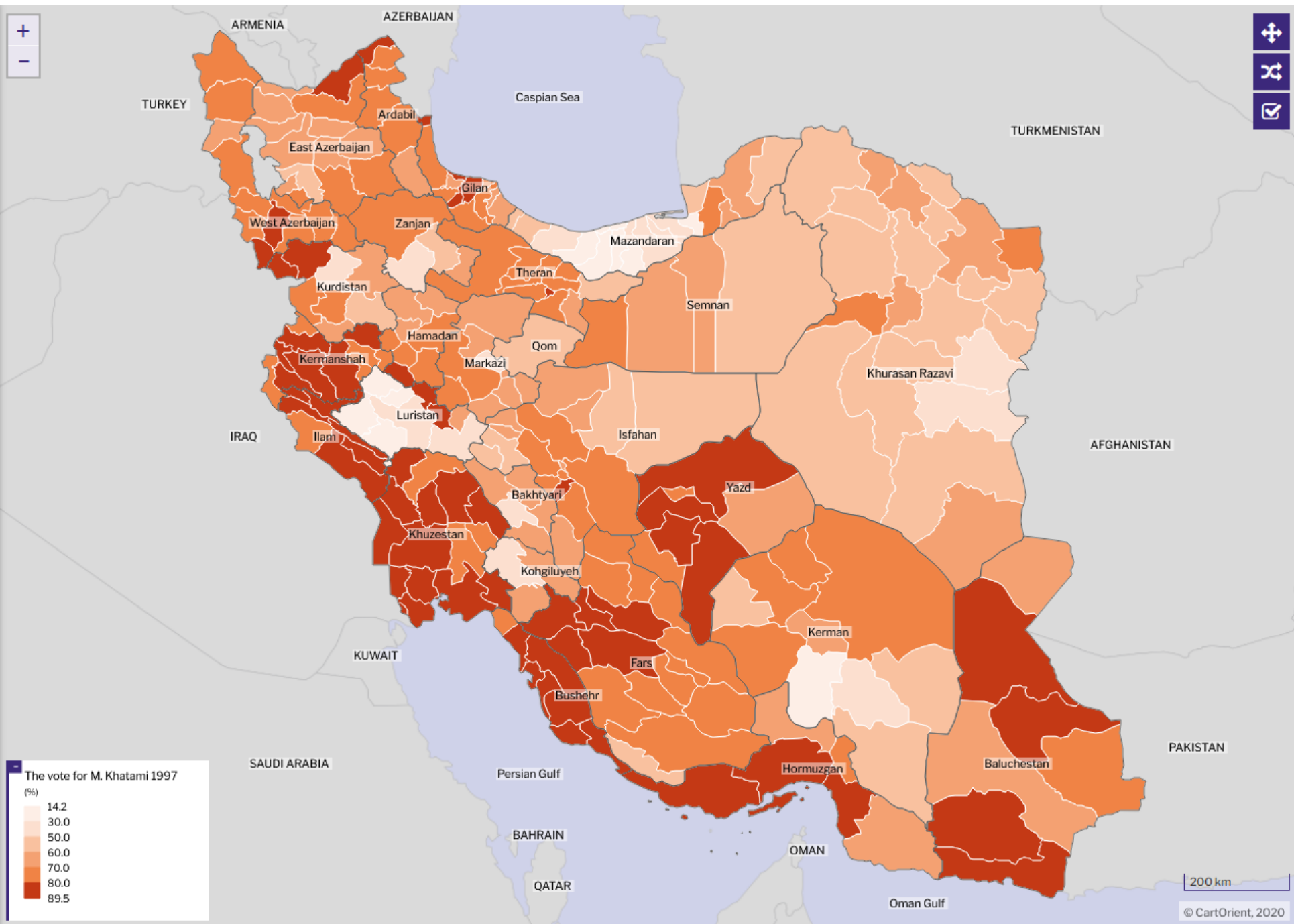
The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first round (by district, 2005)

The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the second round (by district, 2005)

Electronic reference

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URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/164/?lang=en>



The 1997 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 1997)

Bernard Hourcade

On 23 May 1997, Mohammad Khatami was elected, in the first round of the election, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 69.1% of the vote. Out of the 238 persons who filed requests to run as candidates, only four were retained by the Guardian Council of the Constitution. The very high turnout rate — 79.9% — for this seventh presidential election under the Islamic Republic was evidence both of widespread popular support and of a new national consensus in Iranian politics. The turnout rate was lower (54.8%) for Khamenei's reelection in 1985; and even lower for the election and reelection of Rafsanjani, respectively 54.6% in 1989 and to 50.7% in 1993.

Results of the 1997 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Vote	%
Mohammad Khatami	20 078 187	69,1
Nategh Nuri Ali-Akbar	7 242 859	24,9
Zavare'i Reza	771 460	2,7
Reyshahri Mohammad	742 598	2,6
Blank and spoiles ballots	240 996	0,8
Total (turnout rate 79,9%)	29 076 100	100,0

Under chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected once. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with two rounds of voting. All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the

religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (article 118). Since 1981, this council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively; and despite some incoherent returns, the results clearly reflect the country's social, cultural and political geography.

An upset victory

Mohammad Khatami, the son of a major religious figure from Yazd, was a former minister of Culture and religious official, who had been close to Imam Khomeini. His election came as a surprise since most government institutions were backing his principal rival: Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri (24.9% of the vote), a former president of the parliament. The two other candidates — Reza Zavarei (2.7%) and a former minister of Intelligence, Mohammad Reyshahri (2.6%) — were sidelined.

The upset victory of the “reformist” candidate and of his Islamic Iran Participation Front (*Moshārekat*) marked a date in contemporary Iranian politics. The *Moshārekat* was backed by the Construction Party (*Kārgozārān*) of incumbent president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the “Islamic Left” of the former Prime minister Mir-Hossein Moussavi.

The Second of Khordād Movement has adopted as its name the day and month of this victory, which left durable marks on Iranian politics; this movement is the symbol of a reformist drive within the Islamic Republic.

Reformist peripheral areas vs. a conservative center?

As the map shows, Khatami received strong support (more than 50% of the vote) in nearly all districts (*shahrestān*). This national trend expressed the population's readiness for reforms and change. It was also evidence of support from a powerful network of political organizations loyal to the "khomeinist" original revolutionary tradition. This network included several Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (*Pāsdārān*), who were opposed to the opportunistic "pragmatism" that had characterized Rafsanjani's two terms (1989-1997).

A second lesson to be learned from this map is the contrast between conservative zones in the center and northeast of the country (Kavir, Khorasan) and the zones more favorable to change in the west and south, and especially in peripheral areas (Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, the coast of the Persian gulf, etc.). the latter, often poorer, do not speak Persian as the mother tongue and are Sunnite areas inhabited by Baluchi, Kurds, Arabs, etc. In some of these districts, Khatami garnered more than 80% of the vote. The political rhetoric of the candidate and reformist movement was well received in these areas, since it advocated a common citizenship for all Iranians based on equal rights without ethnic or religious distinctions. This geographical contrast between a conservative center and more peripheral areas more open to change has been a constant in Iran's electoral geography.

The weight of localism and the absence of an ethnic vote

On a finer scale, factors such as localism and regionalism had a significant impact on voting patterns. Several candidates obtained high scores in their home districts (*shahrestān*) or provinces (*ostān*). This holds in particular for Khatami in Yazd, a province in the center of the country, despite its reputation for being conservative. Likewise, Zavareh, who came from Azerbaijan, ran up a somewhat higher score in a few districts in his home province: 9%-11% in Tabriz, Maragheh, Jolfa and Marand. Besides localism/regionalism, the religious factor, marked by the Sunnite/Shiite cleavage, strongly affected geographical voting patterns in the country.

On the contrary, there was no ethnic vote. The voting patterns of Azeris rested on the

same political factors as those of Persian-speakers.

Socio-geographical factors also determined voting patterns at the local level. Lower-class districts, such as Eslamshahr in the suburbs south of Tehran, or Mobarakeh, where the steel works are located (close to Isfahan), cast many more ballots for the reformist candidate than did the inhabitants of big cities. The abstention rate was also higher in metropolitan areas (26% in Tehran), even though some opponents of the Islamic Republic cast their ballots for the first time, in hope of a radical change in politics.

The vote for Nateq Nuri, a powerful politician (who garnered a quarter of the vote) was understandably higher in his home province, Mazandaran, (84% in Nur district). But it was astonishingly high in the province of Lorestan where the turnout rate was more than 100% in some areas. Although, under the electoral law, voters may vote wherever they want, it is unlikely that thousands of inhabitants from Isfahan or other nearby areas went to a poll two hundred kilometers away. This local electoral fraud did not alter the election's outcome; but it does remind us of threats to the sincerity of elections in Iran.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

This map was drawn by using information from various sources, in particular the daily press. As a consequence, inaccuracies, though possible, do not cast doubt on the results in the main.

The results are now available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton): <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2005-presidential-election>

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Cartographer(s)

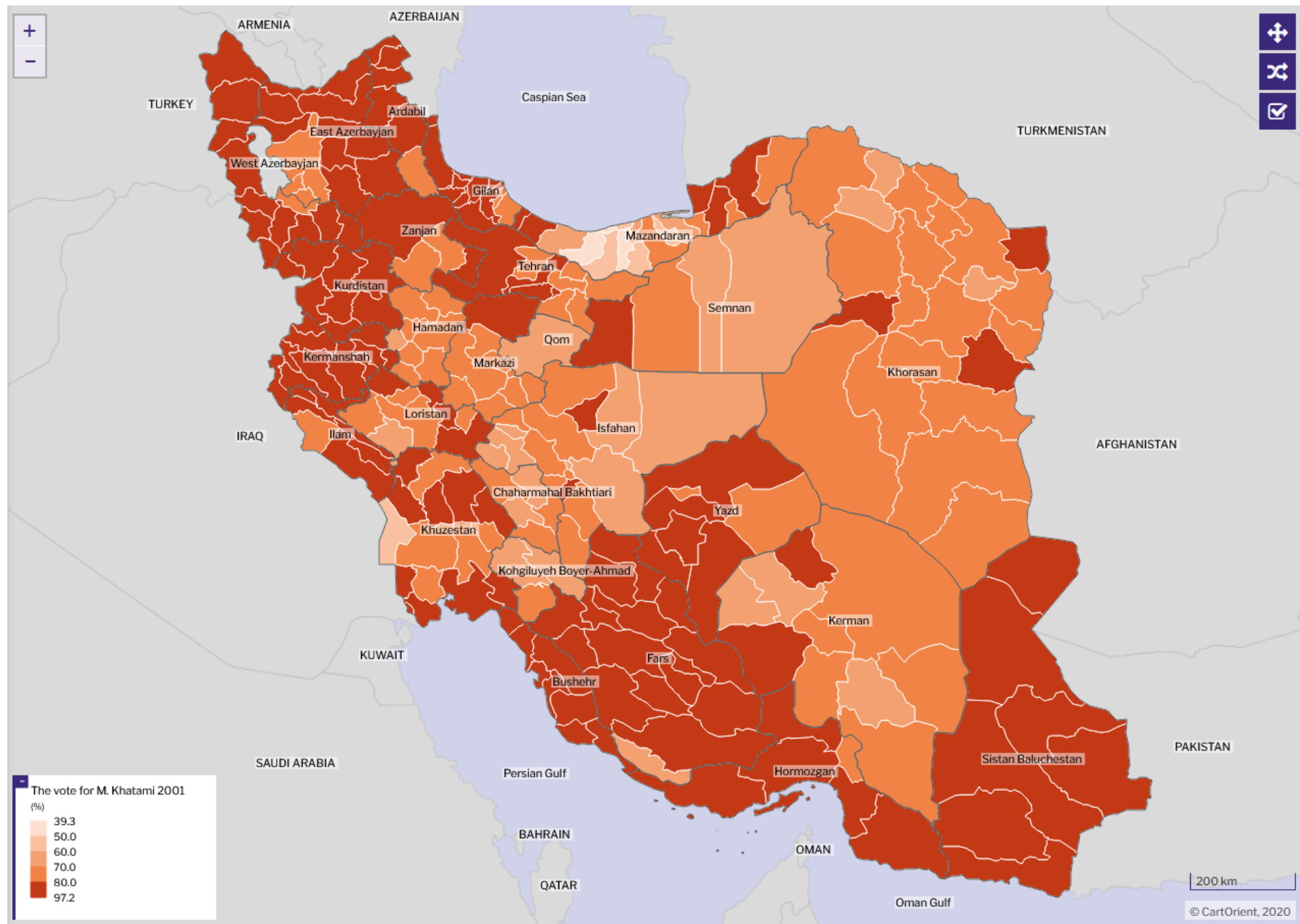
Emmanuel Giraudet, cartographer, research associate, CNRS, Mondes iranien et indien, Paris, France
 Bernard Hourcade, geographer, senior researcher emeritus, CNRS, Mondes iranien et indien, Paris, France

Related map(s)

Election présidentielle en Iran - 1980. Taux de participation pour l'élection d'Abol-Hassan Banisadr (régions, 1980)
 Election présidentielle en Iran - octobre 1981. Taux de participation pour l'élection d'Ali Khamenei (régions, 1981)
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The 2001 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 2001)

Bernard Hourcade

Elected for a first term in 1997, Mohammad Khatami was reelected on 8 June 2001 as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 78.9% of the vote in the first round of elections but with a drop in voter turnout. The percentage who did not go to the polls rose from 20.1% in 1997 to 33.2% in 2001. This might be explained by the disappointment of potential voters who had hoped for radical reforms or, even more, were disappointed by the lack of serious contenders. The Guardian Council of the Constitution retained ten candidates out of the 814 applicants; but no opponent of the incumbent had the ability or ambition to win, which would have prevented the reelection of a still very popular reform president.

Khatami thus won a higher percentage of the vote (78.9%) than for his first term (69.1%). The stakes were not very high in this election, despite the opposition of conservatives such as Ahmad Tavakoli who, backed by the Islamic Coalition, only obtained 16% of the vote. Some errors and cases of fraud at the local level were signaled, but such marginal irregularities did not affect the outcome.

Under chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected once. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with an eventual second round of voting. All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (article 118). Since 1981, this council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively; and the results, notwithstanding some incoherent returns, clearly reflect the country’s social, cultural and political geography (Buchta, 1999).

Results of the 2001 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Vote	%
Mohammad Khatami	21 656 476	78,9
Ahmad Tavakoli	4 387 112	16,0
Ali Shamkhani	737 051	2,7
Abdollah Jassbi	259 759	0,9
Hassan Ghafourifard	129 155	0,5
Mansour Razavi	114 616	0,4
Shahabedin Sadr	60 546	0,2
Ali Fallahian	55 225	0,2
Mostafa Hashemitaba	27 949	0,1
Mahmoud Kashani	23 766	0,1
Total	27 451 655	100,0

A national consensus

Despite both the economic problems due to the drop in the price of oil and the increasingly radical opposition of conservative forces (headed by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei), who inveigh against “Western cultural aggression”, the momentum of the “reformers” organized in the Second of Khordad Movement (the date of Khatami’s

first election in 1997) has grown stronger and spread throughout the country. This movement wants to open Iran to international influences (Clawson, 1997, Tazmini, 2012).

Voting patterns by district (*shahrestān*) provide evidence of the support nationwide for the incumbent. Khatami failed to win an absolute majority in but three districts in Mazandaran Province, where Ahmad Tavakoli was the frontrunner. This local factor also stands out in the vote for Ali Shamkhani, a former admiral who won a significant share of votes in his home province (Khuzestan: 12% of the vote in Ahvaz and 25% in Shidehgan), where he was appreciated as a governor. Support for President Khatami was massive in Yazd, his province of origin, whereas other areas in the center of the country voted moderately in his favor (50%-70%), in particular Qom, where the conservative clergy still wields power. An anecdote: the district of Meybod in the center of Iran voted less than neighboring areas for Mohammad Khatami since it is a traditional rival of Ardakan, where the incumbent president was born.

Regional and religious differences

Local cultural factors are seen to play another role when we turn attention to voting patterns by religion (in areas with a Sunnite population). As in 1997, the districts with a strong Sunnite majority (of Kurds, Baluchi, Turkmen, Arabs in Hormozgan Province, the Sarakhs area in northern Khorasan, and the Talysh in Gilan Province) voted almost unanimously — often more than 90% — for the reform president, who, during his first term, took measures in favor of the economic development of these peripheral areas and of equality between Sunnites and Shiites. This vote for reforms and for equality regardless of religion has to be qualified however. In effect, many voters abstain or even boycott elections when ethnic or regionalist issues are compounded with the Sunnite religious factor. This is especially so in Kurdish provinces, where an opinion in favor of autonomy and opposed to central authorities in Tehran persists. In Kurdistan Province, turnout only amounted to 53.5%. Overall however, voting patterns in 2001 provide evidence that the ethnic factor did not weigh very much nationwide. For instance, Shiite Arabs on the Khuzestan plain voted for Khatami in proportions comparable with the rest of the country (70%-85%), whereas Sunnite Arabs along the Persian Gulf to the west of Bandar Abbas voted more than 90% for the president.

Geographical voting patterns are very stable when compared with the results of the 1997 presidential election. The only noteworthy shifts can be set down to local factors: a much stronger vote for Khatami in Mazandaran, which Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, Khatami's major opponent in 1997, had won. Compared with Nateq-Nuri who, well known in the province, had a solid base there, Ahmad Tavakoli, who also came from this province, did not profit as much from his local roots in 2001. In Lorestan Province where widespread voting fraud had pushed Khatami onto the sidelines in 1997, the incumbent president obtained a result that better reflected the representation of political forces.

Given the national consensus in favor of Khatami and the lack of well-known opponents with a network capable of giving them the hope of winning, the 2001 election results are of little help for describing provinces in Iran as being either conservative or reformist. In the uncertain context of Iranian politics, stable geographical voting patterns and political behaviors might either not exist or be undetectable. Given the national consensus in favor of Khatami and the lack of well-known opponents with a network capable of giving them the hope of winning, the 2001 election results are of little help for describing provinces in Iran as being either conservative or reformist. In the uncertain context of Iranian politics, stable geographical voting patterns and political behaviors might either not exist or be undetectable.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

This map was drawn by using information from various sources, in particular the daily press. Data at the district level (*shahrestan*) have been collected in various ways. As a consequence, inaccuracies, though possible, do not cast doubt on the results in the main.

The results are now available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton): <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2005-presidential-election>

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Cartographer(s)

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Related map(s)

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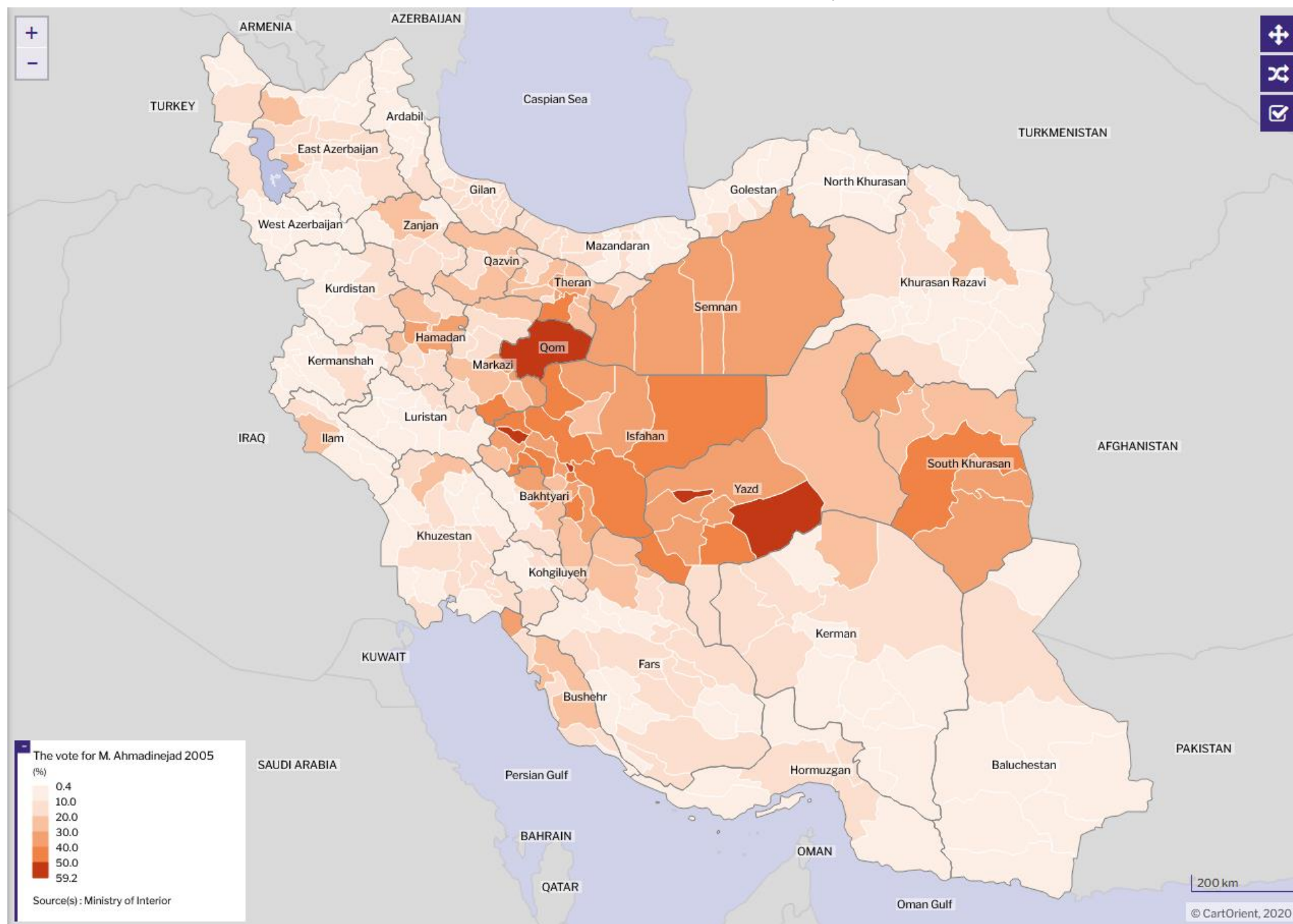
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URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/101/?lang=en>

The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)



The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was necessary to organize as required a second round for the 2005 presidential election. This resulted on 24 June in the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (61.7% of the votes cast) over Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafсанджани. During the first round held a week earlier, five candidates had won more than 10% of the vote.

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, mayor of Tehran since 2003, a little-known machine politician lacking direct ties with the Pasdaran elite (Guardians of the Revolution) or the Shiite clergy, came as a surprise. Among his opponents were top-ranking politicians who had very powerful networks of influence, such as the former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafсанджани or the former president of parliament Mehdi Karroubi. However Ahmadinejad's victory should not be set down to the rivalry between various factions or to electoral fraud. It also reflected the emergence of a popular/populist current in politics with solid social roots: this candidate managed to combine the advantages of a new image with support from a traditionally strong conservative base in central Iran.

By propelling to the top a person of humble origins (blacksmith's son) who had been neither of the clergy nor of the Guardians of the Revolution — the forces that virtually control politics in the country — this presidential election came at just the right time to re-legitimize the Islamic Republic. Ahmadinejad's victory reflected the Islamic Revolution's social dimension, as advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian power-holders would have a hard time managing this exceptional political "casting".

Results of the 2005 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	1 st round	%	2 nd round	%
Ali- Akbar Hashemi- Rafсанджани	6 211 937	21,1	10 046 701	35,9
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5 711 696	19,4	17 284 782	61,7
Mehdi Karroubi	5 070 114	17,2	-	-
Mostafa Mo'in	4 095 827	13,9	-	-
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4 083 951	13,9	-	-
Ali Larijani	1 713 810	5,8	-	-
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1 288 640	4,4	-	-
Blanks and spoils ballots	1 224 882	4,2	663 770	2,4
Total	29 400 857	100,0	27 995 253	100,0

The map depicts by district the vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the first round. There were 325 districts, *sharestan*, at the time. The data used were published by the Ministry of the Interior.

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be re-elected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). Before an electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

A populist more than a parochial vote

The first significant fact about this election is that elections now have durable roots in Iranian politics. True, the Guardian Council (Shurā-ye nehgābān) eliminates most candidates before the election. Out of 1014 candidates in 2005, only eight were allowed to run; and one of them (Mohsen Rezaie) withdrew before election day. Nonetheless, Iranians had obviously become republicans. Evidence of this was the turnout (62.8%) and the genuine political debate that took place between the seven candidates, all of whom were historical figures in the Islamic Republic.

