Iran’s Presidential Election Puts Spotlight on Domestic Situation

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https://www.radiozamaneh.com

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While Iran’s nuclear program, its regional imperialist interventions and its recent direct missile war with Israel have been in the news, the recent death of president Ibrahim Raisi and the subsequent state-orchestrated election for a replacement have put the spotlight on Iran’s domestic situation.

By the government’s own estimates, less than 40% of eligible voters participated in the first round of the presidential election in which 6 candidates vetted by the authoritarian and theocratic regime competed and held debates. During the second round of the election which was narrowed down to the extreme conservative Saeed Jalili and the reformist candidate, Masud Pezeshkian, more people chose to vote only because Pezeshkian promised to restart negotiations with the U.S. to improve relations and offered to be less violent than the others in his approach to women who refuse the hijab.

As Iranian feminist writer and activist, Elahe Amani stated in an earlier article in *New Politics*, “Amidst the sham or state-orchestrated presidential election in Iran, a grim reality unfolds. Women are being violently arrested by the Morality Police for refusing to comply with mandatory hijab rules or wearing ‘improper’ hijab, dubbed ‘Bad Hijab.’ This misogynistic backlash follows the historic 2022 Woman Life Freedom uprising, led by Iranian women. Despite severe punishments, fearless women persist in their resistance, marking a turning point in the fight against the mandatory hijab.“ According to a poll conducted by the Iranian human rights website, Zamaneh, based in the Netherlands, Over 60% of Iranians are against the compulsory hijab. According to the Iranian government’s own poll, 45% said they were against the compulsory hijab. Pezeshkian, the reformist candidate who won the presidential election, did not oppose the compulsory hijab. He only promised to use education and less violent means to convince women to wear it.

The Iranian state’s war against women also continues in the form of further assaults on women

inside prisons and most recently, the issuance of a death sentence against a woman labor activist, Sharifeh Mohammadi. Mohammadi, an industrial engineer, has been falsely accused of affiliation with a Kurdish organization and of inciting rebellion against Islam.

Another Iranian progressive currently facing the death penalty is Ahmad Reza Jalali, a physician and dual Swedish citizen who was arrested on a visit to Iran in 2016 and imprisoned on false charges of "spying for Israel." In June, the Swedish government made a deal with the Iranian government to release a Swedish diplomat and a Swedish Iranian citizen imprisoned in Iran, in exchange for Sweden's release of Hamid Nuri, an Iranian government prosecutor earlier convicted by a Swedish court for his involvement in the executions of over 5000 political prisoners in Iran in 1988. However, the Swedish government did not negotiate the release of Jalali. Jalali is now on a hunger strike and has issued a statement from prison, condemning the Swedish government for abandoning him. Iran has the highest execution rate after China.

Police brutality and arrests of women, labor and environmental activists, Kurdish, Baluch, Arab youth, and Afghan migrants continue to increase. Thousands of the over 20,000 who were arrested during the Women, Life, Freedom movement protests are still in prison. 2023 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and feminist, Narges Mohammadi is still in prison along with dozens of other feminist leaders.

Thanks to public pressure inside and outside Iran, Toomaj Salehi, beloved working-class rapper and supporter of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement no longer faces the death penalty. However, he remains imprisoned for his powerful songs and defiance of the Iranian regime.

In November 2023, according to a poll conducted by the Iranian government itself, 73% said they believe in the complete separation of religion and state and 85% said they were less religious than five years ago. In a poll conducted by Zamaneh in June 2024, Iranians overwhelmingly said that the presidential election will not improve their lives. 69% wanted a fundamental transformation of the political system. 26% said the existing system could be reformed. 5% wanted to maintain the existing system.

Iran's nuclear and missile programs, its military interventions in the Middle East region, its increasing production of missiles and drones for Russia's imperialist war on Ukraine, and the Western economic sanctions imposed in response to these actions have continued to impoverish the Iranian masses to an unprecedented level. Of those recently polled by Zamaneh, 83% have said that increasing Iranian militarism and military intervention in the region would lead to increasing domestic repression.

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