

Extra Feature Story

Iranian Presidential Election Erupts in Protest

June 16, 2009

Hundreds of thousands of students and moderates defied a protest ban and rallied in the capital Tehran after the government announced president election results declaring victory for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad over pro-reform leader Mir Hossein Mousavi.

President Ahmadinejad has dismissed charges by Mr. Mousavi and his supporters who contend that that he rigged the election results.

Mr. Mousavi addressed supporters at the rally saying, "The vote of the people is more important than Mousavi or any other person."

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the government's influential group of clerics, the Guardian Council, to investigate the charges and perform a partial recount on the votes.

Not wanting to mar the possibility of negotiations with Iran's leadership, the U.S. government has remained quiet regarding the controversy.

Vice President Joe Biden said that he had "doubts" about legitimacy of Iran's election but that it was too soon to take sides.

"We just don't know enough," Mr. Biden said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Contested Election Inspires Huge Voter Turnout

Iranian citizens turned out in record numbers for Friday's election, with 85 percent of Iran's 46.2 million voters casting ballots according to the Associated Press.

In a landslide victory, President Ahmadinejad received nearly 63 percent of the vote with significant support from working-class and rural Iranians. Popular with urban, middle-class and young Iranians, Mr. Mousavi came in second with about 33 percent of the vote.

Some Iranian citizens had been growing increasingly unhappy with President Ahmadinejad's politically repressive actions as president. Mr. Mousavi, who had actually executed many political prisoners as prime minister during the Islamic Revolution, galvanized their support by promising change.

Iran Limits Internet, Cell Phones Access During Unrest

In an effort to clampdown on would-be protest organizers, the Iranian government began cutting off text-messaging services on election day. Cell phone providers and access to certain Web sites like Facebook and Twitter have also been blocked.

Still, many internet users have been finding ways to avoid the limited access to the social networking sites. According to the New York Times, some have been using proxy servers - Internet connections from other countries that they can access through their computers.

Many Iranian citizens have been using social networking Web sites like Twitter and Facebook to blog and post photos from the protests in real time.

Twitter even announced Monday that it would delay scheduled maintenance so as not to impede upon "the role Twitter is currently playing as an important communication tool in Iran."

Iran's Government a Complex Mix of Religious and Democratic Rule

Although President Ahmedinejad is Iran's elected leader, the Iranian constitution ensures that the country's unelected supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the Guardian Council actually wield the most power.

In 1979, Iran became an Islamic republic after religious fundamentalists overthrew the Western-backed Shah, in what is known as the Islamic Revolution.

For more information on Iran's government, check out the NewsHour's Governing Iran page [here](#).

U.S.-Iranian Relations

In 2002, former President George W. Bush declared that Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, was part of an "Axis of Evil."

Since his election in 2005, hard-liner President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has exacerbated tensions with the United States with his controversial positions on the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, whether the Holocaust happened and whether Israel should exist.

The U.S. government has been especially critical of Iran's interest in developing nuclear weapons. Iran launched a satellite in February, prompting concern from the international community that the country would begin to develop missile systems capable of hitting Israel and Europe.

-- Compiled by Kate Stanton for NewsHour Extra

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