Opposing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were:

- Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, a former president of parliament and then of the Republic (1989-1997). This pragmatist, who had been in charge of reconstruction following the Iran-Iraq War, was the favorite in pre-election polls.
- Mehdi Karroubi, a clergyman from Lorestan, who had long been president of the Iranian parliament.
- Mostafa Moeen, born in Najafabad (near Isfahan), who had been minister of Science, Research and Technology. Though not well known, he was a respected figure among the reformers grouped around the previous president, Mohammad Khatami.
- Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, from Mashad, a former general of the Guardians of the Revolution, commander of the national police and head of Khatam overall Ambya (the financial trust of the Guardians of the Revolution).
- Ali Larijani, also from the ranks of the Guardians of the Revolution, who had held

several official positions. He was the son of deceased Ayatollah Amoli, a highly respected religious leader in his home province of Mazandaran.

— Mohsen Mehralizadeh, from the province of Azerbaijan, was less well known than all the other candidates (save in sports where people had a high opinion of him).

The equilibrium between these candidates, the weight of parochialism and the consequent scattering of the vote produced hackneyed geographical voting patterns. Each of the seven candidates, even those with very small scores nationwide, won a majority in at least one province, usually his home province: Ali Larijani in Mazandaran, Mohsen Mehralizadeh in Azerbaijan, Mehdi Karroubi in areas with a Lori population (often nomads) and Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf in Khorasan. The geography of the vote for Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Mostafa Moeen and, above all, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — the three candidates had a clear political identity and national audience — was more varied. For instance, there was no clear correlation between the vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his home area (east of the capital, near Garmsar).

The conservative vote of central Iran, Persian and Shiite

When analyzing the electoral map, notice the conservative vote in the center of the country, on the Iranian plateau, the heartland of Persian, Shiite Iran. This vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad fell in line with patterns observed during previous presidential elections (Hourcade, 2006). Although Ahmadinejad did not receive more than 20% of the vote nationwide, he won more than 50% in several central provinces: Yazd (in Meybod and Bafq, where he had his highest score, 59.3%), Qom, and Isfahan (the cities of Khomeyni Shahr, Khunsar, Isfahan...). The conservative vote was also rather strong in the provinces of South Khorasan (Birjand), Hamadan, Semnan and Tehran (31.5% in the city of Tehran, 40.3% in Rey).

A clear relation exists between the image (humble, popular, pragmatic and pious) displayed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the historical and cultural characteristics of provinces in the center of Iran, factors brought to light by the geographer Xavier de Planhol (1993). The center of the Iranian plateau — the historical heartland of modern Iran since the time of the Safavid dynasty (16th century) — is structured around Shiah and the Persian culture. On the piedmonts of the Alborz and Zagros mountains, at the

edges of the big deserts (Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut), nearly everyone speaks Persian and is Shiite; and the traditional way of life was (and still is to a large extent) organized through a network of ancient cities (Kashan, Yazd, Natanz, Ardakan, Tabas, etc.), where people lived around the mosque and bazar, and that controlled surrounding villages. The 2005 election politically reflected the historical cultural opposition between central Iran and provinces on the periphery that are not Persian-speaking or are Sunni. In the districts (shahrestān) inhabited by Kurds or Baluchi for example, people did not vote for Ahmadinejad and, in some cases (as in Kurdistan), massively stayed away from the polls.

This geographical pattern of center versus periphery has been observed in several fields other than politics (Hourcade et al. 1998). However it is important to qualify it by taking account of local situations and, even more, of the influence of new social and cultural trends stemming from urbanization and education. For instance, several big cities where a majority of the population is Shiite and speaks Persian (e.g., Shiraz, Kerman and Mashhad), and certain Shiite provinces (like Azerbaijan) did not vote massively for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the first round. Iranian politics is not, therefore, determined solely by these historical and cultural factors.

The vote of revolutionary Iran?

We can hypothesize that the main reason for the localization of this conservative or “traditional” vote lies in other factors, namely the recent history of the Islamic Republic. As of the autumn of 1978, these provinces in central Iran were the first to rise up against the imperial regime, like the city of Isfahan which opposition forces controlled de facto as early as August 1977 (before the Shah was ousted). Furthermore, these provinces provided the revolutionaries who would become the officials and leaders of the Islamic Revolution, the first Guardians of the Revolution (Pasdaran) and volunteers (bassiji) during the Iran-Iraq War. Nowadays, all these “veterans” are members of the numerous Islamic or civilian associations that form a network of mutual aid and are often active in propaganda work for the regime in central Iran more than in provinces elsewhere in the country. In 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was apparently the only candidate that had relations with the grassroots (through his responsibilities in local administration and security services). He easily attracted these voters whereas the

other candidates, who wielded influence with the elite and in state institutions, did not have locally implanted networks.

Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad’s presence in the second round of elections gave rise to suspicions of electoral fraud, voiced in particular by Mehdi Karroubi. Voter turnout was low for this second round, which Ahmadinejad carried. He mustered the vote from Turkic-speaking, Shiite areas in Azerbaijan, while the Sunni provinces again opposed this “Shiite candidate” and voted for Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who was seen as the “official” candidate of the administration, clergy and business community.

The geography of this election thus confirms the importance of long-term cultural and historical factors and, too, the ever more decisive role of political trends arising out of the 1979 revolution, not to mention recent social changes that affect the whole, now massively urbanized, country.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The official results of the presidential election were published by the Ministry of the Interior for the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed in 2005. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, some data have been aggregated to adjust them to the bounds of the current administrative map with 318 districts (prior to the division of certain *shahrestan*).

The results are available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton):

<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2005-presidential-election>

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Cartographer(s)

Emmanuel Giraudet, cartographer, research associate, CNRS, Mondes iranien et indien, Paris, France

Related map(s)

The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2009)

The 2001 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 2001)

The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)

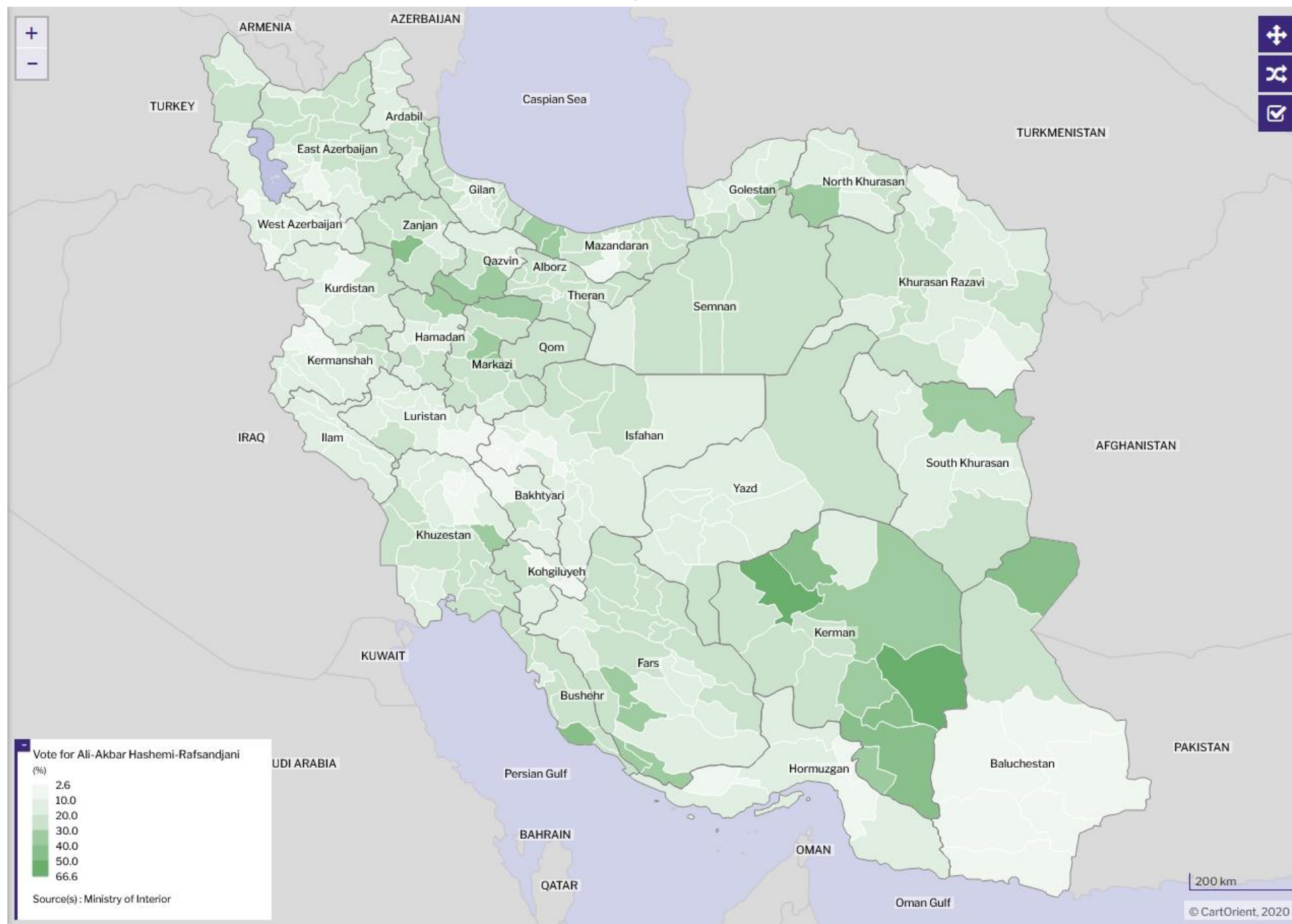
The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi (by district, 2009)

Localism and regionalism : the 2005 Iranian presidential election (by region, 2005)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)", *CartOrient*. Online since 21 February 2019.

URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/144/?lang=en>



The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first round (by district, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

For the first and, till now, only time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, no candidate received a majority in the election on 17 June 2005. A second round was, therefore, organized a week later with the two frontrunners. The expected winner, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had successively served as president of parliament (1989-1989) and president of the Republic (1989-1997), came in first but with only 21.1% of the vote. During the second round on 24 June, he would be beaten by the mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The defeat of a religious leader (hojat ol-islam) considered to be one of the country's most influential politicians came as a surprise. Born in Bahreman, Kerman Province, this former president of parliament (1981-1989) and of the republic (1989-1997) was the architect of the country's reconstruction following the war with Iraq. This pragmatic, prudent businessman and politician belonged to Ayatollah Khomeini's inner circle and seemed capable of pursuing the policy of political and economic liberalization that President Khatami had followed during his two terms of office.

Based on the data released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts the vote for Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first round of the election in the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed at the time.

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be reelected only once for a successive term. The electoral system is winner-takes-all but with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first round (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). Before an

electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 16 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets applicants and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively.

Results of the 2005 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	1 st round	%	2 nd round	%
Ali- Akbar Hashemi- Rafsandjani	6 211 937	21,1	10 046 701	35,9
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5 711 696	19,4	17 284 782	61,7
Mehdi Karroubi	5 070 114	17,2	-	-
Mostafa Mo'in	4 095 827	13,9	-	-
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4 083 951	13,9	-	-
Ali Larijani	1 713 810	5,8	-	-
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1 288 640	4,4	-	-
Blanks and spoiles ballots	1 224 882	4,2	663 770	2,4
Total	29 400 857	100,0	27 995 253	100,0

In the lead but weak

In the lead after the first round of voting with 21.1% of the vote, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani won more than 30% of the vote in only 26 districts. Outside his backyard, the province of Kerman, where he won 66.6% in Rafsandjan and 32.5% in the city of Kerman, the country's best-known politician did not receive anywhere the massive vote expected by his supporters and by most national and foreign observers.

In big cities, where Rafsanjani hoped he could count on businessmen, engineers, technicians and administrators who liked his pragmatism, he often scored better than elsewhere: 24.7% in Tehran, 28.4% in Shemiran and 26.2% in Karaj. However some big agglomerations backed other candidates. In Isfahan for instance, he carried only 13.9% of the vote. A similar trend can be observed in provinces where the traditional Shiite clergy was very powerful. Though an eminent representative of politicized Islam, Rafsanjani won only 19.3% in Mashhad and 22.4% in Qom (compared with 55.2% for Ahmadinejad).

In areas on the periphery, such as Lorestan, Kurdistan or Bandar Abbas, where voters do not speak Persian or are Sunnite and often vote for reformist candidates, Rafsanjani's score seldom amounted to more than 10%. Baluchestan is an interesting case, since the Shiite and mostly Persian-speaking area of Sistan in the north heavily voted for Rafsanjani (40.7% in Zabol) unlike the more traditional Baluchi zone in the south (3.2% in Saravan).

The geographical pattern of the vote for Rafsanjani is characterized by being local and dispersed. This territorial distribution is a characteristic shared with the "second-rank" candidates who fail to attract strong support in the big cities and in the country's political, cultural and geographic center. Rafsanjani's setback can also be set down to rivalries within his own camp, since he was seen as becoming too influential. Another factor was that Mohammad Khatami's reformist government had created conditions for real political competition between experienced candidates devoted to the Islamic Republic.

This situation also reflected a change wanted by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei,

and conservatives. The latter played an active part in organizing elections to their benefit and wanted to consolidate their power by favoring Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a new politician with popular support. "Official" backing was also lacking for Mehdi Karroubi, an active, well-known cleric who would protest the results of the first round of voting, since he claimed to have come in second instead of Ahmadinejad. The institutions that organized the election might have deemed inappropriate the prospect of a match between two clerics during the second round of the election.

This first electoral setback left lasting marks on Rafsanjani's political career. He would never win another election. He would exercise strong influence as the president of the Expediency Discernment Council (*shurā-e masle'at nezām*) and of the Assembly of Experts (*shurā-e qobregān*), but he has no longer held an executive position.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The official results of the presidential election were published by the Ministry of the Interior for the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed in 2005. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, some data have been aggregated to adjust them to the bounds of the current administrative map with 318 districts (prior to the division of certain *shahrestan*).

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Cartographer(s)

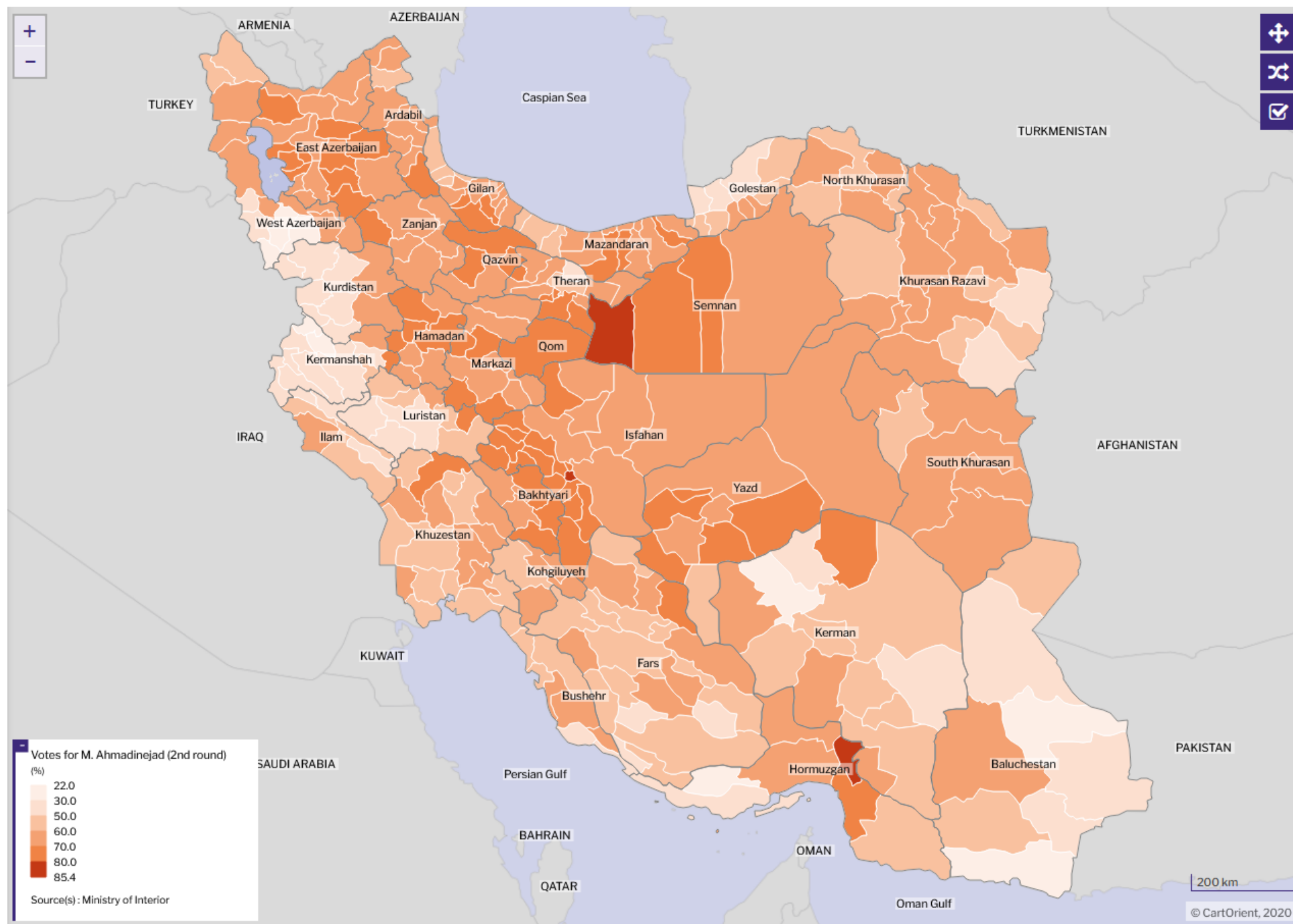
Emmanuel Giraudet, cartographer, research associate, CNRS, Mondes iranien et indien, Paris, France

Related map(s)

The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the second round (by district, 2005)
 The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)
 The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)
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The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a second round, as required under the constitution, had to be organized for the 2005 presidential election. It resulted on 24 June in the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (61.7% of the votes cast) over Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani. During the first round of voting a week earlier, five candidates had won more than 10% of the vote.

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, mayor of Tehran since 2003, a little-known machine politician lacking direct ties with the *Pasdaran* elite (Guardians of the Revolution) or the Shiite clergy, came as a surprise. Among his opponents were top-ranking officials with powerful networks of influence, such as former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani or the former president of parliament Mehdi Karroubi. However Ahmadinejad's victory should not be set down to the rivalry between various factions or to electoral fraud. It reflected the emergence of a popular/populist current in politics with solid social roots: this candidate managed to combine the advantages of a new image with support from a traditionally strong conservative base in central Iran.

By propelling to the top a person of humble origins (a blacksmith's son) who was a member neither of the clergy nor of the Guardians of the Revolution — the forces that virtually control politics in the country — this presidential election came at just the right time to endow the Islamic Republic with fresh legitimacy. Ahmadinejad's victory reflected the Islamic Revolution's social dimension, as advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian power-holders would have a hard time managing this exceptional political "casting".

The map depicts by district the vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round. There were 325 districts, *sharestan*, at the time. The data used were published by the Ministry of the Interior.

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The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively.

An unexpected victory

After the surprising results from the first round of voting, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad nearly received as many votes as Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani, a powerful, experienced candidate (19.4% vs. 21.1% of the vote), the second round yielded a bigger surprise: the mayor of Tehran overwhelmingly carried the election. This shock wave forced political scientists to modify their views of Iranian politics and of the place of the clergy and the ruling class close to Ayatollah Khomeini.

This election, organized by the government of President Mohamad Khatami, was the first time that results were released by district (*shahrestan*). Even though the election was criticized as being rigged, in particular by Mehdi Karroubi, who officially came in third in the first round (17.2% of the vote), the results shed light on the actual lineup of political forces in the country. Authorities might have wanted to avoid having two well-known religious leaders face each other in the second round, since this would have exposed a political fracture within the clergy, something that official declarations have always tried to minimize.

A nationwide victory

The vote during the first round of this election revealed a sharp contrast between the center of the country (Persian-speaking, Shiite, and conservative), which supported Ahmadinejad, and the periphery (often Sunni and speaking languages other than Persian) where the other candidates benefitted from local support in their home provinces. Voting patterns during the second round reproduced this center-periphery gradient but less markedly so. Ahmadinejad broadened his voter base by reaching out to the whole country: he won a majority everywhere save in the provinces with a large Sunni population (notably Kurdistan and Baluchestan).

Ahmadinejad gained more votes everywhere from the first to the second round of this presidential election, in the central provinces as well as on the periphery. In fact, the share of his vote increased even more in peripheral areas (e.g., more than 10,000% in Saravan and Shahbaz in Baluchestan). He held an advantage over Rafsandjani: most voters wanted to keep a member of the clergy from coming back to power, in particular someone known for his leading role in politics since the revolution and his close ties with business circles. In some districts, voting fraud probably bloated Ahmadinejad's score.

Although voter turnout lowered during the second round (59.8% compared with 62.8% in the first round), Ahmadinejad won nearly twelve million more votes, whereas his opponent only won four million more. Rather than a success for Ahmadinejad, this election was a failure for the front-runner, Rafsandjani.

A vote by a revolutionary, popular Iran?

In 2005, Ahmadinejad was the only candidate who was close to the lower classes who had lent decisive support to the revolution in 1979 and felt that they had been shunned during the period of reconstruction following the Iran-Irak War — when Rafsandjani served as president (1989-1997) — and during the two terms of cultural opening under the reformer president Mohamad Khatami (1997-2005).

In 2009, Ahmadinejad would be reelected president with more than 60% of the vote after a single round of voting. However the 2009 election, decried as rigged, triggered massive protests in the streets, thus revealing a widespread discontent that contrasted with the hopes aroused within the lower classes by his election in 2005.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

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Cartographer(s)

Emmanuel Giraudet, cartographer, research associate, CNRS, Mondes iranien et indien, Paris, France

Related map(s)

The 2005 Iranian presidential election. The shift in the vote for Ahmadinejad from the first to the second round (by district, 2005)

The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)

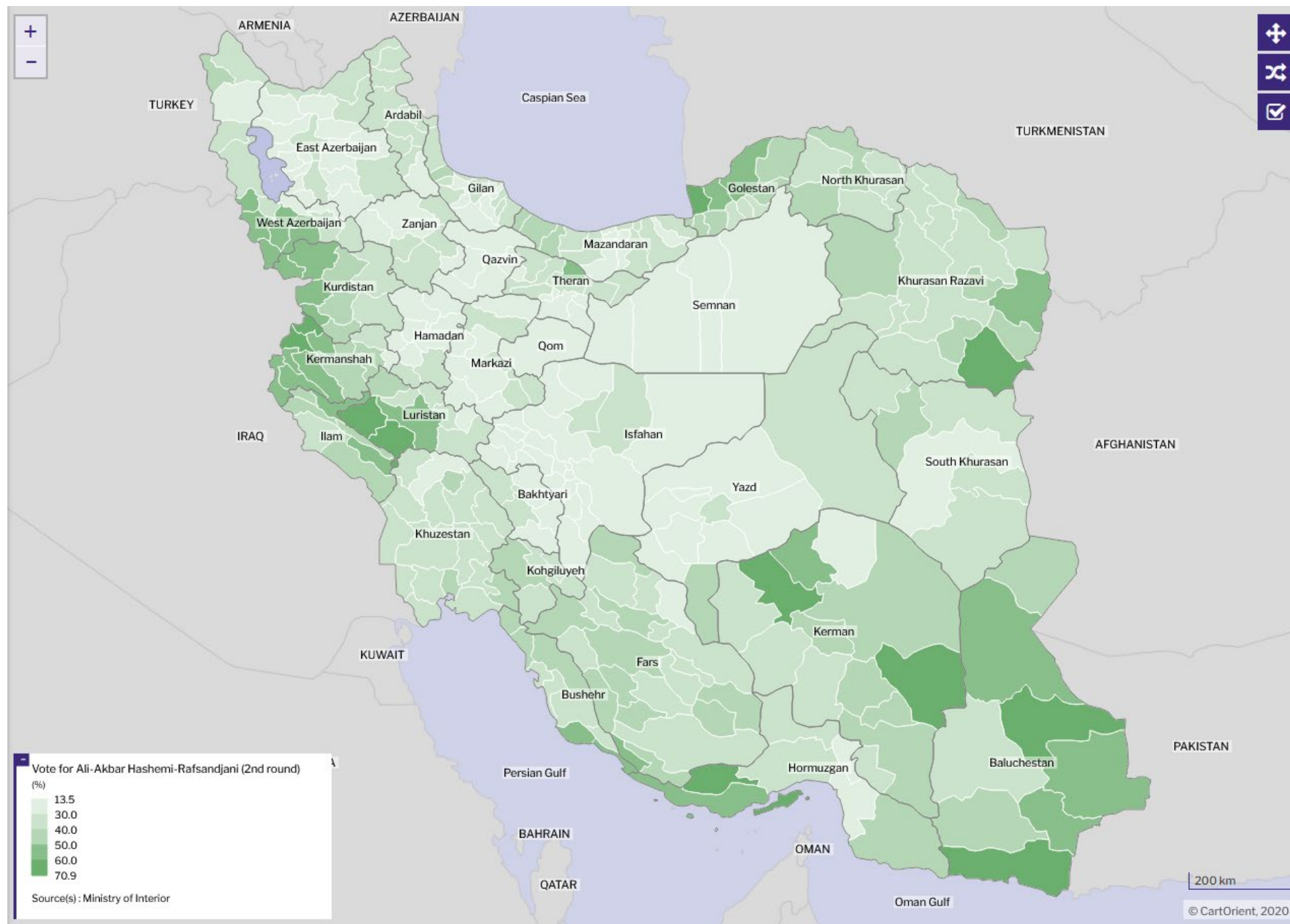
The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2009)

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Electronic reference

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The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the second round (by district, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

For the first (and till now only) time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, no candidate (out of the five running) was elected president following the first round of voting. Therefore, a second round was organized on 24 June 2005. This presidential election resulted in the unexpected victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, mayor of Tehran, and a definite defeat for the front-runner, Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The defeat of a religious leader (*hojat ol-eslam*) considered to be one of the country's most influential politicians came as a surprise. Born in Bahreman, Kerman Province, this former president of parliament (1981-1989) and of the republic (1989-1997) was the architect of the country's reconstruction following the war with Iraq. This pragmatic, prudent businessman and politician belonged to Ayatollah Khomeini's inner circle and seemed capable of pursuing the policy of political and economic liberalization that President Khatami had followed during his two terms of office.

Instead, the winner was — by a wide margin — Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This man of humble origins, mayor of Tehran since 2003 and an engineer by education, owed his social and political advancement to the new regime. Though belonging to neither the clergy nor the Guardians of the Revolution, Ahmadinejad represented a traditional, popular form of Islam. His victory kept an outstanding clergyman, who had been a major player in politics since the revolution and had very close ties with business circles, from returning to power.

Based on data from the Ministry of the Interior, the map shows the percentage of votes for Rafsanjani during the second round in the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed at the time.

Results of the 2005 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	1st round	%	2nd round	%
Ali- Akbar Hashemi- Rafsandjani	6 211 937	21,1	10 046 701	35,9
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5 711 696	19,4	17 284 782	61,7
Mahdi Karroubi	5 070 114	17,2	-	-
Mostafa Mo'in	4 095 827	13,9	-	-
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4 083 951	13,9	-	-
Ali Larijani	1 713 810	5,8	-	-
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1 288 640	4,4	-	-
Blanks and spoiles ballots	1 224 882	4,2	663 770	2,4
Total	29 400 857	100,0	27 995 253	100,0

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be re-elected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first (Chapter 9, Article 113ff).

Before an electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

An unexpected loss

Though the front-runner in the first round with 21.1% of the vote, Rafsanjani won only 35.9% during the second round. According to the official results, he attracted only four million more voters, whereas Ahmadinejad increased his score between the two rounds by nearly twelve million. However the turnout rate was lower during the second round: 62.8% vs. 59.8%.

Rafsanjani carried a majority only in 41 districts (out of 325), far too short to win. His best scores were in the peripheral provinces, in non-Persian-speaking or non-Shiite areas, where, for political reasons, most voters preferred a Shiite religious leader known for his pragmatism and attachment to political and economic liberalization rather than an engineer known for his religious conservatism. Such was the case in districts in Baluchestan and Kurdistan. As normally happens during elections, Rafsanjani also received a high number of votes (69.6%) in his home district (Rafsanjan).

Nonetheless, the incumbent failed to carry provinces in central Iran, including most cities there. He only received 25% of the vote in Qom and 28% in Isfahan. Although his percentage of the vote in Shiraz (42.5%) was higher than his national average, most cities supported his rival, the mayor of Tehran. In Mashhad and Tabriz, the score of the pragmatic Rafsanjani barely amounted to more than 30%. In Tehran, where his score was higher than his national average (38.9% vs. 35.9%) thanks to support from the middle classes, the results diverged from neighborhood to neighborhood: Shemiran, a well-off district north of Tehran, cast 51.2% of its ballots for Rafsanjani, whereas Rey, a working-class district south of the capital, only gave 20% of its votes to the incumbent.

On the national scale, the geographical voting patterns in favor of Rafsanjani show up as small patches compared with the support for Ahmadinejad, whose score in nearly all provinces rose between the two rounds and who rallied provinces in the center of the country.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior released the official results of the presidential election for the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed in 2005. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, some data have been aggregated to adjust them to the bounds of the administrative map with 318 districts (prior to the division of certain *shahrestan*).

The results are available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton):

<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2005-presidential-election>.

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Related map(s)

The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first round (by district, 2005)

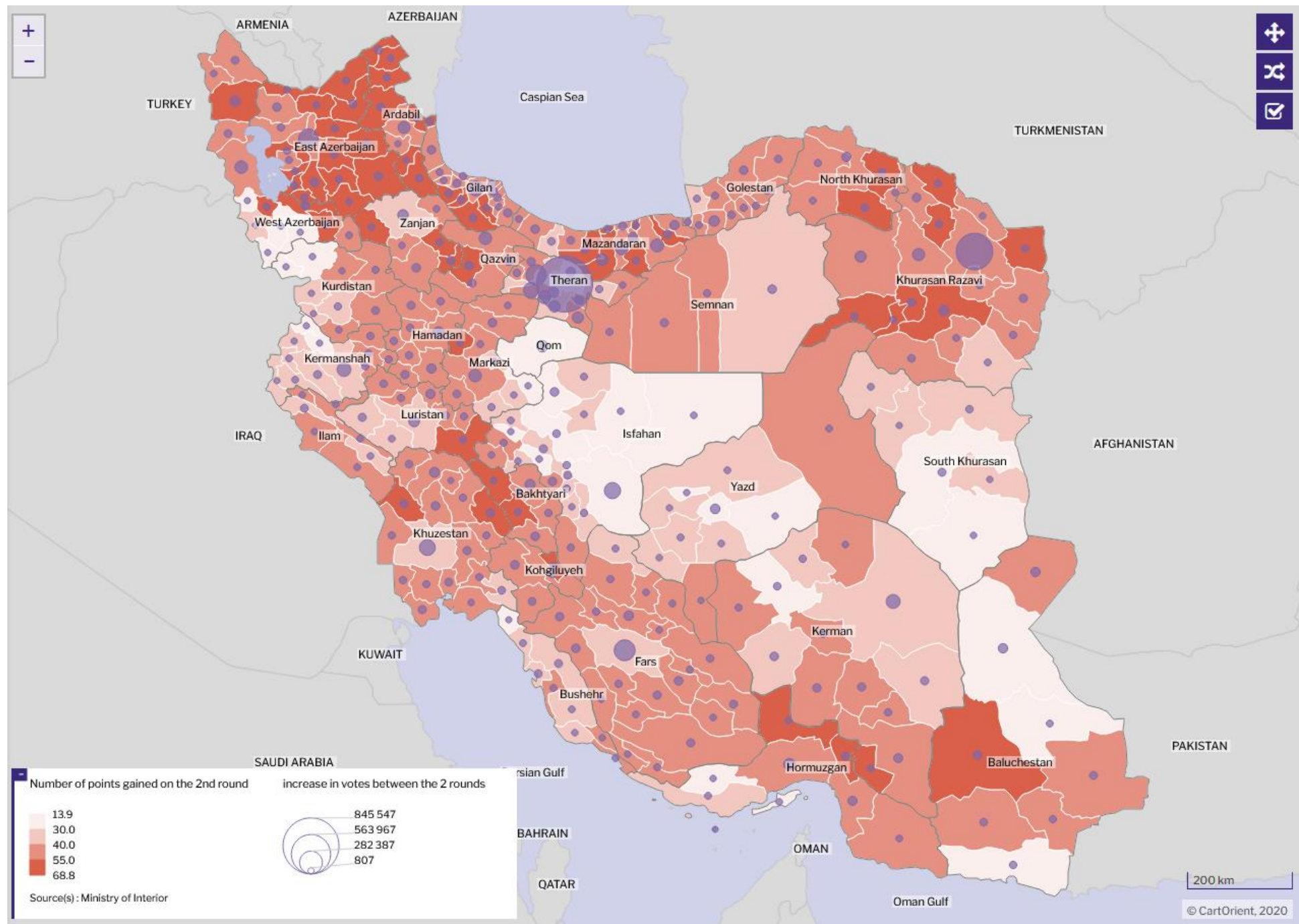
The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)

The 1993 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by province, 1993)

The 1989 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (by region, 1989)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the second round (by district, 2005)", *CartOrient*. Online since 08 November 2019. URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/165/?lang=en>



The 2005 Iranian presidential election. The shift in the vote for Ahmadinejad from the first to the second round (by district, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a second round, as required under the constitution, had to be organized for the 2005 presidential election. It resulted on 24 June in the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (61.7% of the votes cast) over Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani. During the first round of voting a week earlier, five candidates had won more than 10% of the vote.

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, mayor of Tehran since 2003, a little-known machine politician lacking direct ties with the *Pasdaran* elite (Guardians of the Revolution) or the Shiite clergy, came as a surprise. Among his opponents were top-ranking officials with powerful networks of influence, such as former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani or the former president of parliament Mehdi Karroubi. However Ahmadinejad's victory should not be set down to the rivalry between various factions or to electoral fraud. It reflected the emergence of a popular/populist current in politics with solid social roots: this candidate managed to combine the advantages of a new image with support from a traditionally strong conservative base in central Iran.

By propelling to the top a person of humble origins (a blacksmith's son) who was a member neither of the clergy nor of the Guardians of the Revolution — the forces that virtually control politics in the country — this presidential election came at just the right time to endow the Islamic Republic with fresh legitimacy. Ahmadinejad's victory reflected the Islamic Revolution's social dimension, as advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian power-holders would have a hard time managing this exceptional political "casting".

Based on the data released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts the shift in the vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from the first to the second round of the election

(in number of votes and percentage) in the 325 districts (*shahrestān*) that existed at the time. Based on the data released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map depicts the percentage increase in the number of votes for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from the first to the second round of the election in the 325 districts (*shahrestān*) that existed at the time.

Results of the 2005 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	1 st round	%	2 nd round	%
Ali- Akbar Hashemi- Rafsandjani	6 211 937	21,1	10 046 701	35,9
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5 711 696	19,4	17 284 782	61,7
Mehdi Karroubi	5 070 114	17,2	-	-
Mostafa Mo'in	4 095 827	13,9	-	-
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4 083 951	13,9	-	-
Ali Larijani	1 713 810	5,8	-	-
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1 288 640	4,4	-	-
Blanks and spoiles ballots	1 224 882	4,2	663 770	2,4
Total	29 400 857	100,0	27 995 253	100,0

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of four years and may be reelected once. The electoral system is

winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first round (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). Before an electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 16 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively.

An unexpected victory

After the surprising results from the first round of voting, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad nearly received as many votes Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani, a powerful, experienced candidate (19.4% vs. 21.1% of the vote), the second round yielded a bigger surprise: the mayor of Tehran overwhelmingly carried the election. This shock wave forced political scientists to modify their views of Iranian politics and of the place of the clergy and the ruling class close to Ayatollah Khomeini.

This election, organized by the government of President Mohamad Khatami, was the first time that results were released by district (shahrestan). Even though the election was criticized as being rigged, in particular by Mehdi Karroubi, who officially came in third in the first round (17.2% of the vote), the results shed light on the actual lineup of political forces in the country. Authorities might have wanted to avoid having two well-known religious leaders face each other in the second round, since this would have exposed a political fracture within the clergy, something that official declarations have always tried to minimize.

A nationwide victory

The vote during the first round of this election revealed a sharp contrast between the center of the country (Persian-speaking, Shiite, and conservative), which supported Ahmadinejad, and the periphery (often Sunni and speaking languages other than Persian) where the other candidates benefitted from local support in their home

provinces. Voting patterns during the second round reproduced this center-periphery gradient but less markedly so. Ahmadinejad broadened his voter base by reaching out to the whole country: he won a majority everywhere save in the provinces with a large Sunni population (notably Kurdistan and Baluchestan).

Ahmadinejad gained more votes everywhere from the first to the second round of this presidential election, in the central provinces as well as on the periphery. In fact, the share of his vote increased even more in peripheral areas (Azerbaijan, Baluchestan). He held an advantage over Rafsandjani: most voters wanted to keep a member of the clergy from coming back to power, in particular someone known for his leading role in politics since the revolution and his close ties with business circles. In some districts, voting fraud probably bloated Ahmadinejad’s score.

Although voter turnout lowered during the second round (59.8% compared with 62.8% in the first round), Ahmadinejad won nearly twelve million more votes, whereas his opponent only won four million more. Rather than a success for Ahmadinejad, this election was a failure for the front-runner, Rafsandjani.

A vote by a revolutionary, popular Iran?

In 2005, Ahmadinejad was the only candidate who was close to the lower classes who had lent decisive support to the revolution in 1979 and felt that they had been shunned during the period of reconstruction following the Iran-Iraq War — when Rafsandjani served as president (1989-1997) — and during the two terms of cultural opening under the reformer president Mohamad Khatami (1997-2005).

In 2009, Ahmadinejad would be reelected president with more than 60% of the vote after a single round of voting. However the 2009 election, decried as rigged, triggered massive protests in the streets, thus revealing a widespread discontent that contrasted with the hopes aroused within the lower classes by his election in 2005.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The official results of the presidential election were published by the Ministry of the Interior for the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed in 2005. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, some data have been aggregated to adjust them to the bounds of the current administrative map with 318 districts (prior to the division of certain *shahrestan*).

The results are available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton):

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Cartographer(s)

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Related map(s)

The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)

The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2009)

The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi (by district, 2009)

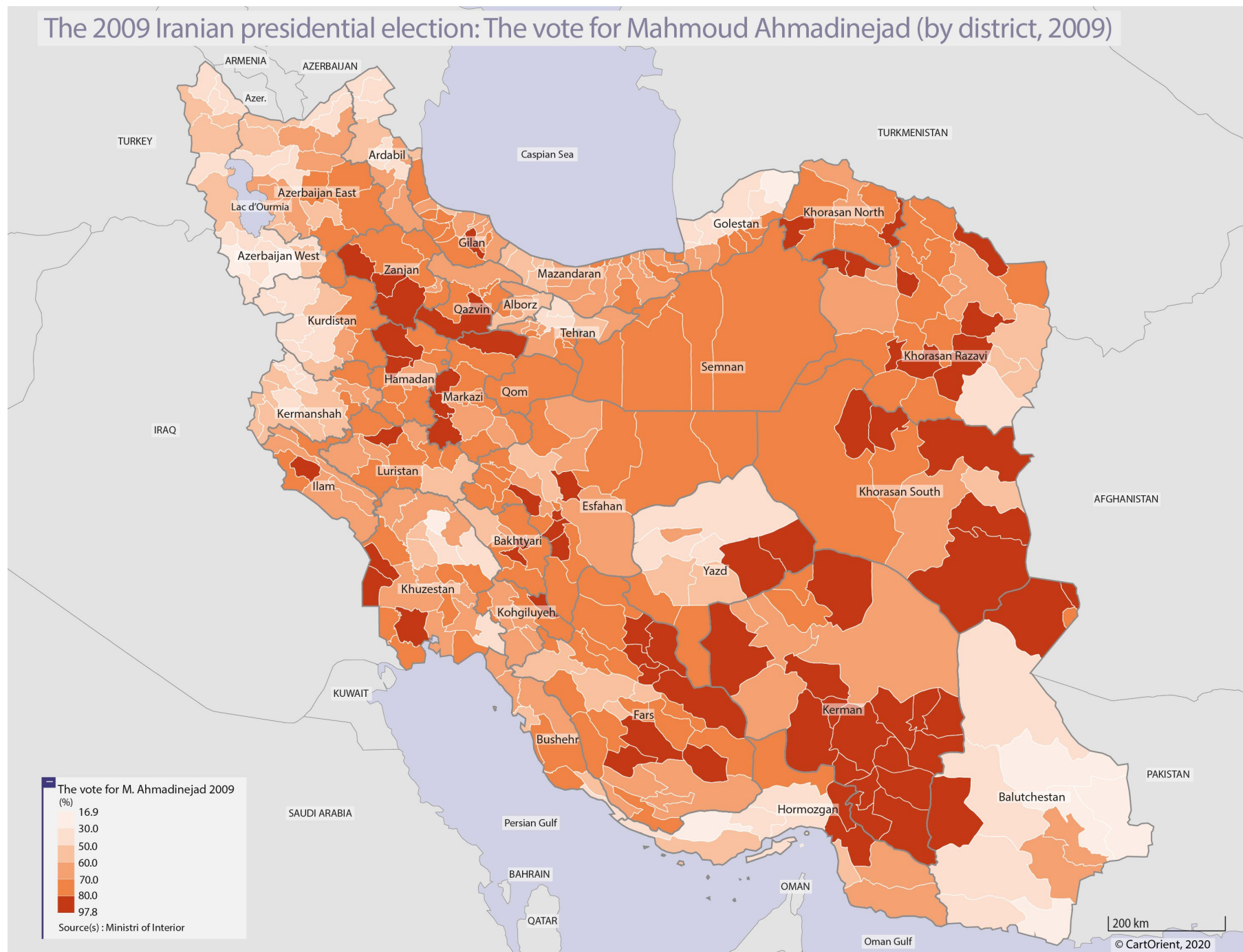
The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)

The 2001 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 2001)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The 2005 Iranian presidential election. The shift in the vote for Ahmadinejad from the first to the second round (by district, 2005)", *CartOrient*. Online since 28 September 2019.

URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/156/?lang=en>



The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2009)

Bernard Hourcade

The incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the presidential election of 12 June 2009 with 62.6% of the vote. This date has marked the history of elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran since, for the first time after the 1979 Revolution, mass demonstrations in Tehran and other big metropolitan areas protested the results, and were harshly repressed. The results of previous elections had always been accepted without strife. Never before had the opposition between two candidates been evident after the publication of the results. The formal consensus was tarnished that preserved the image of the Islamic Republic's unity and the Supreme Leader's power, thus making a deep, lasting cleavage in politics and the ruling classes. The two leaders of the protest, Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, were still under house arrest in 2018; and Mohammad Khatami, the former reformist president, was still not allowed to speak in public.

Results of the 2009 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Votes	%
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	24 527 516	62,63
Mir Hossein Moussavi	13 216 411	33,75
Mohsen Rezaei	678 240	1,73
Mehdi Karroubi	333 635	0,85
Blank and spoiled ballots	409 389	1,05
Total	39 165 191	100,0

The map uses the data published by the Ministry of the Interior to depict the votes won by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by district (*shahrestān*).

An election with direct universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of four years and may be reelected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first round (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). All Iranians, both men and women over 18 years old may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this council itself selects the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively.

Ahmadinejad reelected

Once the Guardian Council of the Constitution had made its pick out of the 485 candidates who wanted to run for president, only the four listed in the table hereafter were allowed to stand for election.

Mehdi Karroubi, who had won 17.2% of the vote when he ran for president in 2005, was a well-known religious leader very involved in politics under the Islamic Republic. He had served, for a long time, as president of the parliament. In 2009, he was defending a moderate reformist line in politics.

Mir Hossein Moussavi had served as prime minister from 1981 till 1989 — during the very hard period of the Iran-Iraq War when Ali Khamenei was president of the Republic. In 2009, he advocated a political opening, both national and international.

Mohsen Rezaei, who had been general and then head of the Guardians of the

Revolution from 1980 to 1997, was a conservative known for his pragmatism and affiliations with the Islamic Republic.

Officially, the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a populist and conservative, was reelected in the first round of elections with 62.6% of the vote versus 33.8% for Mir Hossein Moussavi, 0.9% for Mehdi Karroubi and 1.7% for Mohsen Rezaei. Surprisingly the losing candidates, though being well-known, tallied a very small share of the vote. The turnout rate was unusually high (85%), while the total number of voters (46,199,997) was slightly lower than in 2005, the age to vote having been raised from 16 to 18 in 2007.

Beyond the protest... a political rift and turning point

The demonstration organized in Tehran after the vote was the largest protest since the 1979 Revolution. These “events of 88” (1388 in the Iranian calendar) divided the class that held power since 1979. Beyond the accusations of a rigged election (“Where is my vote?”), this conflict publicly set at odds two shifting, complex currents in politics, each of which had popular support and leaders (Ansari, 2010). The “reformists” had expressed their views and organized during the two terms served by Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005); and they were now strong enough to challenge the strain of populism that had had formed into an organization during the first term served by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The “reformists”, supporting the liberalization of society and the international integration, argued that it was necessary to respond to social demands while remaining within the legal framework of the Islamic Republic, whereas the “conservatives” insisted on standing up to domestic and international pressures (Kian, 2011).

The crackdown soon quelled the protest, which was loosely organized as the “Green Movement”. Mainly present in Tehran and big cities, this movement’s slogans went beyond protesting a rigged election; they targeted the government as well as the regime of the Islamic Republic and the power of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

There had probably been voting fraud during previous elections in Iran, but it was apparently local and did not stimulate large-scale protests. It usually would not have

changed the outcome of elections, which were often pointless when a single official candidate was standing for office during a campaign without debate in what amounted to a “consensus of fatalism”.

Abstention was often massive, for example, in 1985 (a turnout of 54.7% for the reelection of Ali Khamenei) or 1989 (54.6% for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani). Even for the first presidential election in 1980, Abolhassan Banisadr was elected with 59.9% of the vote, but the turnout was 67.4%. The political context was quite different since there were 96 official candidates, the campaign was often violent but remained competitive, and debates on political issues were very open during the months following the collapse of the monarchy. The first election to attract a huge number of voters — a turnout of 79.9% — was in 1997, which resulted in Mohammad Khatami’s upset victory. In 2005, the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the second round had not set off protests.

Despite shortcomings, elections are now a lasting part of politics in the country. The events in 2009 confirmed the new place of presidential elections in national politics.

Voting fraud and protests in 2009

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad might (and probably would) have been reelected without fraud in 2009, but only after a second round of voting. The possibility of a second round of elections seems to have been deemed risky, since, even more than in 2005, a second round would have too visibly divided the Islamic Republic’s ruling class. It would have weakened, if not the Islamic Republic, at least those who controlled it, namely the Supreme Leader and his councilors. Power-holders feared the victory of Mir Hossein Moussavi, who had long been close to Ayatollah Khomeini but was now supporting political liberalization with the backing of reformists who were nostalgic for the Khatami period. Even though Moussavi’s victory was, according to several analysts, not very probable, the fear of a deep change in politics that would be highly legitimate owing to popular support was so strong that the decision seemed to have been made to see to it that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would be reelected. This serious political mistake would tarnish the regime’s image both inside and outside the country.

Several witnesses and publications have described how voting fraud was bungled: the early announcement of the winner, incoherent local results and an astonishingly low vote for Mehdi Karroubi (Ansari, 2010, Parizi, 2010, Ladier-Fouladi, 2009, 2011). These maneuvers sparked a spontaneous “republican” revolt in defense of fair elections. The arrests of Moussavi and Karroubi along with the repression soon put an end to protests and silenced the Green Movement’s voice in public.

Unchanged geographical voting patterns?

Voting fraud altered the national results but in line with the geographical voting patterns observed during previous elections (Hourcade, 2016, 2018).

According to the official results, the populist, conservative candidate won by a wide majority in central Iran (except for Yazd province, from which a former reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, came) and in rural areas (Zanjan, Hamadan, Markazi, South Khorasan). The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was sometimes so high that fraud was suspected, especially in the province of Kerman. In this electoral stronghold of former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani, it was more than 85% in many wards.

According to the results presented by authorities, only Mahmoud Ahmadinejad obtained a result that was nationwide, whereas the other candidates, (with the relative exception of Moussavi) received a local, regional vote. Moussavi benefitted from a national backing but much less so than Ahmadinejad. He only carried: his home area of Azerbaijan, peripheral provinces where Sunnites often make up a majority (Baluchistan) and northern neighborhoods in Tehran.

The votes for Mehdi Karroubi and Mohsen Rezaei were even more geographically concentrated, in fact limited to their home provinces. Rezaei obtained respectable results in a few districts in the two provinces (Khuzestan as well as Chaharmahal-and-Bakhtiari), where nomads of the Bakhtiari tribe (of which he is a member) dwell: 62.1% in Lali, 33.2% in Masjed Soleyman, 30.1% in Izeh. Karroubi had noticeable support (more than 8%) only in Lorestan, his home province. Aligudarz was the only city where his result (21.8%) reflected his popularity. This suggests that voting fraud affected his

results more than Moussavi’s.

Despite the questionable official results, a geographical analysis of the vote shows that Moussavi’s candidacy struck a responsive chord in Tehran, especially in neighborhoods in the north and center where voters have a high level of income and education: 62.8% in Shemiran, 51.8% in the municipality of Tehran, and 41.9% in Karaj, a large middle-class suburb. In contrast, the incumbent president had a higher score in big cities in the provinces, except for Tabriz (49.7%) and a few working-class suburbs south of Tehran (61.7% in Eslamshahr, 64.7% in Rey, 71.7% in Robat-Karim). This situation might account for the size of the protests in the capital and for the Green Movement’s failure nationwide.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior published the official results of the 2009 presidential election for the 366 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed at the time. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, the data have been adapted to the administrative map of the 2011 census, which has 394 *shahrestan*, fourteen districts having been divided between 2009 and 2011. These new districts were assigned the score of their district of origin.

The results are available on the website *Iran Data Portal*, published by the universities of Syracuse and Princeton:

<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election>

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Related map(s)

The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)

The 2001 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 2001)

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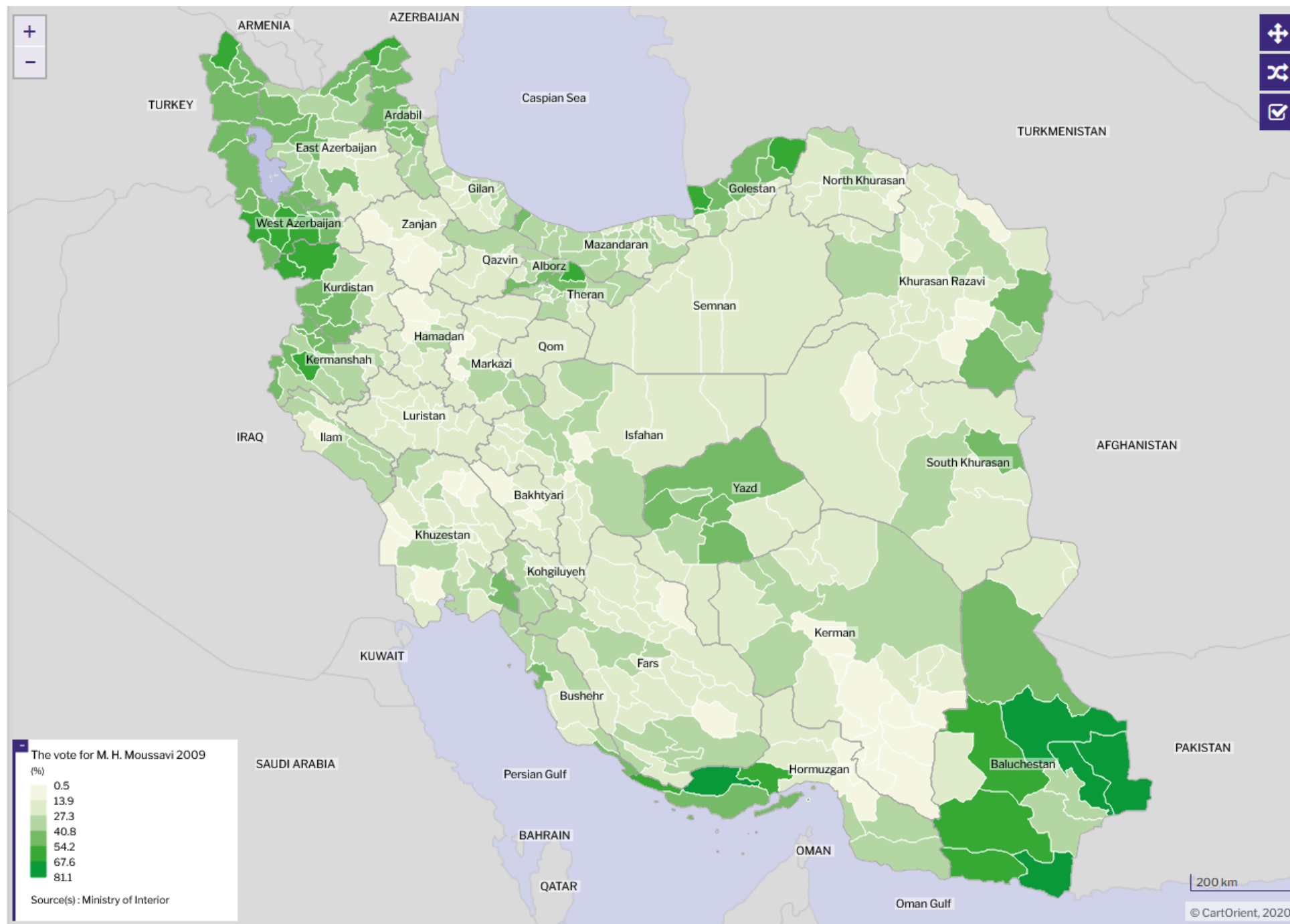
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The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi (by district, 2009)

Bernard Hourcade

Elected for a first term in 1997, Mohammad Khatami was reelected on 8 June 2001 as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 78.9% of the vote in the first round of elections but with a drop in voter turnout. The percentage who did not go to the polls rose from 20.1% in 1997 to 33.2% in 2001. This might be explained by the disappointment of potential voters who had hoped for radical reforms or, even more, were disappointed by the lack of serious contenders. The Guardian Council of the Constitution retained ten candidates out of the 814 applicants; but no opponent of the incumbent had the ability or ambition to win, which would have prevented the reelection of a still very popular reform president.

Results of the 2009 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Votes	%
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	24 527 516	62,63
Mir Hossein Moussavi	13 216 411	33,75
Mohsen Rezaei	678 240	1,73
Mehdi Karroubi	333 635	0,85
Blank and spoiled ballots	409 389	1,05
Total	39 165 191	100,0

The map uses the data published by the Ministry of the Interior to depict the votes won by Mir Hossein Moussavi by district (*shahrestān*).

An election with direct universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Iranian president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of four years and may be reelected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first round (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). All Iranians, both men and women over 18 years old may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this council itself selects the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively.

Ahmadinejad reelected

Once the Guardian Council of the Constitution had made its pick out of the 485 candidates who wanted to run for president, only the four listed in the table hereafter were allowed to stand for election.

Mehdi Karroubi, who had won 17.2% of the vote when he ran for president in 2005, was a well-known religious leader very involved in politics under the Islamic Republic. He had served, for a long time, as president of the parliament. In 2009, he was defending a moderate reformist line in politics.

Mir Hossein Moussavi had served as prime minister from 1981 till 1989 — during the very hard period of the Iran-Iraq War when Ali Khamenei was president of the Republic. In 2009, he advocated a political opening, both national and international.

Mohsen Rezaei, who had been general and then head of the Guardians of the Revolution from 1980 to 1997, was a conservative known for his pragmatism and affiliations with the Islamic Republic.

Officially, the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a populist and conservative, was reelected in the first round of elections with 62.6% of the vote versus 33.8% for Mir Hossein Moussavi, 0.9% for Mehdi Karroubi and 1.7% for Mohsen Rezaei. Surprisingly the losing candidates, though being well-known, tallied a very small share of the vote. The turnout rate was unusually high (85%), while the total number of voters (46,199,997) was slightly lower than in 2005, the age to vote having been raised from 16 to 18 in 2007.

Beyond the protest... a political rift and turning point

The demonstration organized in Tehran after the vote was the largest protest since the 1979 Revolution. These “events of 88” (1388 in the Iranian calendar) divided the class that held power since 1979. Beyond the accusations of a rigged election (“Where is my vote?”), this conflict publicly set at odds two shifting, complex currents in politics, each of which had popular support and leaders (Ansari, 2010). The “reformists” had expressed their views and organized during the two terms served by Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005); and they were now strong enough to challenge the strain of populism that had had formed into an organization during the first term served by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The “reformists” argued that it was necessary to respond to social demands while remaining within the legal framework of the Islamic Republic, whereas the “conservatives” insisted on standing up to domestic and international pressures for a liberalization of society and for international integration (Kian, 2011).

The crackdown soon quelled the protest, which was loosely organized as the “Green Movement”. Mainly present in Tehran and big cities, this movement’s slogans went beyond protesting a rigged election; they targeted the government as well as the regime of the Islamic Republic and the power of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

There had probably been voting fraud during previous elections in Iran, but it was apparently local and did not stimulate large-scale protests. It usually would not have

changed the outcome of elections, which were often pointless when a single official candidate was standing for office during a campaign without debate in what amounted to a “consensus of fatalism”.

Abstention was often massive, for example, in 1985 (a turnout of 54.7% for the reelection of Ali Khamenei) or 1989 (54.6% for the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani). Even for the first presidential election in 1980, Abolhassan Banisadr was elected with 59.9% of the vote, but the turnout was 67.4%. The political context was quite different since there were 96 official candidates, the campaign was often violent but remained competitive, and debates on political issues were very open during the months following the collapse of the monarchy. The first election to attract a huge number of voters — a turnout of 79.9% — was in 1997, which resulted in Mohammad Khatami’s upset victory. In 2005, the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the second round had not set off protests.

Despite shortcomings, elections are now a lasting part of politics in the country. The events in 2009 confirmed the new place of presidential elections in national politics.

Voting fraud and protests in 2009

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad might (and probably would) have been reelected without fraud in 2009, but only after a second round of voting. The possibility of a second round of elections seems to have been deemed risky, since, even more than in 2005, a second round would have too visibly divided the Islamic Republic’s ruling class. It would have weakened, if not the Islamic Republic, at least those who controlled it, namely the Supreme Leader and his councilors. Power-holders feared the victory of Mir Hossein Moussavi, who had long been close to Ayatollah Khomeini but was now supporting political liberalization with the backing of reformists who were nostalgic for the Khatami period. Even though Moussavi’s victory was, according to several analysts, not very probable, the fear of a deep change in politics that would be highly legitimate owing to popular support was so strong that the decision seemed to have been made to see to it that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would be reelected. This serious political mistake would tarnish the regime’s image both inside and outside the country.

Several witnesses and publications have described how voting fraud was bungled: the early announcement of the winner, incoherent local results and an astonishingly low vote for Mehdi Karroubi (Ansari, 2010, Parizi, 2010, Ladier-Fouladi, 2009, 2011). These maneuvers sparked a spontaneous “republican” revolt in defense of fair elections. The arrests of Moussavi and Karroubi along with the repression soon put an end to protests and silenced the Green Movement’s voice in public.

The peripheral vote for Moussavi

Voting fraud altered the national results but in line with the geographical voting patterns observed during previous elections (Hourcade, 2016, 2018).

According to the results presented by authorities, only Mahmoud Ahmadinejad obtained a result that was nationwide, whereas the other candidates, with the relative exception of Moussavi, received a local, regional vote. The populist, conservative candidate won by a wide majority in central Iran (except for Yazd province, from which a former reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, came) and in rural areas (Zanjan, Hamadan, Markazi, South Khorasan). The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was sometimes so high that fraud was suspected, especially in the province of Kerman. In this electoral stronghold of former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani, it was more than 85% in many wards.

The map of the vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi is nearly a negative of that for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (The two other candidates allowed to run had very low scores). Mir Hossein Moussavi, a former prime minister, received votes from throughout the country but fewer than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. His major handicap was the geographical concentration of his results in a few provinces. Like all reformist candidates, he drew massive support in peripheral areas with a high Sunnite population: 81.1% in Khosh, 75% in Saravan (Baluchistan), 66.2% in Maraveh Tappeh (a Turkmen district in Golestan), 62.4% in Saqqez (Kurdistan), and in his home province of Azerbaijan (65% in Maku). His relative success in Yazd Province (50.7% in the city of Yazd and 53.2% in Ardakan, a small city and the home place of President Khatami) could not make up for the poor showing in the more heavily populated provinces of central Iran. Electoral fraud — obvious in some places (in Tabriz: 47.9% as

compared with 49.7% for Ahmadinejad) — does not suffice to explain the tepid vote that the reform candidate received in most big cities apart from Tehran.

Despite the questionable official results, a geographical analysis of the vote shows that Moussavi’s candidacy struck a responsive chord in Tehran, especially in neighborhoods in the north and center where voters have a high level of income and education: 62.8% in Shemiran, 51.8% in the municipality of Tehran, and 41.9% in Karaj, a large middle-class suburb. In contrast, the incumbent president had a higher score in big cities in the provinces, except for Tabriz (49.7%) and a few working-class suburbs south of Tehran (61.7% in Eslamshahr, 64.7% in Rey, 71.7% in Robat-Karim). This situation might account for the size of the protests in the capital and for the Green Movement’s failure nationwide.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior published the official results of the 2009 presidential election for the 366 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed at the time. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, the data have been adapted to the administrative map of the 2011 census, which has 394 *shahrestan*, fourteen districts having been divided between 2009 and 2011. These new districts were assigned the score of their district of origin.

The results are available on the website *Iran Data Portal*, published by the universities of Syracuse and Princeton:

<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election>

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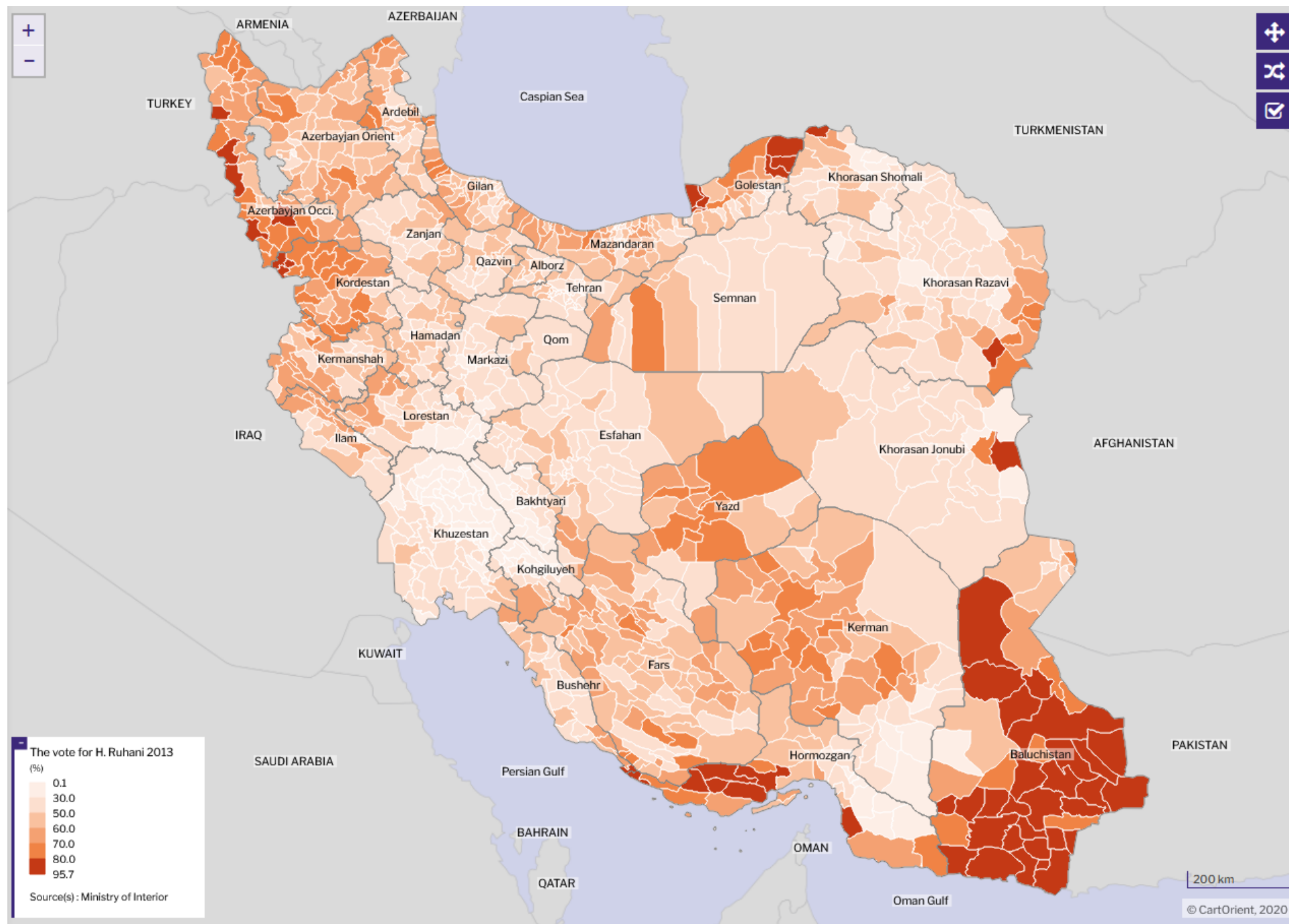
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The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)

Bernard Hourcade

The eleventh presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran was held without protests on Friday, 14 June 2013. Hassan Rouhani, the candidate of the Moderation and Development Party (*Hezb-e E'tedāl va Towse'eh*), running as a moderate, was backed by “Reformers” (supporters of the former president, Mohammad Khatami) and “Reconstructors” (Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani’s *Kārgozārān*). He was elected in the first round with 50.7% of the vote, far ahead of the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, who obtained 16.6 %. The turnout rate of the 50.5 million registered voters was high: 72.7%. The election campaign, active but calm, presented a contrast with the demonstrations and dramatic events following the disputed election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

Out of the 686 persons (including 30 women) who filed requests to stand in the presidential election, the Guardian Council of the Constitution allowed only eight (all of them men) to run. Following the withdrawals of the Reformist candidate Mohammad Reza Aref of the party Hope of Iran (*Bonyād-e Omid-e Irāniān*) in favor of Rouhani, and of Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, a former MP backed by the Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution (*Jam'iyat-e Isārgarān-e Enqelāb-e Eslām*), only six candidates remained in the race.

These six candidates reflected rather clearly the lineup of political forces between moderate reformers, conservatives and the Guardians of the Revolution, all of them loyal to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The map has been drawn using the results from 1057 *bakhsh* [subdistricts/townships] — the first time the Ministry of the Interior published the vote on this scale. This effort to report fully transparent results contrasts with the electoral fraud that, in 2009, marred Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s reelection and led to violent mass protests.

Results of the 2013 presidential elections in Iran

Candidates	Votes	%
Hassan Rouhani	18 613 329	50,71
Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf	6 077 292	16,56
Sa'id Jalili	4 168 946	11,36
Mohsen Rezaie	3 88 4412	10,58
Ali-Akbar Velayati	2 268 753	6,18
Mohammad Gharazi	446 015	1,22
Blank and spoiled ballots	1 245 409	3,39
Total	36 704 156	100

A president elected by universal suffrage

Under chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected once. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with an eventual second round of voting.

All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution “supervises” (article 118). Since 1981, this council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election. Despite this method of picking candidates, campaigns are lively; and the results, notwithstanding some incoherent returns, clearly reflect the country’s social, cultural and political geography (Buchta, 1999).

Hassan Rouhani, a compromise candidate, by default

Hassan Rouhani held, since the start of the Islamic Republic, important political offices related, in particular, to questions of security. He served as MP and president of the Parliament from 1992 to 2000; and member and then secretary-general of the Supreme National Security Council from 1982 to 2005. On 21 October 2003, he signed the first nuclear agreement with European powers. Born in 1948, this experienced politician, a full-fledged part of the system whom the Supreme Leader trusts, compelled recognition as one of the few persons capable of: attracting the support needed to oversee the country’s stability, solving the crisis stemming from Iran’s nuclear weapons program and having the economic sanctions lifted that the United States and international community had imposed during the terms of President M. Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). After the reform candidate Mohammad Aref stood down in his favor, H. Rouhani benefitted from the backing, if not the enthusiasm, of Aref’s supporters. H. Rouhani was a pragmatic, compromise candidate for leading the country out of the crisis, but he lacked a solid network of supporters.

Whereas this “moderate” candidate had backing from various “progressive” groups, his opponents came from “conservative” factions, some of them well known but so divided that they had no chances of winning. Sa’id Jalili, a former secretary-general of the National Security Council and negotiator for Iran’s nuclear program under M. Ahmadinejad, was supported by the Front of Islamic Revolution Stability (*Jebheh-ye pāydārī-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmī*). Ali-Akbar Velayati, minister of Foreign Affairs from 1981 to 1997 and then senior advisor on foreign affairs to the Supreme Leader, ran as the

candidate of the Front of the Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader (*Jebheh-ye Peyrovān-e khat-e Emām va Rahbar*). Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, mayor of Tehran since 2005, was backed by the Population for Progress and Justice of Islamic Iran (*Jam’iyat-e Pishraft va Edālat-e Irān-e Eslāmī*). This former general of the Guardians of the Revolution had liberated Khorramshahr in 1982 during the Iran-Irak War, and then served as head of the national police. He had run for president in 2005. As for Mohsen Rezaie, a former commander-in-chief of the Guardians of the Revolution during the Iran-Irak War up till 1997, who then became secretary-general of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System (*Shurā-ye Maslehāt-e Nezām*), he was backed by the Resistance Front of Islamic Iran (*Jebheh-ye Istādegi-e Irān-e Eslāmī*). Mohammad Gharazi, a former minister of Petroleum who held various positions since 1997, came in a far sixth.

H. Rouhani clearly stood out on this slate of candidates. After the crackdown following M. Ahmadinejad’s election in 2009, the reform movement, much weaker, was sidelined without any possibility of running a candidate capable of winning. Other factions in the opposition, conservative or liberal, had no other choice than to support one of the candidates retained by the Guardian Council of the Constitution.

After years of tension, both domestically and internationally, during M. Ahmadinejad’s terms, there was a relative consensus about the need for “moderation” so as to avoid the division and strife that had followed the 2009 election. This benefitted, by default and without enthusiasm, Rouhani.

Variable geographical voting patterns

The map of the vote by bakhsh in favor of H. Rouhani confirms, once again, the constants of Iran’s electoral geography, as observed since M. Khatami’s election in 1997: in the center of the country areas favorable to conservatives, but on the periphery, voters for reform candidates, especially in subdistricts with a Sunnite majority (Baluchistan, Kurdistan). The conservative candidates A.-A.Velayati and S. Jalili, did better than their national score in subdistricts in the center of the country and South Khorasān. This is evidence of the traditionally conservative leanings of the center of Persian-speaking, Shiite Iran, around the central desert (See the results of

the 1997 and 2001 elections).

The impact of regionalism is visible in the massive vote in certain *bakhsh* for contenders who had strong local roots (not necessarily ethnic) but were minority candidates at the national level. Such was the case of M.-B. Ghalibaf in Khorasan and Tehran (where he was mayor) and of M. Rezaie in the southern Zagros where nomads from various tribes voted alike for the occasion. Unlike M. Rezaie or M.-B. Ghalibaf, the conservative candidates seldom managed to obtain a high proportion of votes on the subdistrict level: they won more than 50% in only nine *bakhsh* scattered over the provinces of Hormozgān and South Khorasān. In Qom, a city renown as a conservative stronghold, these two candidates (A.-A. Velayati and S. Jalili) only won 36.7% of the vote.

At the local level, socioeconomic differences are sometimes obvious, especially in the Tehran metropolitan area. The capital, where turnout was apparently much lower, did not give H. Rouhani a majority: he received 47.2% of the vote there, and only 37.7% in Rey. Farther west, in the “suburban” province of Alborz, bedroom suburbs and manufacturing towns, such as Karaj and Fardis, gave more votes to H. Rouhani, respectively 51.4% and 53.4%. In more agricultural, less well-off suburbs in the southeast, H. Rouhani did not win an absolute majority: 42.5% in Varāmin and 42% in Pishvā. However the differences are too small to draw any conclusions about whether or not the political behavior of Iranians is correlated with socioeconomic variables.

The electoral map attests, in the country as a whole, to a sense of national unity since the outcome overall was clearly in favor of the candidate who was elected. It is also evidence, on the *bakhsh* scale, of the wide diversity of a complex land at the local level, where economic, social (level of education), geographical (degree of urbanization), ethnic or religious factors come into play.

The ethnic factor, one among others

Contrary to prevailing ideas about Iran, the ethnic factor is not decisive in geographical voting patterns. The results in Turkic-speaking areas in the northwest (Azerbaijan, Zanjān) do not stand out from the vote in provinces with a Persian-speaking majority.

In contrast, the religious factor has become cardinal. Though culturally important, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish minorities — fewer than 100,000 people — carry no political weight, unlike Sunni Muslims. The constitution has granted an outsider status to Sunnites, since it forbids them from holding high offices in the Islamic Republic. There are no official statistics on the country’s Sunni population, but the commonly accepted figure varies between 10% and 15%.

The places with a concentration of Sunnites are correlated with a massive vote for H. Rouhani, as previously for M. Khatami. For these two candidates who led a campaign with reformers, citizenship reaches beyond religious and ethnic cleavages. Paradoxically, their status as members of the Shiite clergy did not keep Sunnites from voting for them. The H. Rouhani vote rose to more than 80% (and often more 90%) in the *bakhsh* with a Sunni majority. This was the case in Persian-speaking areas in the eastern Razavi Khorāsān, along the border with Afghanistan (90.6% in Khāsh), among the Turkmen in eastern Golestān (87.5% in Pishkamar, Kalāleh district, and 84.1% in Marāveh Tappeh), among the Tālysh in Gilān (78% in Asālem), and the Arabs along the Persian Gulf in the provinces of Hormozgān and Bushehr (91.6% in Mehrān, Bandar Lengeh district, and 87.3% in Chāh-e Mobarāk, Asaluyeh district).

In provinces with Kurd or Baluchi populations, Sunnites voted even more systematically for H. Rouhani, evidence that both the ethnic and religious factors came into play. The highest percentages in the country for Rouhani were recorded in Baluchistan where another factor — underdevelopment — intervened: 95.7% in Ladiz (Mirjaveh district). In Kurdistan, where the population is often mixed, the scores were very high, sometimes over 80% (82.5% in Bāneh).

Regionalism and localism

As in all elections in Iran, localism and regionalism affect voting patterns. Part of the vote tends to go to the candidate with local roots, as attested by the local scores of candidates who do poorly at the national level. Underlying this tendency are geographical, ethnic and cultural factors. The *bakhsh* where Bakhtiari nomads or Luri-speaking tribes make up a majority of the population voted massively for M. Rezaie, who used his origins as a nomad as a pitch to voters. In the mountains of Chahārmahāl-

and-Bakhtiāri or Khuzestan, H. Rouhani had his lowest scores: only 0.1% in Hatti (Lali district) and 2% in Bāzoft. This clearly contrasts with neighboring areas, such as the cities on the plain in Khuzestān where the new president got a strong support (43% in Ahvaz, 42,5% in Abadan, 51,4% in Bandar Khomeyni) .

M.-B. Ghalibaf, a Persian-speaking Shiite, has a strong national image. He ran up good scores in his home region, Khorasan (often between 30% and 50%, even 56.6% in the *bakhsh* where he was born, Torqabeh near Mashhad), where he often forced Rouhani into second place. Nevertheless, H. Rouhani fhad 38.1% in Mashhad compared with 33.7% for the mayor of Tehran, where M.-B. Ghalibaf scored only 26.8% compared with 47.2% for H. Rouhani.

Parochialism also shows up in some localities. In Semnān province to the east of Tehran, voters in Sorkheh subdistrict, H. Rouhani's home area, voted massively for him (71%), whereas he won only 47% in the neighboring *bakhsh* of Arādān, where the outgoing president, M. Ahmadinejad was born.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

For the first time in Iranian presidential elections, the Ministry of the Interior published soon after the election on its website the vote by *bakhsh* (subdistrict/township). These statistics have not been archived on that website but are available on *Iran Data Portal* at the University of Syracuse (USA): <http://irandataportal.syr.edu>

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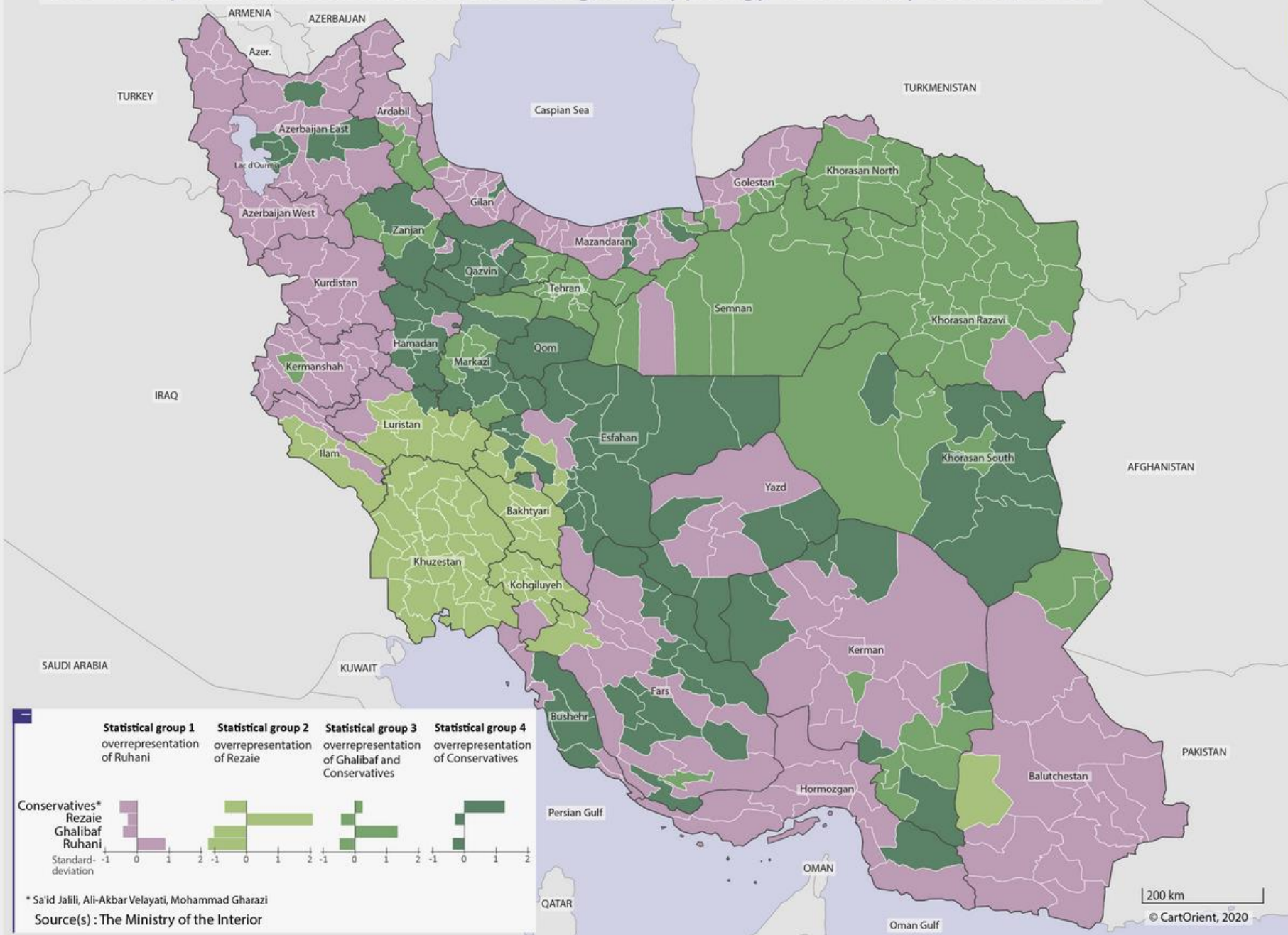
Related map(s)

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The 2013 presidential election in Iran - A regional typology of votes (by district, 2013)

Bernard Hourcade

The eleventh presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran was held without protests on Friday, 14 June 2013. Hassan Ruhani, the candidate of the Moderation and Development Party (Hezb-e e'tedāl va towse eh) was backed by “reformers” (supporters of the former president, Mohammad Khatami) and “reconstructors” (Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani’s Kargozarān). Running as a moderate, Ruhani was elected in the first round with 50.7% of the vote, far ahead of the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who obtained 16.6 %. The turnout rate of the 50.5 million eligible voters was high: 72.7%. The election campaign, active but calm, contrasted with the demonstrations and dramatic events following the disputed election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

Out of the 686 persons (including 30 women) who filed requests to stand in the presidential election, the Guardian Council of the Constitution allowed only eight (all of them men) to run. Before the election however, the reformist candidate Mohammad Reza Aref of the party Hope of Iran (Bonyād-e omīd-e irāniān) withdrew in favor of Ruhani; and Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, a former MP backed by the Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution (Jam`iyat-e isargarān-e enqelab-e eslām), also stood down. As a consequence, only six candidates remained in the race.

These six candidates clearly reflected the lineup of political forces between moderate reformers, conservatives and the Guardians of the Revolution, all of them loyal to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The map presents the results of the 2013 presidential election by district (*shahrestan*). The data have been statistically processed to shed light on the over- and under-representation of given candidates. Drawn from a statistical analysis (cluster analysis) of the percentage of votes obtained by each candidate, the map displays the districts where a given candidate received more votes than his national average. Four categories of districts have been retained: those where Rouhani’s score was higher

than his national average; those where Rezaie’s score was higher than his national average; those where Ghalibaf’s score was higher than his national average; and those where the total score of the two conservative candidates, Jalili and Velayati, was higher than their national averages.

Results of the 2013 presidential election in Iran

Candidate	Vote	%
Hassan Ruhani	18 613 329	50,7
Mohamad-Bagher Ghalibaf	6 077 292	16,6
Sa'id Jalili	4 168 946	11,4
Mohsen Rezaie	3 88 4412	10,6
Ali-Akbar Velayati	2 268 753	6,2
Mohammad Gharazi	446 015	1,2
Blank and spoiled ballots	1 245 409	3,4
Total	36 704 156	100,0

A election with direct universal suffrage

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected only once for a successive term. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with, if need be, a second round of voting (Article 113). All Iranians, both men and women more than 18 years old (15 before 2007), may vote. Candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, have to be Shiite Muslims well versed in the religion and politics.

The Ministry of the Interior vets applicants and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurah-e nehgabān*) supervises (Article 118). Since the second presidential election in 1981, this council selects among the persons who file applications to stand for election those who will be allowed to do so. Only those loyal to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience to the Supreme Leader) are allowed. Despite this method of vetting candidates, campaigns have been lively since 1997, when candidates representing several political currents have been allowed to run for office. Notwithstanding incoherent returns from some areas, election results provide a clear picture of the country's social, cultural and political geography. The outcome of the vote is not known in advance.

Hassan Ruhani, a compromise candidate by default

The six candidates who ran for president reflected the lineup of political forces in the country, ranging from moderate reformers to conservatives and the Guardians of the Revolution. The Guardian Council of the Constitution had vetted all of them as being faithful to leadership by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

Hassan Ruhani held, since the start of the Islamic Republic, major political offices related, in particular, to questions of security. He served as MP and president of parliament from 1992 to 2000, and was a member and then secretary-general of the Supreme National Security Council from 1982 to 2005. On 21 October 2003, he signed the first nuclear agreement with European powers. Born in 1948, this experienced politician, a full-fledged part of the system whom the Supreme Leader trusts, compelled recognition as one of the few persons capable of: attracting the support needed to oversee the country's stability, settling the crisis stemming from Iran's nuclear weapons program and having the economic sanctions lifted that the United States and international community had imposed during the terms of President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). After the reform candidate Mohammad Aref stood down in his favor, Ruhani benefitted from the backing, if not enthusiasm, of Aref's supporters. Ruhani was a pragmatic, compromise candidate for leading the country out of the crisis, but he lacked a solid network of supporters.

Whereas this “moderate” had backing from various “progressive” groups, his opponents came from “conservative” factions, some of them well known but so divided that they had no chances of winning.

— Sa'id Jalili, a former secretary-general of the National Security Council and negotiator for Iran's nuclear program under Ahmadinejad, was supported by the Front of Islamic Revolution Stability (*Jebheh-ye pāydārī-e enqelāb-e eslāmī*).

— Ali Akbar Velayati, minister of Foreign Affairs from 1981 to 1997 and then senior advisor on foreign affairs to the Supreme Leader, ran as the candidate of the Front of the Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader (*Jebheh peyrovān-e khat-e emām va rahbar*).

— Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, mayor of Tehran since 2005, was backed by the Population for Progress and Justice of Islamic Iran (*Jamīyat-e pishraft va edālat-e irān-e eslāmī*). This former general of the Guardians of the Revolution had liberated Khorramshahr in 1982 during the Iran-Irak War, and then served as head of the national police. He had run for president in 2005.

— As for Mohsen Rezaie, a former commander-in-chief of the Guardians of the Revolution during the Iran-Irak War till 1997 and then secretary-general of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System (*shurā-ye masle'āt-e nezam*), he was backed by the Resistance Front of Islamic Iran (*Jebheh istādegi-e irān-eslāmī*).

— Mohammad Gharazi, a former minister of Petroleum who held various positions since 1997, came in a far sixth.

Ruhani clearly stood out on this slate of candidates. After the crackdown following Ahmadinejad's election in 2009, the weakened reform movement was sidelined without any possibility of running a candidate capable of winning. Other factions in the opposition, conservative or liberal, had no other choice than to support one of the candidates retained by the Guardian Council of the Constitution.

After years of tension, both domestically and internationally, during Ahmadinejad's terms of office, there was a relative consensus about the need for “moderation” so as to avoid the division and strife that had followed the 2009 election. This consensus benefitted, by default and without enthusiasm, Ruhani.

Variable geographical voting patterns

The map confirms the territorial dimension of the partition of Iran between conservative and progressive provinces. To simplify, the areas favorable to conservatives are located in the center of the country whereas voters on the periphery support reformers, in particular in areas where a majority of the population is Sunnite or speaks a language other than Persian (Baluchestan, Kurdistan). Besides this progressive/conservative divide, regional and local factors also come into play, thus complicating geographical voting patterns.

The two conservative candidates, Velayati and Jalili, carried more votes than their national averages in the center of Iran and South Khorasan. Like Ruhani, they were very well-known politicians; and the persons who voted for them had ideological rather than provincial or local motivations. This was not the case of the two former generals of the Guardians of the Revolution, Mohsen Rezaei and, to a lesser extent, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf.

Mohsen Rezaei won more votes than his national average in the oil-producing province of Khuzestan, where many Arabs and members of the nomadic Bakhtiari tribe dwell. In fact, this former shepherd, himself a member of this tribe, campaigned wearing the Bakhtiari traditional headdress. He even won an absolute majority in several districts (90% in Izeh) and had strong support in all provinces where various Lori tribes dwell: Lorestan, Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Ilam. These often rival provinces united for the election.

Ghalibaf's case is somewhat different. This mayor of Tehran, originally from Khorasan, benefitted from a politically-motivated vote. He profited both from his local reputation in his home province (57% of the vote in his place of birth, Torqabeh near Mashhad) and from his technocratic approach and conservative ideas, especially in Khorasan and Semnan, two provinces that normally vote for conservatives.

As this typology of the vote shows, political and regional factors are intertwined, but political factors are preeminent in determining voting patterns in Iranian presidential elections. During the 2013 election, support for any given candidate was not just a

matter of his popularity in his home province (as was the case with many candidates in the 2005 election) but also of his political appeal to a much larger territory.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

For the first time in Iranian presidential elections, the Ministry of the Interior published soon after the election on its website (www.moi.ir) the vote by *bakhsh* (1057 subdistricts/townships). These statistics were not archived on that website but are available on *Iran Data Portal* at the University of Syracuse (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>). The data have been regrouped on the scale of the 429 districts (*shahrestan*).

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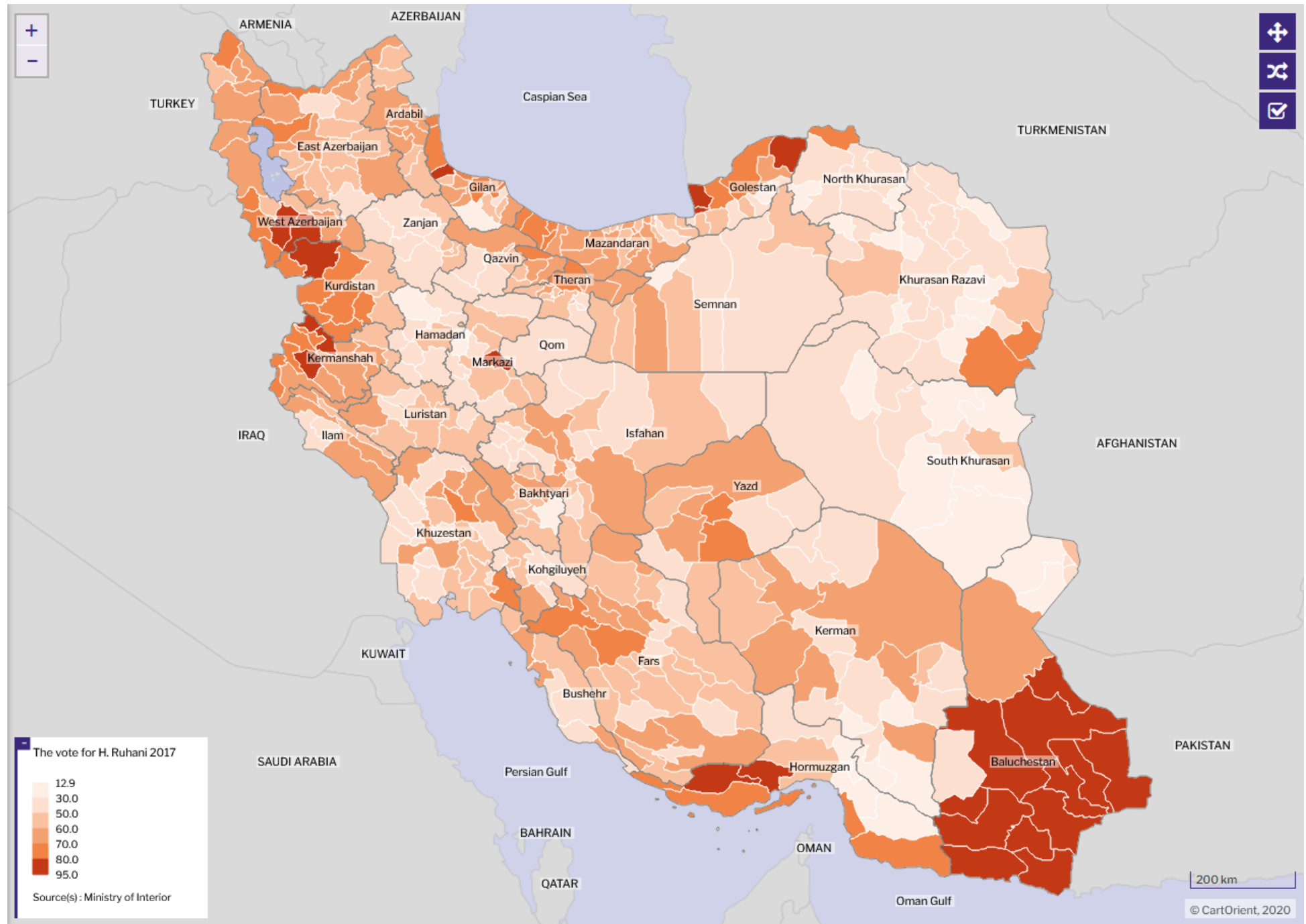
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Related map(s)

The geography of presidential elections in Iran: A typology of provinces (by region, 1997 - 2017)
 The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)
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 The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Ebrahim Raisi (by district, 2017)
 Localism and regionalism : the 2005 Iranian presidential election (by region, 2005)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The 2013 presidential election in Iran - A regional typology of votes (by district, 2013)", *CartOrient*. Online since 20 January 2020.
 URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/173/?lang=en>



The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Held on Friday, 19 May 2017, the twelfth presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran ended, after a single round of voting, in the reelection of Hassan Ruhani (Moderation and Development Party: *Hezb-e e'tedāl va towse'eh*) who received 23,636,652 votes, 57.1% of the total. His only actual rival was Ebrahim Raisi, a member of the Association of the Combatant Clergy and, more important, manager (*motavalli*) of the very powerful Astan Quds Razavi Foundation in Mashhad. Raisi mustered voters who were religious in social affairs and conservative in politics to tally 38.3% of the vote. Turnout was very high (73.3%) but, as often happens, somewhat lower in Kurdistan and Lorestan (less than 60% but far from a boycott).

Results of 2017 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Votes	%
Hassan Ruhani	23 636 652	57.14
Ebrahim Raisi	15 835 794	38.28
Mostafa Mir-Salim	478 267	1.16
Mostafa Hashemitaba	214 441	0.52
Blank and spoiled ballots	1 200 931	2.90
Valid votes	41 366 085	73.33
Registered voters	56 410 234	100.00

The map uses the statistics released by the Iranian Ministry of the Interior to depict the vote for Hassan Ruhani by district (*shahrestan*).

An election with direct universal suffrage

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected once. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with, if need be, a second round of voting (Article 113). All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, have to be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election “supervised” by the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurah-e nehgabān*) (Article 118). Since 1981, this council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

Following the 2015 nuclear agreement: A confrontation between two political strategies

The 2017 presidential election took place in the new (both national and international) political context resulting from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) about the country's nuclear program. Iran signed this plan in Vienna on 14 July 2015 with the European Union and the five permanent members of the UN's Security Council. The JCPOA followed up on the Teheran Declaration of 2003 that Iran had reached with France, the United Kingdom and Germany and that Russia, China and the United States would then join. In exchange for a halt to Iran's nuclear program, the JCPOA provided that the signatories, along with the United Nations and European Union, would lift all economic sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic.

Although 1636 persons, including 137 women, declared their intention to seek election, the Guardian Council of the Constitution only authorized six men to run. In contrast with past presidential elections in which several top-ranking personalities competed, this election was definitely a confrontation between those who advocated

and those who opposed or criticized Hassan Ruhani's policy of opening the country, which had the population's backing. To avoid a loss on this major political decision and a second round of voting that might have led to hard-to-heal divisions within the regime, several candidates withdrew before election day. On the one hand, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, mayor of Teheran (Party for Progress and Justice in Islamic Iran: *Jam'iyat-e pishraft-o 'edālat-e irān-e eslāmi*) and Mostafa Mir-Salim, a conservative and former minister of Culture (Islamic Coalition Party: *Hezb-e mo'talefe-ye eslāmi*) both came out in favor of Ebrahim Raisi. On the other hand, Eshaq Jahangiri, vice-president of the Islamic Republic, and Mostafa Hashemitaba, president of Iran's Olympic Committee, both of them "reformers" and members of the Executives of Construction Party (*hezb-e kārgozārān sāzandegi-e irān*), called for voters to choose Ruhani. Mir-Salim and Hashemitaba did not formally withdraw from the race however, and a little more than half a million ballots were cast in their favor.

The six candidates vetted by the Guardian Council of the Constitution participated in three long, lively debates on television. All six were committed to the Islamic Republic.

At stake in this confrontation between two clerics were their radically different political strategies. The incumbent president, Hassan Ruhani, touted his diplomatic victory, the JCPOA. Expectations for faster economic development were rising given the possibility of sanctions being lifted; and multinational firms were rushing to prospect the country's market. Ebrahim Raisi rallied the partisans of a "resistance" to this too rapid liberalization, which would sooner or later compromise Islamic social norms, threaten power-holders and jeopardize the economic advantages gleaned over a period of more than forty years by the men and their families who belonged to factions closely bound to the regime.

As members of the clergy and active figures in the politics of the Islamic Republic, the two major candidates claimed support from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. For the sake of stability, the latter seemed to want Ruhani to be re-elected but, at the same time, was strengthening the hand of conservatives as a countervailing force to the irreversible liberalization.

Hassan Ruhani's low-key victory

Hassan Ruhani won five million more votes than in 2013, but turnout was slightly higher. Nonetheless, his victory was far from a thrashing for his opponent. Following the Vienna nuclear deal and given the prospects opened by the policy of political, economic and social liberalization, the incumbent president could have imagined a much more impressive victory, like Mohammad Khatami's in 1997 and 2001. A massive vote (more than 70%) would have left no doubts and enabled him to impose his policy on several factions of opponents.

However the hopes aroused by the 2015 nuclear deal were soon crushed. Unlike the Iranian Parliament, the US Congress refused to ratify the JCPOA, and President Barak Obama was forced to lift American sanctions by executive orders, which have to be reissued every three months. The Iranian president's position became vulnerable given the waning hopes for an economic boom — hopes that would vanish once the other (in particular European) signatories failed to overcome the obstacles (in particular, banking restrictions) imposed by the United States on foreign investments in Iran.

Ruhani also had to face difficulties inside the country. During the two years following the signing of the agreement, he sought to appease critics (among them the Supreme Leader and conservatives) who advocated a policy of resistance to the inevitable cultural changes entailed by liberalization. Despite the support of public opinion, Ruhani did not undertake the structural economic reforms (banks, financial accountability, corruption...) that were urgent and indispensable for integration in the world's economy after forty years of isolation.

Elected in 2013 as a consensus candidate, or as the "best of the worst" as some reformers said, Ruhani managed neither to convince "progressives" nor to obtain the mass support of a not very politicized population that, nonetheless, would have been responsive to tangible economic changes. His low-key victory in 2017 reflected Iranian politics: a stable but uncertain situation without strong popular support and, as a consequence, in a position of weakness in relation to an American Congress, which ceaselessly displayed its hostility — a view that would definitively prevail once Donald Trump was elected president in November 2017.

Stable geographic voting patterns

Though not a triumph, the incumbent president's victory went unquestioned, since he carried 273 out of 429 districts, compared with 156 for Raisi. The geographical distribution of the vote for Ruhani fits into a stable pattern similar to what was observed during previous elections, in particular in 2013. In a sketch, this pattern sets the peripheral apart from the central provinces, Sunnite from Shiite areas, Persian-speaking regions from the regions where other languages are spoken (Baluchi, Kurd, etc.). The local voting patterns shown on the map reflect the Iranian state's cultural, social and political diversity (Planhol 1993). In the center of Iran for instance, the inhabitants of Yazd, where Ruhani won 71.6% of the vote, continued supporting reformers in line with former president Khatami, who is very influential in his home province – a much stronger support than that of their neighbors and traditional rivals in Meybod, where Ruhani barely carried a majority (51.4%).

However the factors having to do with minority status, provincialism or localism were not decisive in this election. In effect, no candidate had strong regional roots, unlike Ghalibaf or Rezai in 2013. In 2017, the clear, ideological opposition between the two major candidates gave the presidential election a much more political tonality.

Nonetheless, the provinces with a high percentage of Sunnites (in particular, Baluchi, Kurd and Turkmen), the area bordering on the Caspian and districts in Shiite Azerbaijan voted, once again, in favor of a candidate representing liberalization. In contrast, Raisi carried the traditionally conservative provinces of the east (Khorasan) and western center (Qom, Markazi, Hamadan, Zanjan). In the southwest, between Khuzestan and Kerman, the political landscape presented many contrasts.

Whereas the big cities moderately supported Ruhani in 2013, the fear of a cleric coming to power who was known for his radical conservative opinions might account for the strong correlation that we notice in 2017 between the vote for Ruhani and the size of cities. Cities with more than a million inhabitants (who are already swept up in the trend supported by Ruhani toward social and cultural liberalization) clearly stand out from smaller cities where conservative vote has more solid grounds, given the weight of cultural and religious traditions (Hourcade 2018). Note too that the presence

of a large number of clerics and theology students along with the piety or traditional, even conservative, mentality of the population accounts for Ruhani's defeat in the two large centers of pilgrimage: Qom (37.3% of the vote) and Mashhad (42.3%), where Raisi headed, as mentioned, the foundation that manages Imam Reza's mausoleum.

The size of cities and share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani in the 2017 presidential election

Population	%
> 1 000 000	62.2
500 000 - 1 000 000	56.9
200 000 - 500 000	53.7
100 000 - 200 000	53
50 000 - 100 000	56
10 000 - 50 000	48.1

At a smaller scale (within agglomerations), major differences can be noticed, as during most presidential elections. In the agglomeration of Teheran, the sociocultural north/south gradient is reflected in the vote: the *shahrestan* of Shemiran north of Tehran, a district with a well-off, well-educated population, voted massively for Ruhani (78.9%) as compared with districts in the center (71.5%) and, notably, Rey to the south (56.4%).

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior (www.moi.ir) released election results by district (*shahrestan*) and not on the finer subdistrict (*bakhsh*) scale as in 2013. These results were not protested. They are available on the *Iran Data Portal* of the University of Syracuse (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

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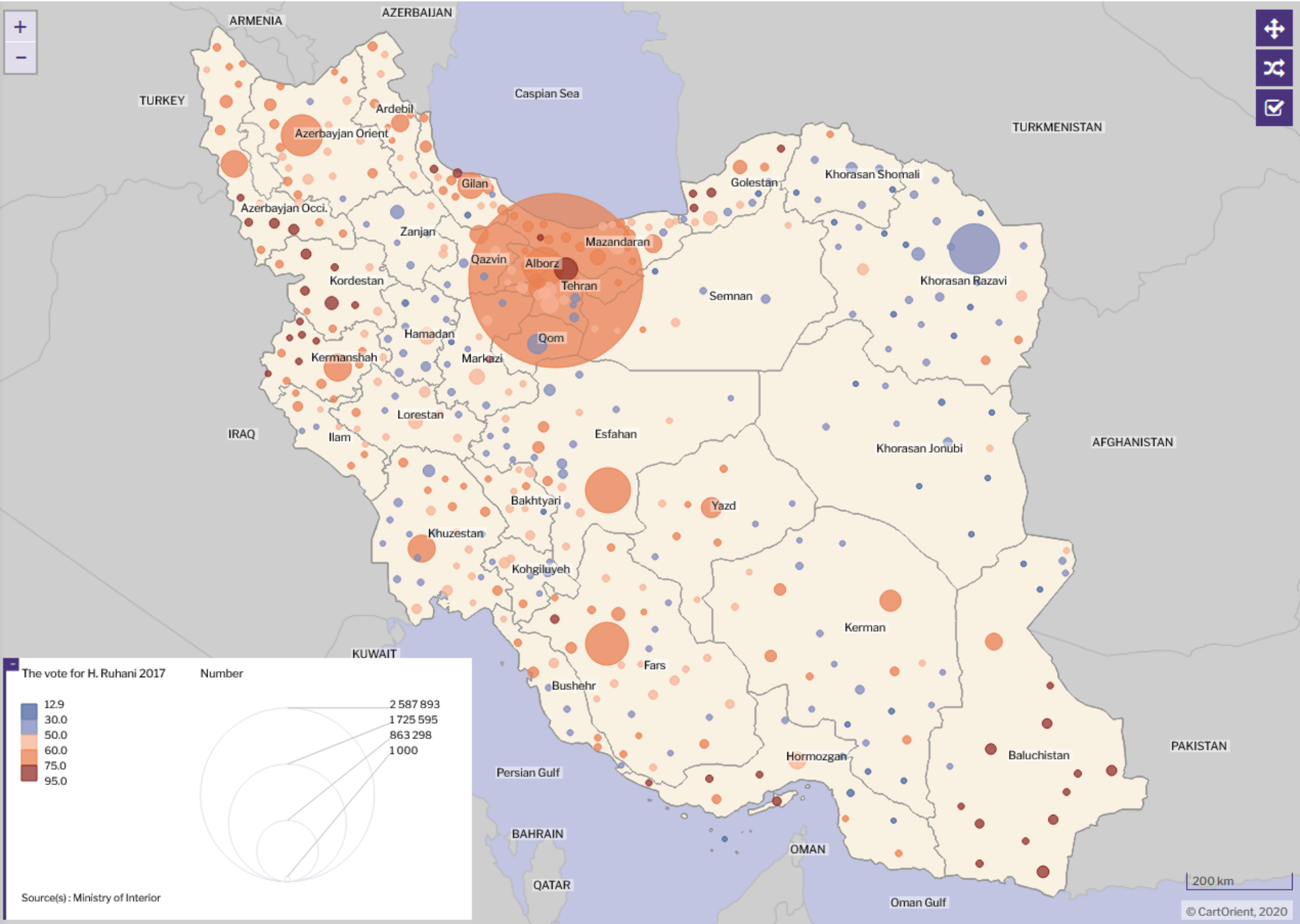
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Related map(s)

The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2009)
 The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)
 The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi (by district, 2009)
 The first round of the 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (by district, 2005)

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Votes cast	41 366 085	73,33
Total number registered	56 410 234	100,00

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large areas that are much less populated, as compared with the vote for Rouhani.

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Hassan Rouhani's low-key victory

Hassan Rouhani won five million more votes than in 2013, but turnout was slightly higher. Nonetheless, his victory was far from a thrashing for his opponent. Following the Vienna nuclear deal and given the prospects opened by the policy of political, economic and social liberalization, the incumbent president could have imagined a much more impressive victory, like Mohammad Khatami's in 1997 and 2001. A massive vote (more than 70%) would have left no doubts and enabled him to impose his policy on several factions of opponents.

However the hopes aroused by the 2015 nuclear deal were soon crushed. Unlike the Iranian Parliament, the US Congress refused to ratify the JCPOA, and President Barak Obama was forced to lift American sanctions by executive orders, which have to be reissued every three months. The Iranian president's position became vulnerable given the waning hopes for an economic boom — hopes that would vanish once the other (in particular European) signatories failed to overcome the obstacles (in particular, banking restrictions) imposed by the United States on foreign investments in Iran.

Rouhani also had to face difficulties inside the country. During the two years following the signing of the agreement, he sought to appease critics (among them the Supreme Leader and conservatives) who advocated a policy of resistance to the inevitable cultural changes entailed by liberalization. Despite the support of public opinion, Rouhani did not undertake the structural economic reforms (banks, financial accountability, corruption...) that were urgent and indispensable for integration in the world's economy after forty years of isolation.

Elected in 2013 as a consensus candidate, or as the "best of the worst" as some reformers said, Rouhani managed neither to convince "progressives" nor to obtain the mass support of a not very politicized population that, nonetheless, would have been responsive to tangible economic changes. His low-key victory in 2017 reflected Iranian politics: a stable but uncertain situation without strong popular support and, as a consequence, in a position of weakness in relation to an American Congress, which

ceaselessly displayed its hostility — a view that would definitively prevail once Donald Trump was elected president in November 2017.

Stable geographic voting patterns

Though not a triumph, the incumbent president's victory went unquestioned, since he carried 273 out of 429 districts, compared with 156 for Raisi. The geographical distribution of the vote for Rouhani fits into a stable pattern similar to that during previous elections, in particular in 2013. In a sketch, this pattern sets peripheral apart the central provinces, Sunnite from Shiite areas, Persian-speaking regions from the regions where other languages are spoken (Baluchi, Kurd, etc.). The local voting patterns shown on the map reflect the Iranian state's cultural, social and political diversity (Planhol 1993). In the center of Iran for instance, the inhabitants of Yazd, where Rouhani won 71.6% of the vote, continued supporting reformers in line with former president Khatami, who is very influential in his home province — a much stronger support than that of their neighbors and traditional rivals in Meybod, where Rouhani barely carried a majority (51.4%).

However the factors having to do with minority status, provincialism or localism were not decisive in this election. In effect, no candidate had strong regional roots, unlike Ghalibaf or Rezaee in 2013. In 2017, the clear, ideological opposition between the two major candidates gave the presidential election a much more political tonality.

Nonetheless, the provinces with a high percentage of Sunnites (in particular, Baluchi, Kurd and Turkmen), the area bordering on the Caspian and districts in Shiite Azerbaijan voted, once again, in favor of a candidate representing liberalization. In contrast, Raisi carried the traditionally conservative provinces of the east (Khorasan) and western center (Qom, Markazi, Hamadan, Zanjan). In the southwest, between Khuzestan and Kerman, the political landscape presented many contrasts.

Big cities voted for Rouhani

Whereas the big cities moderately supported Rouhani in 2013, the fear lest a cleric known for his radical conservative opinions come to power might account for the strong

correlation in 2017 between the vote for Rouhani and the size of cities.

Cities with more than a million inhabitants (who are already swept up in the trend supported by Rouhani toward social and cultural liberalization) clearly stand out from smaller cities where the conservative vote has more solid grounds, given the weight of cultural and religious traditions (Hourcade, 2018). Note too that the presence of a large number of clerics and theology students along with the piety or traditional, even conservative, mentality of the population accounts for Rouhani's defeat in the two large centers of pilgrimage: Qom (37.3%) and Mashhad (42.3%), where Raisi heads, as mentioned, the foundation that manages Imam Reza's mausoleum.

Correlation between the vote and the city sizes

Population of cities	Vote for H. Rouhani(%)
> 1 000	62,2
500-1000	56,9
200-500	53,7
199-200	53,0
50-100	56,0
10-50	48,1

The contrast between big cities and small cities or rural areas has to be qualified. The growth of vast suburban areas around urban centers makes the social and political situation more complex, and has shifted geographical voting patterns. Within agglomerations, major differences stand out. This is especially the case in the agglomeration of Tehran, where the vote reflects the sociocultural north/south gradient. The *shahrestan* of Shemiran north of Tehran, a district with a well-off, well-educated population, voted massively for Rouhani (78.9%) as compared with districts in the center (71.5%) and, notably, Rey to the south (56.4%).

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior (www.moi.ir) released election results by district (*shahrestan*) and not on the finer subdistrict (*bakhsh*) scale as in 2013. These results were not protested. They are available on the *Iran Data Portal* of the University of Syracuse (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

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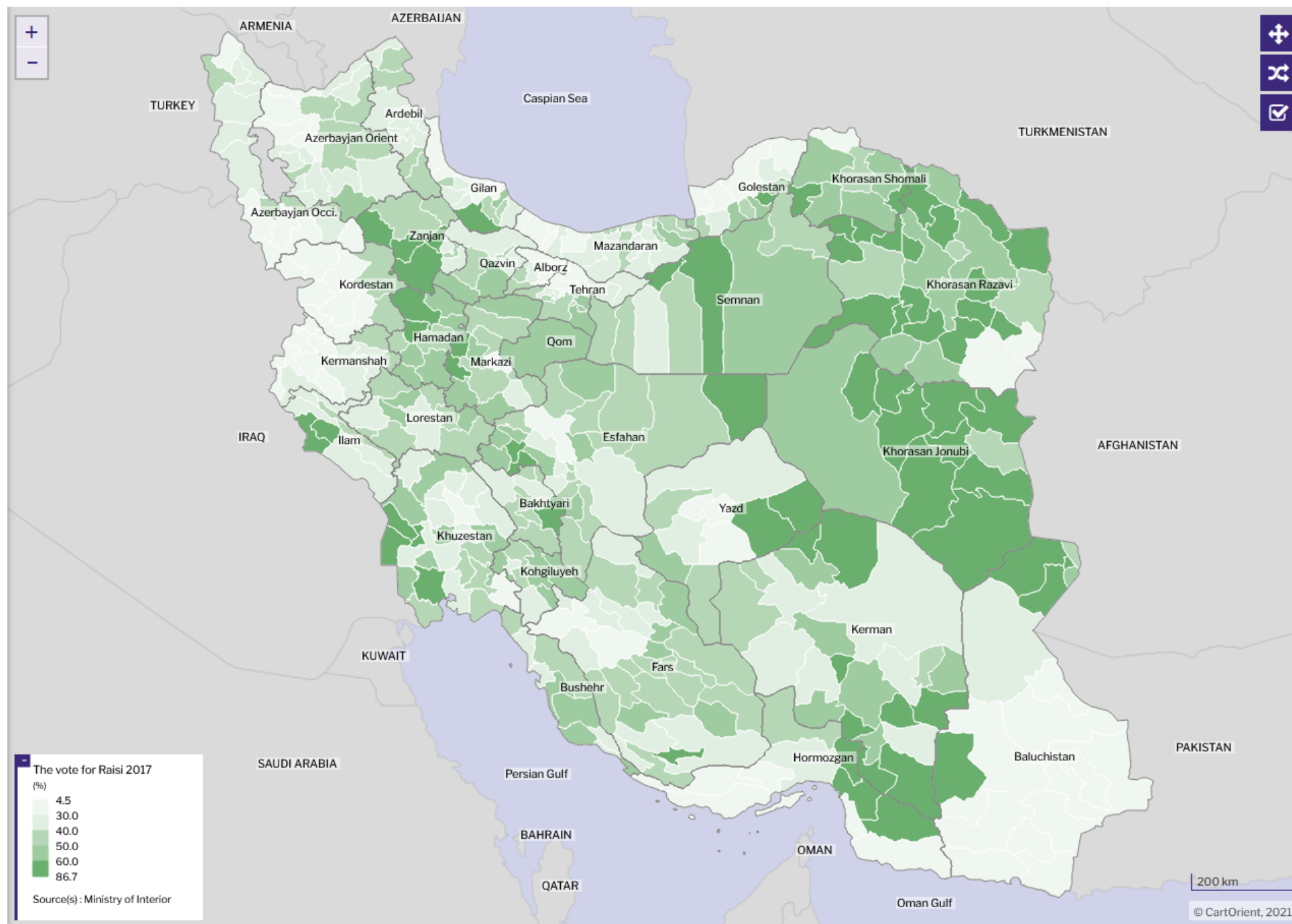
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Related map(s)

The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Ebrahim Raisi (by district, 2017)
 The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)
 The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The 2017 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)", *CartOrient*. Online since 24 June 2019.
 URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/155/?lang=en>



The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Ebrahim Raisi (by district, 2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Held on Friday, 19 May 2017, the twelfth presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran ended, after a single round of voting, in the reelection of Hassan Ruhani (Moderation and Development Party: *Hezb-e e'tedāl va towse'eh*) who received 23,636,652 votes, 57.1% of the total. His only actual rival was Ebrahim Raisi, a member of the Association of the Combatant Clergy and, more important, manager (*motavalli*) of the very powerful Astan Quds Razavi Foundation in Mashhad. Raisi mustered voters who were religious in social affairs and conservative in politics to tally 38.3% of the vote. Given the political and diplomatic success represented by the signing of the nuclear agreement in July 2015, we might have expected Ruhani's triumphal reelection; but the good showing by Raisi, who was not well known by the general public, reflected the complexity and uncertainty of politics in Iran. Turnout was very high (73.3%) but, as often happens, somewhat lower in Kurdistan and Lorestan (less than 60% but far from a boycott).

Results of the 2017 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	Votes	%
Hassan Ruhani	23 636 652	57.14
Ebrahim Raisi	15 835 794	38.28
Mostafa Mir-Salim	478 267	1.16
Mostafa Hashemitaba	214 441	0.52
Blank and spoiled ballots	1 200 931	2.90
Valid votes	41 366 085	73.33
Registered voters	56 410 234	100.00

The map uses the statistics released by the Iranian Ministry of the Interior to depict the vote for Ebrahim Raisi by district (*shahrestan*).

An election with direct universal suffrage

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected once. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with, if need be, a second round of voting (Article 113). All Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old (18 since 2007), may vote. The candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, have to be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election "supervised" by the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurah-e nehgabān*) (Article 118). Since 1981, this council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

Following the 2015 nuclear agreement: A confrontation between two political strategies

The 2017 presidential election took place in the new (both national and international) political context resulting from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) about the country's nuclear program. Iran signed this plan in Vienna on 14 July 2015 with the European Union and the five permanent members of the UN's Security Council. The JCPOA followed up on the Teheran Declaration of 2003 that Iran had reached with France, the United Kingdom and Germany and that Russia, China and the United States would then join. In exchange for a halt to Iran's nuclear program, the JCPOA provided that the signatories, along with the United Nations and European Union, would lift all economic sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic.

Although 1636 persons, including 137 women, declared their intention to seek

election, the Guardian Council of the Constitution only authorized six men to run. In contrast with past presidential elections in which several top-ranking personalities competed, this election was definitely a confrontation between those who advocated and those who opposed or criticized Ruhani's policy of opening the country, which had the population's backing.

Raisi's candidacy pushed the other candidates, conservatives or reformers, onto the sidelines; and they stood down shortly before the vote. Two conservative candidates came out in favor of Raisi: Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, mayor of Teheran (Party for Progress and Justice in Islamic Iran: *Jam'iyat-e pishraft-o 'edālat-e irān-e eslāmi*) and Mostafa Mir-Salim, a former minister of Culture (Islamic Coalition Party: *hezb-e mo'talefe-ye eslāmi*). In contrast, Eshaq Jahangiri, vice-president of the Islamic Republic, and Mostafa Hashemitaba, president of Iran's Olympic Committee, both of them "reformers" and members of the Executives of Construction Party (*hezb-e kārgozārān sāzandegi-e irān*), called for voters to choose Ruhani. Mir-Salim and Hashemitaba did not formally withdraw from the race however, and a little more than half a million ballots were cast in their favor.

The six candidates vetted by the Guardian Council of the Constitution participated in three long, lively debates on television. All six were committed to the Islamic Republic. At stake in this confrontation between two clerics were their radically different political strategies. The incumbent president, Hassan Ruhani, touted his diplomatic victory, the JCPOA. Expectations for faster economic development were rising given the possibility of sanctions being lifted; and multinational firms were rushing to prospect the country's market.

Ebrahim Raisi rallied the partisans of a "resistance" to this too rapid liberalization, which would sooner or later compromise Islamic social norms, threaten power-holders and jeopardize the economic advantages gleaned over a period of more than forty years by the men and their families who belonged to factions closely bound to the regime. As members of the clergy and active figures in the politics of the Islamic Republic, the two major candidates claimed support from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. For the sake of stability, the latter seemed to want Ruhani to be re-elected but, at the same time, was strengthening the hand of conservatives as a countervailing

force to the irreversible liberalization.

The stronger hand of conservatives since the breakdown of the 2015 nuclear agreement

The enthusiasm aroused by the announcement of the nuclear agreement in July 2015 aroused expectations that Ruhani's reelection would amount to a plebiscite. This was not the case, as the relatively good score obtained by his conservative opponent proves.

The hopes raised by the agreement were soon disappointed. Unlike the Iranian parliament, the US Congress has refused to ratify the JCPOA and lift economic sanctions. During the two years after the agreement was signed, President Ruhani seemed to be trying to appease the Supreme Leader and conservatives (who were calling for a policy of "resistance" to the cultural change that would inevitably follow on opening the doors of the country's economy) instead of tending to the difficult structural reforms and behavioral changes (banks, transparency in finance, the fight against corruption...) that are indispensable for adapting laws and practices to the world economy after forty years of isolation. Trade with European firms, which Iranian authorities had counted on to stimulate the economy, was also thwarted by both the American sanctions, which forbid firms from investing in Iran, and the lack of adaptation of Iran's economy to globalization.

Social and economic difficulties served the interests of conservatives and more radical opponents, who had always insisted on adopting an extreme position toward the Western powers and could now decry an agreement that did not deliver the announced economic benefits. Before the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in November 2017, the factors for the current economic crisis were already at work; and this played in favor of Raisi during the election in May 2017.

Geographical voting patterns: A "traditional" Iran

The incumbent president's victory was undeniable, if not a triumph, since Ruhani carried 273 districts (*shahrestan*) out of 429, as compared with 156 for Raisi. Major

regional variations characterized the geographical distribution of the vote for Raisi. This conservative tallied a moderate score in regions on the country's periphery, where a larger proportion of the population are Sunnite and/or do not speak Persian: Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Turkmen areas in North Khorasan and Arabic-speakers in Hormozgan. In contrast, his success was quite noticeable in the northeast of the country, especially the city of Mashhad, his home town where his father-in-law, Ayatollah Alamolhoda, is imam on Fridays.

This "localism" , a usual factor that we observe during Iranian elections, was even stronger owing to the fact that Raisi has, since 2016, been manager (motavalli) of the very powerful Astan Quds Razavi Foundation, which supervises the mausoleum of Imam Reza, owns extensive properties and has very powerful networks throughout Khorasan and even beyond. Raisi's score came out of a combination of a regional vote with a political, religiously motivated vote, the latter corresponding to voters who had radical views (close to the candidate's conservative ideas) or who were traditional (the respect of Iranians for Imam Reza). This very much explains why, out of the cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants, he Raisi managed to win a majority only in the cities, both religious and conservative, of Mashhad and Qom (59,5%). In contrast, his percentage of the vote in Tehran (26.7%), Isfahan (36.1%), Tabriz (28.4%) and Shiraz (26.2%) fell under the national average.

The geographical voting pattern for Raisi reflects the existence of an opposition, political and ideological, between an Iran that is "traditional" or conservative (with a real base in the society, especially in the center of the country) and an Iran that is more progressive and forms the majority in cities.

Translation : Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior (www.moi.ir) released election results by district (*shahrestan*) and not on the finer subdistrict (*bakhsh*) scale as in 2013. These results were not protested. They are available on the Iran Data Portal of the University of Syracuse (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

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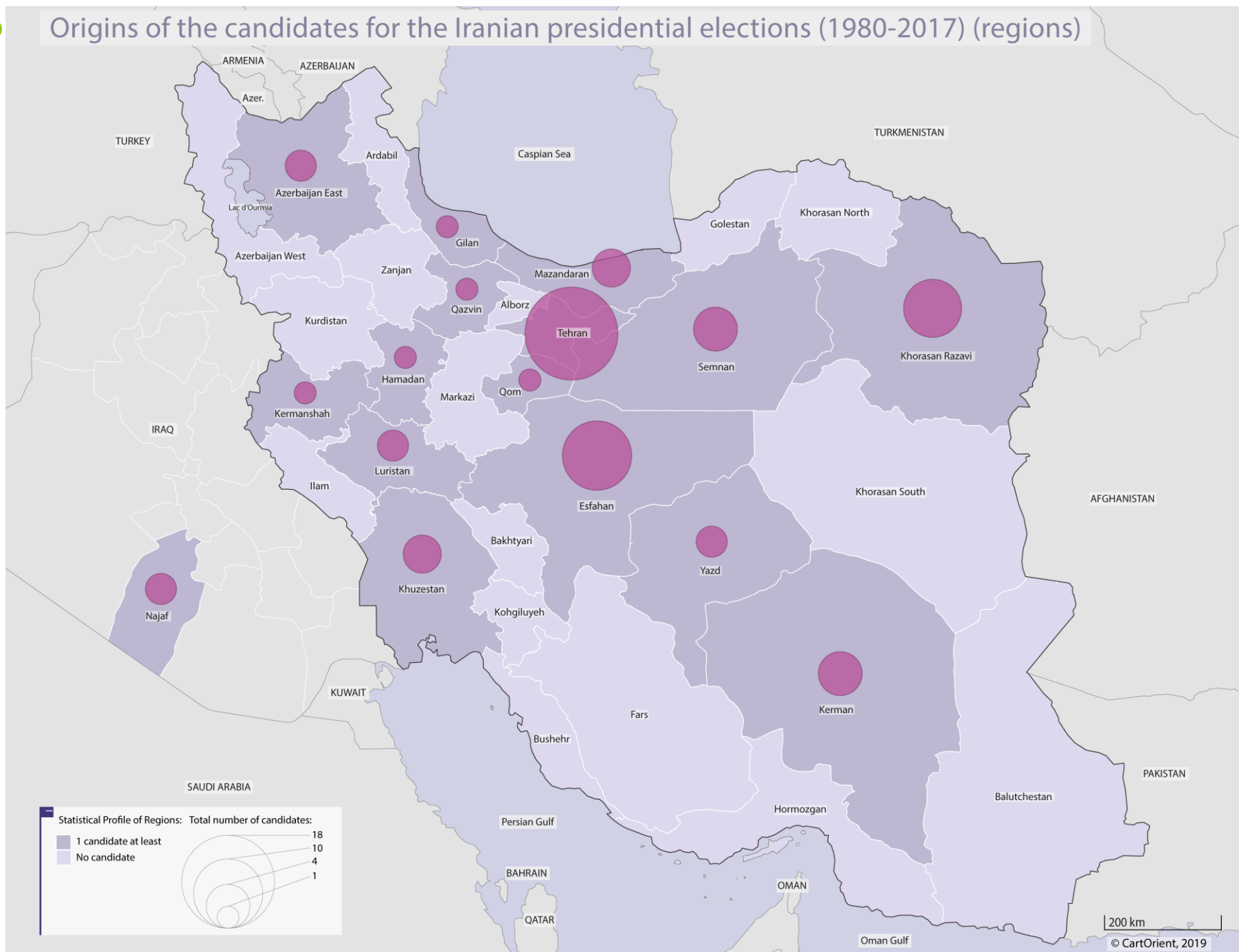
Related map(s)

- The 2017 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)
- The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)
- The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)

Electronic reference

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Origins of the candidates for the Iranian presidential elections (1980-2017) (regions)



Origine of the candidates in Iranian presidential elections (by region, 1980-2017)

Bernard Hourcade

The presidential election in Iran has, since 1980 and the overthrow of the shah, become a major event in national (and even international) politics. Forces are marshaled throughout the country, in particular since the election in 1997 of the reformer Mohamad Khatami. Voter turnout has often been high, despite recurrently lower rates in provinces, such as Kurdistan.

The map depicts the province of birth of the persons allowed to run in one or more presidential elections. As we see, the provinces are disparately represented among candidates in this election. This geographical disparity — related to the geographical distribution of population groups (Sunnite and/or groups whose native language is not Persian) — is a well-known, oft debated issue in politics, one that has seldom been handled other than symbolically.

A direct election with universal suffrage but selected candidates

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of four years and may be reelected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first round (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). Before an electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well versed in the religion and political system. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

This arrangement caused few problems during the first election organized on 25 January 1980 following the revolution. Out of the 124 citizens who applied to run with the Ministry of the Interior, 96 were allowed to stand for election, a selection made on

purely legal grounds (age, nationality, etc.). The situation changed after the impeachment in June 1981 of Abol-Hassan Banisadr, the first elected president. The Guardian Council arrogated the right to vet potential candidates using political and religious criteria, which were added onto the legal requirements used by the Ministry of the Interior.

The number of candidates ranged from a minimum of two in 1989 to a maximum of ten in 2001; the average number of candidates is five. Owing to the aforementioned method of selection, the candidates are always persons very devoted to the Islamic Republic and, in particular, to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*: obedience to the Supreme Leader). Some candidates allowed to run were aware that they had no chance to be elected, and they stood down a few days before the vote in order to avoid a negative exposure of the differences of opinion and of rivalries within the ruling class.

The 96 authorized candidacies correspond to 43 different persons; half of them having run for president more than once. For the thirteen presidential elections from 1980 to 2017, the total number of candidacies is 62. The candidates allowed to stand for election are representative of the Islamic Republic's political core. It should be mentioned that two candidates allowed to run for president were born at Najaf in Irak, where the father was a student in theology. The law requires only that the candidates be of Iranian "nationality" and "origin".

The strongholds of the Islamic Republic

A first fact that stands out on the map of the home provinces of the candidates in presidential elections from 1980 to 2017 is the division of the country into two nearly equal parts:

— on the one hand, a group of 16 provinces that, active in national politics, have

provided candidates for presidential elections; and — on the other hand, the 15 provinces from which no candidate has come. Comprising provinces on the country's periphery, this set seems to be a group of outsiders, or at least of areas that do not much bother with national politics.

The center of politics in Islamic Iran is definitely located on the Persian-speaking, Shiite Iranian plateau. The provinces providing the most candidates are, besides Tehran, Isfahan (with as capital the first city actually controlled by revolutionary forces before the shah's ouster), and Khorasan Razavi (with Mashhad, its capital, the oldest and most popular place of pilgrimage in Iran). All the presidents elected have come from these central provinces. Abol-Hassan Banisadr (1980-1981) was born in Hamadan; Mohammad-Ali Rajai (1981-1981), in Qazvin; Ali Khamenei (1981-1989), in Mashhad, Khorasan; Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani (1989-1997), in Bahraman (near Rafsanjan), Kerman Province; Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), in Ardakan, Yazd Province; Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), in Aradan (near Garmsar), Semnan Province; and Hassan Rouhani (2013-), in Sorkheh, Semnan.

Nonetheless, a few peripheral provinces did provide candidates for presidential elections. In particular: two candidates (Ali Shamkhani born in Ahvaz, and Mohsen Rezaie born in Masjed Soleyman) came from Khuzestan, but neither was elected, nor even retained for a second round, despite their relative success in their home province and, for Rezaee, in the region crossed by the nomadic Bakhtiari tribe to which he belongs. However their regional political base did not suffice to carry the nation.

Owing to its hegemonic position in national politics, Tehran has provided a disproportional share of presidential candidates: 14 out of 43. Besides, all presidents have had, previous to election, a political career in Tehran, in circles close to the seat of power. This was decisive in opening the way for them to run in a presidential election, more than their provincial affiliations and affinities (often merely a matter of family ties). Tehran's hegemony has less to do with its size or with ethnic, cultural or political factors than with the dense concentration of power and of politics in the capital.

Provinces excluded from politics?

What stands out on this map are the 15 provinces that have never provided a candidate for a presidential election. The provision of the Constitution that excludes candidates who are not Twelver Shiites explains the absence of candidates from provinces with Kurd or Baluchi Sunni majorities. However a factor just as decisive seems to be the lower economic and cultural status of provinces (Ardabil, Ilam, Kohgiluyeh) and areas (Bakhtiari) distant from Tehran, and even of the capital city's suburbs, such as Alborz. However no candidate for president has come from Shiite, Persian-speaking provinces such as Markazi in the center of the country and Fars (with historic Shiraz as capital). This situation reflects Tehran's "hypertrophy" and "hypercentrality", a problem increasingly discussed inside the country.

As the map shows, no candidate — apart from Moussavi and Merhalizadeh— allowed to run for president has come from Turkic-speaking provinces (in particular East Azerbaijan with its capital at Tabriz), even though Turkic-speakers form more than a quarter of the country's population. This would be evidence of the exclusion of Azeris from Iranian politics were it not for another factor, namely the big cities, in particular Tehran, have a high proportion of Turkic-speaking inhabitants. After all, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was born in Mashhad of Azeri parents.

Given this map of the geographical origins of the candidates allowed to run for president in the Islamic Republic, we can formulate the hypothesis that, despite the enthusiasm shown during national elections and the lively debates in the media, several provinces are much less involved in politics. This situation might cause problems in a country where national unity is an issue for reasons related to economic development and to the growing influence of metropolitan areas with a strong sense of identity.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The map depicts the provinces of birth of the candidates that have been allowed to run in one or more presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This information has been compiled from several biographical sources about candidates.

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Cartographer(s)

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Related map(s)

The 2017 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)

The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)

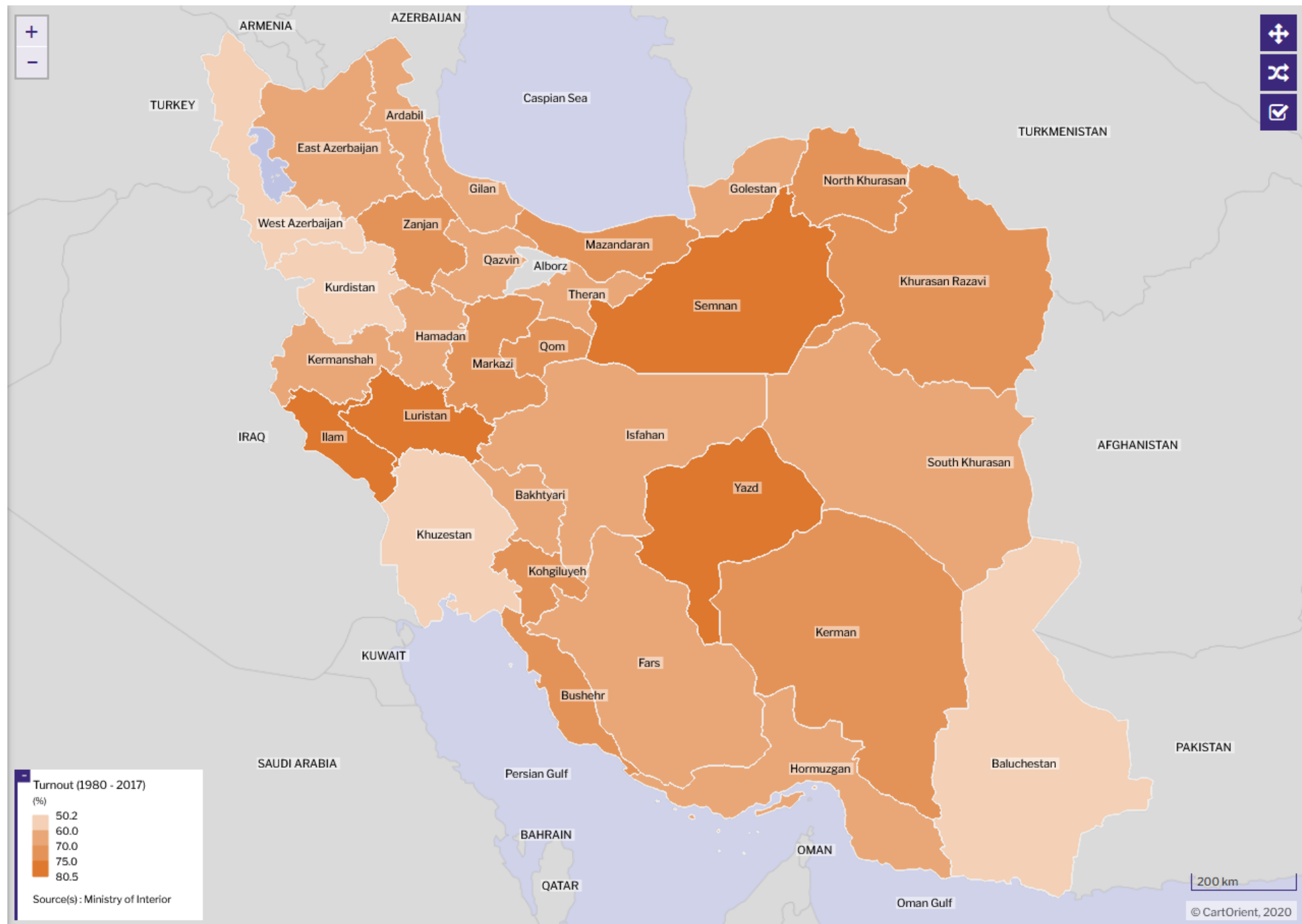
The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Baniadr (by region, 1980)

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Electronic reference

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URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/158/?lang=en>



Average voter turnout rate in Iranian presidential elections between 1980 and 2017 (by province, 1980-2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Iran is a republic since 1 April 1979 (12 Farvardin 1358 on the Iranian calendar). Despite the conditions under which they are organized, elections at all levels (national, provincial, local) have become not just an institutional ritual but a mirror of trends and blockages in the country. Even though the Guardian Council of the Constitution has, since 1981, been using political criteria to select the candidates allowed to run, presidential elections are no longer absolutely predestined. Since 1997, candidates for this election have represented opposing tendencies within the Islamic Republic. As a consequence, electoral debates have often been quite lively.

The map depicts average voter turnout rates by province (*ostan*) during the thirteen presidential elections from 1980 to 2017.

All Iranians, both men and women more than 15 years old (18 since 2007), could vote. The president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be reelected only once for a successive term.

A relatively high turnout

The national voter turnout rate in presidential elections has ranged between 50% (in 1993) and 85% (in 2005). The average is 68% — clear evidence that, after a revolutionary period with massive political mobilization, the population wants to make its voice heard and take part in politics. Statistics are, however, marred by officials' clumsy rigging of elections in certain provinces, where official turnout rates sometimes overshoot 90% or even 100%, but where, as everyone knows, abstention is widespread and signals opposition to the official candidate, government, or even the Islamic Republic.

Presidential elections in Iran (1980 - 2017). Elected candidate and turnout

Election date	Elected candidate	Vote (%)	Turnout (%)	Nb. of candidates
25/01/1980	Banisadr	75,6	67,4	8
24/07/1981	Rajaei	90,0	64,2	4
02/10/1981	Khamene'i	91,1	74,3	4
16/08/1985	Khamene'i	85,0	54,8	3
28/08/1989	Rafsanjani	94,0	54,6	2
11/06/1993	Rafsanjani	63,0	50,7	4
23/05/1997	Khatami	69,1	79,9	4
08/05/2001	Khatami	77,0	66,8	10
16/05/2005	(equality of votes)	19,4	62,8	8
24/05/2005	Ahmadinejad	61,7	59,7	2
12/05/2009	Ahmadinejad	63,1	85,2	4
14/05/2013	Ruhani	50,6	72,9	8
19/05/2017	Ruhani	57,1	73,3	6

Voter turnout rates reflect phases in the history of Iranian politics

Voter turnout trends in presidential elections bring to light two periods in the history of

the Islamic Republic.

What characterizes a first period (the 1980-1993 presidential elections) is a steadily lower turnout, except for the October 1981 election. However, since the official turnout rate in this exceptional election exceeded 100% in several provinces, the results are even more questionable than those of the other elections. Compare this with the 67% of Iranians who cast their ballots in the first presidential election (won by Abolhassan Banisadr in January 1980) or the mere 50% who took part in Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's reelection in 1993.

During this period with a falling turnout rate, a clamp was placed on the political situation, at the end of the revolutionary consensus and during the war with Iraq. Iran's first president, Banisadr, had been impeached; and the second president, Mohammad-Ali Rajai, assassinated by the People's Mujahedin of Iran a few weeks after his election. Meanwhile, liberal and progressive opponents were being pushed out of power or eliminated. During this period, the Guardian Council of the Constitution restricted candidacies, thus preventing any (even closely supervised) competition so that the clergy closest to Ayatollah Khomeini could keep a tight hold on power, as happened under the successive presidents, Ali Khamenei (1981-1989) and Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997).

A second period opened with Mohammad Khatami's unexpected election as president in 1997. Voter turnout would stay higher than during the 1980s, probably because of strong support for the (even small) chances of reforming the Islamic Republic's institutions. During this period, electoral competition was livelier but still under a strict control based on the constitution and acceptance of the Islamic Republic's principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience to the Supreme Leader). The 2009 turnout rate of 85% for the reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad marked a significant but dramatic exception to this return to normalcy in Iranian politics. In effect, massive popular demonstrations followed this contentious election, which, nonetheless, was evidence that elections were now accepted as a method of decision-making.

Between voting and abstention: A new political geography?

The map of average turnout rates by province in presidential elections brings to light a new political geography in Iran. What stands out are the differences between the provinces that have constantly supported the Islamic Republic, as evinced by their high turnout rates, and the provinces where very low turnout rates reflect opposition. The pieces thus visible on this map do not fully overlap with the contrast between center and periphery observed in 1981, a gradient that has not disappeared however.

In general, turnout is higher in Shiite, Persian-speaking provinces, where the traditionalistic culture (more than conservative) of the majority coincides with the Islamic Republic's religious and social ideals. This can clearly be seen in provinces in central Iran (Yazd, Semnan, Markazi, Hamadan, Khorasan), some of them poor. Turnout rates are also high in the provinces of Ilam (80%) and Lorestan (75%), where the religious and ethnic diversity (Sufi, Ali Illahees, Lors, Kurds, Laks, Persians, etc.) would lead us to expect strong abstention, as in the other provinces on the western periphery. However the high turnout in these two provinces can probably be set down to the tight political and military control exercised there.

Abstention is usually strong in the (often peripheral) provinces where many inhabitants are Sunni or speak a language (Kurdish, Arabic, Baluchi, etc.) other than Persian. The average turnout rate was only 59% in Khuzestan, 55% in West Azerbaijan and Baluchestan, and 50% in Kurdistan. While ethnic and religious factors still carry weight in Iranian politics, specifically political factors now weigh more heavily on voting patterns. In these provinces where political debate is lively despite the government's crackdown, abstention reflects persistent mistrust of the Islamic regime. The presidential election allows minorities to legally express their differences with official policies by voting massively for reformers, who advocate the equality of all citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations.

Voter turnout is also lower than the national average in key economic regions, where big cities are located: the one region ranging from Tabriz to the Caspian Sea, and the other from Tehran in central Iran to the Persian Gulf. In these regions, which span the center/ periphery divide, ethnic and religious identities now count less when voters

cast their ballots. Owing to migrations, the big urban centers have mixed populations. In the provinces of East Azerbaijan and Qazvin, where the majority speaks Turkic languages, voting patterns tend to follow this national trend: political factors now weigh more than ethnic affiliations.

Abstention expresses a moderate display of discontent or disinterest rather reflecting outright opposition to the Islamic Republic or a voter boycott.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

Election results were not published by province (*ostan*) or district (*shahrestan*) till 1993. However voter turnout rates by province were available. These data do not figure in the archives on the website of the Iranian Ministry of the Interior but can be found on *Iran Data Portal* (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu>).

To make it easier to read the map, the data have been adjusted to the division (since 2010) into 31 provinces, as compared with the 24 provinces in 1980.

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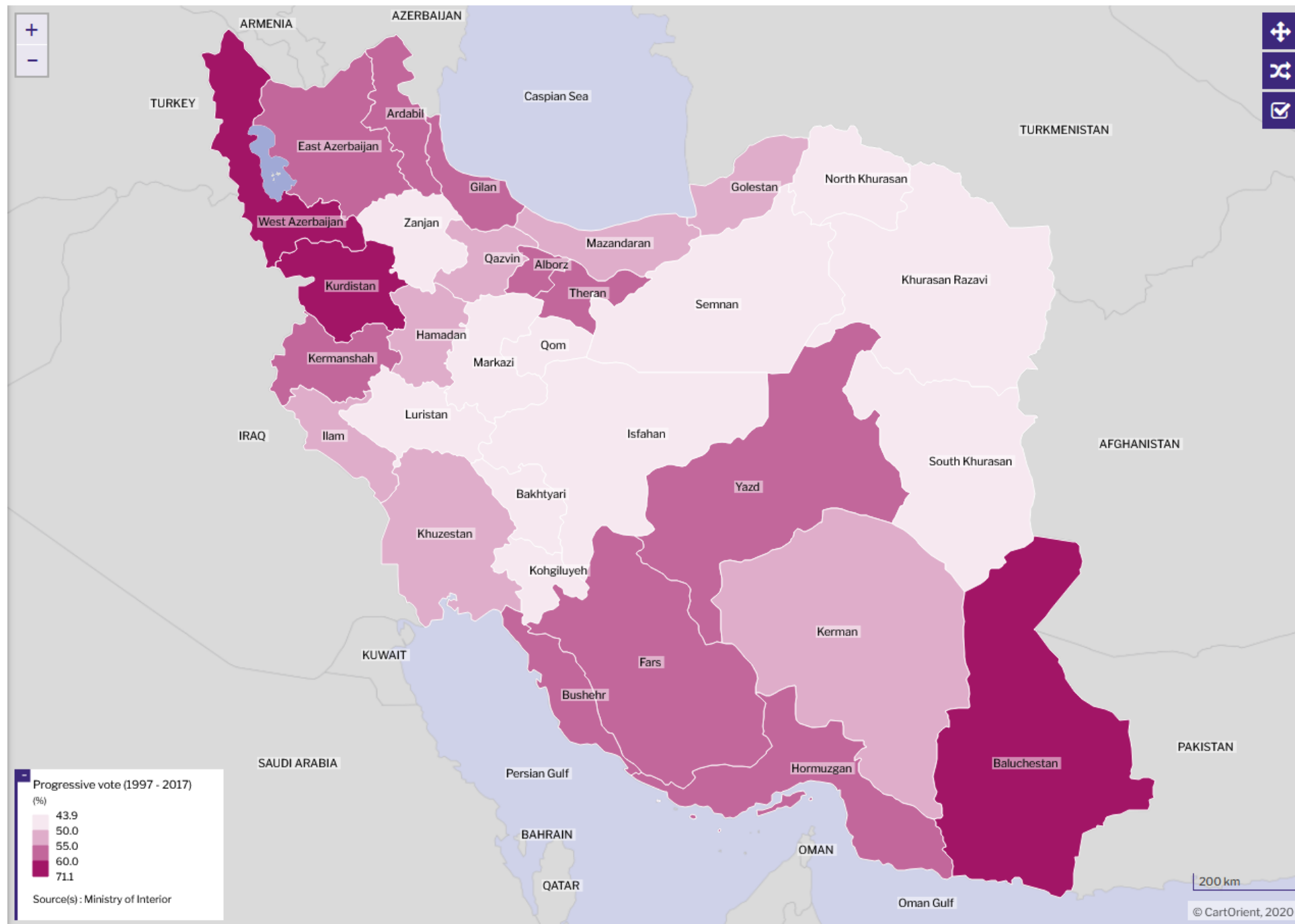
Related map(s)

Localism and regionalism : the 2005 Iranian presidential election (by region, 2005)
 The 1980 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Abolhassan Baniadr (by region, 1980)
 The October 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Ali Khamenei (by province, 1981)
 The July 1981 Iranian presidential election: Voter turnout for the election of Mohammad Ali Rajai (by region, 1981)
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The progressive vote in Iranian presidential elections (by province, 1997 - 2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Since 1980, presidential elections in Iran, which are held every four years, have become an important date when the balance of power between various forces is rather clearly revealed despite the tight control that the power-holders installed by the Islamic Revolution in 1979 exercise over politics. Prior to 1997 however, neither presidential nor parliamentary elections provided major opportunities for public political debates. What characterized politics in Iran at the time was an often chaotic situation stemming from the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini's unequaled power and prestige, the Iran-Iraq War and then the country's reconstruction under the joint control of the Shiite clergy and the Guardians of the Revolution.

When Mohammad Khatami carried the 1997 presidential election against Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri (the "official" candidate and president of parliament), a new period started that has gradually reshaped the political landscape. New persons, trends, "factions" and even national political parties have emerged. Although all these forces declare their fealty to the Islamic Republic and the Supreme Leader, some of them claim to be "reformers"; others, "conservatives"; and still others have not clarified their position.

Institutional politics is now divided into two major currents. The one is conservative, controlled by the more radical factions of the clergy and revolutionary institutions (foundations, Guardians of the Revolution). It benefits from popular support owing to social and cultural traditions, the popularity of Islam and the social changes introduced by the revolution in 1979. The other, also heterogeneous, is "progressive". It attracts the new middle classes who have had access to secondary and higher education and are more open to "globalization". A third current is made up of "reformers", "pragmatists" or "moderates" who, attached to the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, advocate gradual changes in politics but join progressives during elections.

The progressive vote in Iranian elections 1997-2017

Date	"Progressive" Candidates	Vote (%)
1997	Khatami	69,1
2001	Khatami, Hashemitaba	79,0
2005 1st round	Rafsanjani, Karroubi, Mo'in, Mehralizadeh	56,6
2005 2nd round	Rafsanjani	35,9
2009	Moussavi, Karroubi	34,7
2013	Ruhani	50,7
2017	Ruhani, Hashemitaba	57,6

The new middle classes, who did not exist under the imperial regime, now form the majority of the country's population. Middle-class women have a completely new position in Iranian society. While fitting into the dominant religious cultural traditions, these new generations are determined to take part in the economic, cultural and political trends of globalization, with which they are more familiar through the media (Internet) than from personal experience. By advocating more equality between men and women, between citizens without distinction as to religion or ethnic origins, reformers are trying to adapt the Islamic Republic to this social demand from the generations that entered adulthood after the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War.

The map depicts the average vote by province obtained by all "progressive" candidates

during the six presidential elections from 1997 to 2017. Though varying widely depending on the election, this vote represented a majority during this period except for the final rounds of the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and 2009.

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage for a four-year term, and may be reelected only once for a successive term. The electoral system calls for a majority vote with, if need be, a second round of voting (Article 113). All Iranians, both men and women more than 18 years old (15 before 2007), may vote. Candidates for president, in theory women as well as men, have to be Shiite Muslims well versed in the religion and politics.

The Ministry of the Interior vets applicants and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*shurah-e nehgabān*) supervises (Article 118). Since the second presidential election in 1981, this council selects among the persons who file applications to stand for election those who will be allowed to do so. Only those loyal to the principle of government by religious guidance (*velayat-e faghi*, obedience to the Supreme Leader) are allowed. Despite this method of vetting candidates, campaigns have been lively since 1997, when candidates representing several political currents have been allowed to run for office. Notwithstanding incoherent returns from some areas, election results provide a clear picture of the country's social, cultural and political geography. The outcome of the vote is not known in advance.

Iran: Conservatives and progressives?

As the map shows, the country is divided between “conservative” and “progressive” provinces; but there are also vast intermediate zones where the vote might tip the balance in favor on the one or the other of these tendencies.

Progressive candidates have always carried a majority in three provinces where a high proportion of the population is Sunnite and speaks a language other than Persian: Baluchestan (71.1%), Kurdistan (62.9%) and West Azerbaijan (63%). This support can be set down to the fact that “reformers” (in particular Khatami) advocate the equality

of all Iranians without distinction as to ethnic or religious affiliations. Ethnic or religious factors also account for the real (though less intense) support for progressive candidates in the provinces of Kermanshah (Shiite Kurds) and Hormozgan (Sunnite Arabs).

However, in other provinces with a population that is not ethnically or religiously homogeneous, the “progressive” vote is apparently not related to ethnic or religious identities: East Azerbaijan, Gilan, Yazd, Hamadan and Fars. In the metropolis of Tehran, the “progressive” vote has stronger roots in the feeling of being part of an urban area that has played a very active role in politics for more than a century now. As much can also be said about Tabriz, the stronghold of Turkic Azeri culture and a hotbed of political uprisings.

A conservative Iran also definitely exists, comprising eleven provinces between Khorasan and the Zagros Mountains, including Qom (44.4%) and Isfahan (47.8%). This traditional, Persian-speaking, Shiite region lies along the edge of the central desert. *Astān-e Qods Razavi*, the foundation that oversees the sanctuary of Imam Réza in Mashhad, exercises strong influence over all of Khorasan. Conservative Iran also includes poor, rural areas in the central region (Markazi 47.6%, Semnan 44.9%). The low level of support for progressives in Luri-speaking areas (Bakhtiari 43.0%, Kohgiluyeh and Lorestan 44.2%) and in the province of Zanjan (48.1%), where the majority is Turkic-speaking, might be set down to geographical isolation and the tight control exercised there by state authorities.

This political geography does not present as with two poles, as during the 1980s, with a gradient running from the center to the periphery. Nowadays, several factors — local, political, ideological, economic, cultural — come into play together to explain voting patterns.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior has released the official results of presidential elections. A map could not be made on the district scale (*shahrestan*) because district-level vote turnout rates are lacking. The results of these presidential elections are available on the website *Iran Data Portal*, managed by the universities of Syracuse and Princeton (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election>).

The quality of the official results has often come under question, in particular for the 2005 election, when the reform candidate Mehdi Karroubi decried his elimination from a second round to the benefit of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and, too, for the 2009 election, when unprecedented demonstrations protested Ahmadinejad's reelection.

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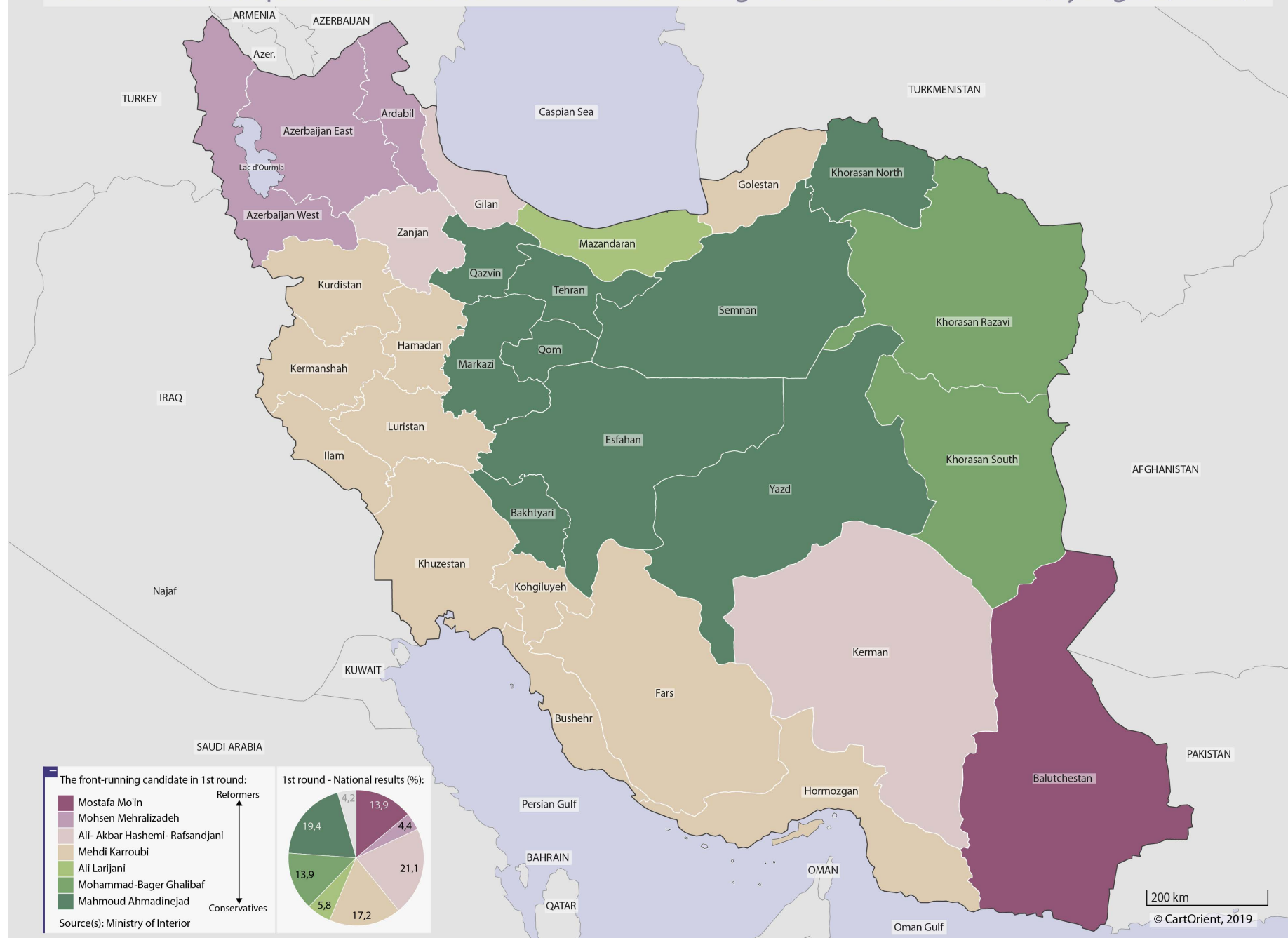
Related map(s)

- The 2017 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)
- The 2013 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hassan Ruhani (by bakhsh, 2013)
- The 1997 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 1997)
- The 2001 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 2001)
- The 2009 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mir Hossein Moussavi (by district, 2009)

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 URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/171/?lang=en>

The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The front-running candidate in 1st round (by region, 2005)



The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The front-running candidate in 1st round (by region, 2005)

Bernard Hourcade

The first round of the presidential election was organized on 17 June 2005 under the aegis of the outgoing president Mohammad Khatami, a reformer. Five of the seven candidates pulled more than 10% of the vote. Hashemi Rafsanjani qualified to run in the second round against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who would win with 61.7% of the vote. Voting patterns reflected both an ideological balance of power and a quite real competition among top-ranking political factions and leaders. Since each candidate arrived first in at least one province (usually his home province), this geographical fragmentation raised questions about localism as a factor in national politics.

Results of the 2005 presidential election in Iran

Candidates	1st round	%	2nd round	%
Ali- Akbar Hashemi- Rafsandjani	6 211 937	21,1	10 046 701	35,9
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5 711 696	19,4	17 284 782	61,7
Mehdi Karroubi	5 070 114	17,2	-	-
Mostafa Moeen	4 095 827	13,9	-	-
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4 083 951	13,9	-	-
Ali Larijani	1 713 810	5,8	-	-
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1 288 640	4,4	-	-
Blanks and spoils ballots	1 224 882	4,2	663 770	2,4
Total	29 400 857	100,0	27 995 253	100,0

Based on data released by the Ministry of the Interior, the map indicates the front-running candidate in each province (*ostan*).

A direct election with universal suffrage

Under the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a four-year term and may be re-elected once. The electoral system is winner-takes-all with a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority in the first (Chapter 9, Article 113ff). Before an electoral law reform in 2007, all Iranians, both men and women over 15 years old, could vote. The candidates for president, men or women, must be Shiite Muslims well-versed in the religion and politics. The Ministry of the Interior vets the candidates and organizes the election, which the Guardian Council of the Constitution "supervises" (Article 118). Since 1981, this Council has taken upon itself the selection of the candidates to be allowed to stand for election.

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Five candidates win more than 10% of the vote

This election proved that elections were now a durable feature of Iranian politics. Turnout was high (69.8%); and political debates were lively between the seven

candidates, all of them historical leaders of the Islamic Republic. True, the Guardian Council of the Constitution (*Shurā-ye nehgābān*), refusing nearly all the 1014 persons who wanted to run, allowed only eight to stand for election; but one of them, Mohsen Rezaee, stood down before the vote. Most political leaders at the time, especially on the side of conservatives, were allowed to run to replace the reformer president, Khatami. This situation marked a change with most earlier elections, when the “official” candidate faced a single “opponent” (or eventually a few second-ranking figures).

The seven candidates that stood for election were:

- Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president of parliament and then of the Republic (1989-1997). This pragmatist, who had been in charge of reconstruction following the Iran-Iraq War, was the favorite in pre-election polls.
- Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an engineer born in Garmsar, whose father was a blacksmith, had served as mayor of Tehran since 2003, after a career as prefect (*farmandar*) and governor of a province.
- Mehdi Karroubi, a clergyman from Lorestan, who had long served as president of the Iranian parliament.
- Mostafa Moeen, born in Najafabad (near Isfahan), who had been minister of Science, Research and Technology. Though not well known, he was a respected figure among the reformers grouped around the previous president, Mohammad Khatami.
- Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, from Mashhad, a former general of the Guardians of the Revolution, commander of the national police and head of Khatam ol Ambya (the financial trust of the Guardians of the Revolution).
- Ali Larijani, also from the ranks of the Guardians of the Revolution, who had held several positions. He was the son of deceased Ayatollah Amoli, a highly respected religious leader in his home province of Mazandaran.
- Mohsen Mehralizadeh, from Maragheh (East Azerbaijan), was less well known than all the others (save in sports where people had a high opinion of him).

Owing to their national reputations and provincial roots, five candidates came in close with scores between 13.9% and 21.1% of the vote. Twenty-five years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, this situation brought to light a division in the ruling elite that resulted from the political differences among (and rival ambitions of)

leaders who were all full-fledged supporters of the Islamic Republic. It also threw light on the opposition’s lack of unity and disorganization.

Given the small differences in scores, some candidates challenged the official results, in particular, Mehdi Karroubi, who was placed in second position in front of Ahmadinejad the evening of the election but whose place would be third in the definitive results released by the Ministry of the Interior.

To each his home (province): Localism and national issues

The first round of voting in 2005 resulted in a commonplace geographical pattern. Each of the seven candidates, even the ones with very low scores nationwide, carried a majority in at least one province, usually the province from which his family came: Larijani in Mazandaran, Mehralizadeh in Azerbaijan, Karroubi in areas with a Luri population (often nomads), and Ghalibaf in Khorasan.

The geographical patterns of the vote for Rafsanjani, Moeen and, above all, Ahmadinejad — the three candidates with a national political identity and audience — were more varied. The strong support from the center of the country for Ahmadinejad mainly had to do with the fact that the heartland on the Iranian plateau is the center of a traditional, Shiite, Persian-speaking Iran, and thus echoed with this candidate’s political message. This factor counted more than Ahmadinejad’s birthplace (on the northern edge of the plateau) or his stint as mayor of Tehran. The geographical distribution of the vote for Moeen is evidence that some political forces are provincial. Although Moeen had no personal attachment to Baluchestan, where most of the population is Sunnite and has always strongly supported candidates who are reformers, he came in first there.

While this map shows that the vote for a “local” candidate is still a major factor in the provinces, it also shows that the result of a presidential election mainly depends on other factors, ideological, political and social (urban vs. rural, level of education), factors that sometimes might also have a provincial dimension. Frequent but sometimes contradictory correlations exist between provincial identities and political leanings, such as the support by Sunnite provinces for reformers, or the conservative

vote in the center of the country and Khorasan. Elected in the second round, Ahmadinejad, like his predecessors and successors, owed his victory to his position in national politics.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior released the official results of the presidential election for the 325 districts (*shahrestan*) that existed in 2005. For want of an administrative map on this scale at this date, some data have been aggregated to adjust them to the bounds of the administrative map with 318 districts (prior to the division of certain *shahrestan*). The results are available on *Iran Data Portal* (universities of Syracuse and Princeton): <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2005-presidential-election>.

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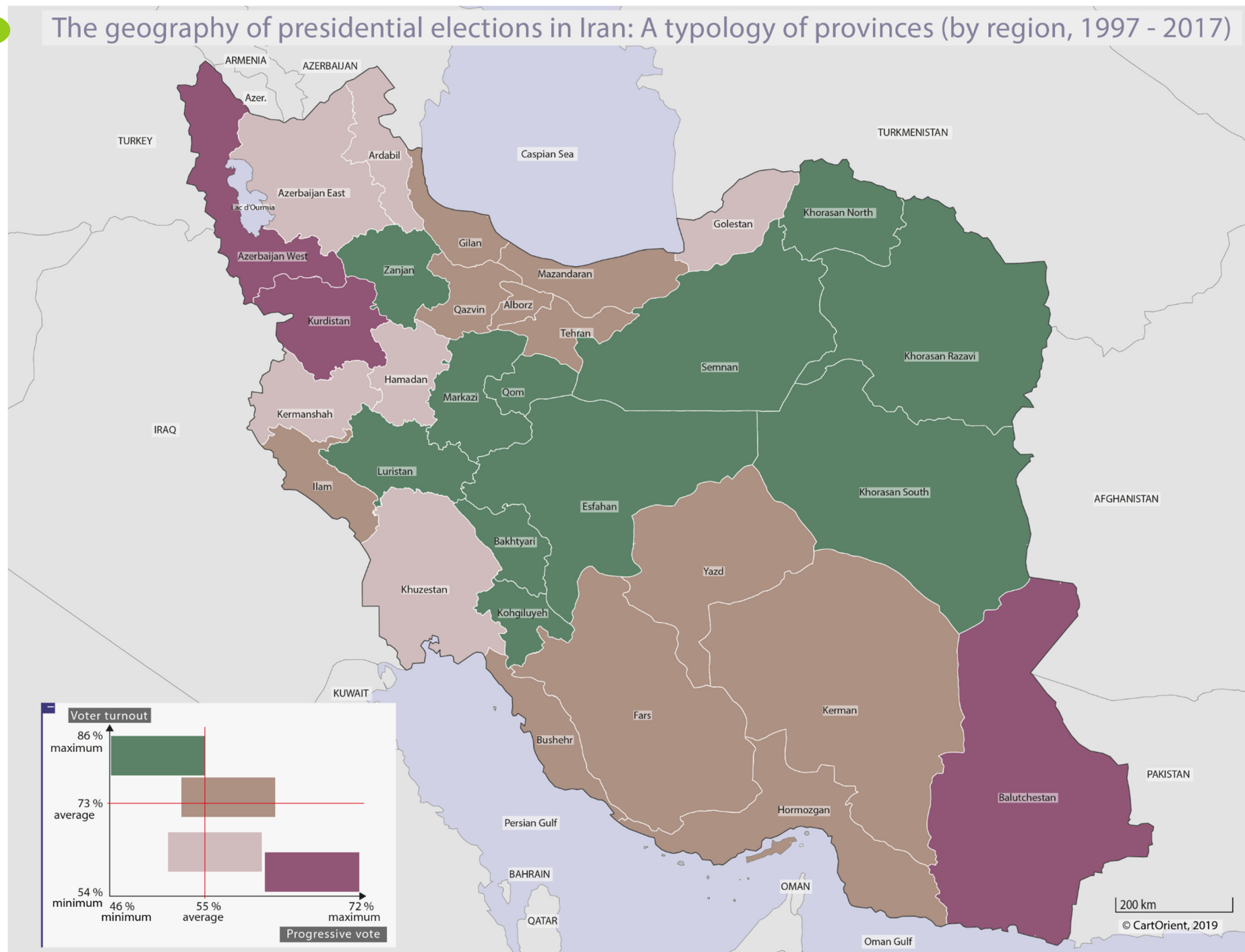
Related map(s)

- The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first round (by district, 2005)
- The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani in the second round (by district, 2005)
- The 2005 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the second round (by district, 2005)
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The geography of presidential elections in Iran: A typology of provinces (by region, 1997 - 2017)



The geography of presidential elections in Iran: A typology of provinces (by region, 1997- 2017)

Bernard Hourcade

Although the data released by authorities have been lacking in details and reliability, a rather stable geography of politics can be observed since the results of the very first presidential elections in Iran (1980-1993) — despite the nearly total lack of political debate at the time, given the increasing concentration of power around Ayatollah Khomeini, the crackdown on liberal and progressive opposition forces and the Iran-Irak War.

The turning point was the election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997: the diversity of candidates was more representative of various political currents in the Islamic Republic even though the Guardian Council of the Constitution still vets the persons allowed to stand for election. The geography of the vote in Iran has brought to light a partition between progressive and conservative provinces and, too, a set of provinces with more mobile voting preferences.

To present the political geography of the Islamic Republic, the map portrays the correlation by province (*ostan*) between the “progressive” vote and voter turnout rate for elections from 1997 to 2017.

A complex political geography in the likeness of the country

Four types of political provinces stand out on this map:

- Provinces with a high voter turnout rate where voters massively cast their ballots for conservative candidates. This is the Islamic Republic’s political heartland between Khorasan and the Zagros Mountains. It includes, in particular, the cities of Isfahan, Mashhad, Qom and Arak. This vast, geographically homogeneous zone (Shiite and Persian-speaking) is conservative, traditional and religious. It plays an active part in the country’s political institutions.

- Provinces with a low voter turnout rate where people massively vote for progressive candidates. Located on the eastern and western periphery of the country, these

provinces with a mostly Sunnite and non-Persian speaking population (Baluchi, Kurd, etc.) are “protesters”. However the high abstention rate during elections attenuates the political impact of this vote for progressive candidates and has pushed these provinces onto the country’s political periphery.

- Provinces with an “average” turnout rate and a more middle-of-the-road position. These characteristics place them at the tipping point of electoral and political trends in the country, since the balance of power between various forces is not fixed owing to cultural, religious or ethnic factors. Debates and conflicts are lively there, and ultimately determine the outcome of an election. Such is the case of Tehran Province along with the provinces along the Caspian Sea or in the south of the country. Located in these provinces are the high places of national history (the capital city, Yazd, Shiraz and Kerman) and, above all, the two major poles of the country’s economy: Tehran and the Persian Gulf.

- Provinces with abstention higher than the national average but where the results of elections fit into the national trend of progressive versus conservative. These are mainly provinces where most of the population is Turkic-speaking (Ardabil, East Azerbaijan) or ethnically heterogeneous (Khuzestan, Golestan, Hamadan, Kermanshah). They carry little weight in national politics or presidential elections owing to their low voter turnout rates, which are evidence of opposition to central authorities.

Given this political geography, social and political activities in Iran cannot be analyzed just as a function of ethnocultural (the Persian center vs. the non-Persian periphery) or sociogeographic (countryside vs. city) factors. This splintered geography draws attention to the social and political movements, often dramatic but strong, that cross Iran and force us to analyze more deeply the complexity of the new situation in Iran.

Translation: Noal Mellot

Source(s)

The Ministry of the Interior released the official results of presidential elections. A map could not be made on the district scale (*shahrestan*) because district-level turnout rates are lacking. The results of these presidential elections are available on the website *Iran Data Portal*, managed by the universities of Syracuse and Princeton (<http://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election>).

he quality of the official results has often come under question, in particular for the 2005 election, when the reform candidate Mehdi Karroubi decried his elimination from a second round to the benefit of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and, too, for the 2009 election, when unprecedented demonstrations protested Ahmadinejad's reelection.

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Related map(s)

Average voter turnout rate in Iranian presidential elections between 1980 and 2017 (by province, 1980-2017)

The progressive vote in Iranian presidential elections (by province, 1997 - 2017)

Localism and regionalism : the 2005 Iranian presidential election (by region, 2005)

The 1997 Iranian presidential election: The vote for Mohammad Khatami (by district, 1997)

The 2017 Iranian presidential election: Share of the vote for Hassan Ruhani (by district, 2017)

Electronic reference

Bernard Hourcade, "The geography of presidential elections in Iran: A typology of provinces (by region, 1997 - 2017)", *CartOrient*. Online since 03 March 2020.
URL : <http://cartorient.cnrs.fr/atlas/172/?lang=en>