

# Inside Iran's Runoff Election

by [Patrick Schmidt \(/experts/patrick-schmidt\)](/experts/patrick-schmidt)

Apr 25, 2016

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/dakhl-antkhabat-alaadt-fy-ayran\)](/ar/policy-analysis/dakhl-antkhabat-alaadt-fy-ayran)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Patrick Schmidt \(/experts/patrick-schmidt\)](/experts/patrick-schmidt)

Patrick Schmidt is a U.S. naval officer stationed in Washington; he previously served in Bahrain and onboard the USS Ronald Reagan.



Brief Analysis

## A detailed look at what happened in the first round of this year's parliamentary elections and how it might affect round two.

**T**wo months after round one of Iran's parliamentary elections, runoff voting will be held for unfilled seats on April 29. Article 9 of the Majlis election laws stipulates that candidates must receive at least one-fourth of all votes cast in order to win their districts outright, and some winners in February did not meet that threshold, necessitating runoffs for certain districts to fill the new 290-seat parliament.

## FIRST ROUND RECAP

**T**he initial round of elections for the Majlis and Assembly of Experts was held on February 26. Various officials, including President Hassan Rouhani and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, praised the high participation rate, which the government pegged at 62 percent nationwide and 50 percent in Tehran, for a total of 36 million people turning out to vote. The nationwide rate is similar to that reported for the 2012 Majlis election.

Polls were initially scheduled to close at 6 pm on election day, but the Interior Ministry issued several extensions that kept them open until 10 pm. Despite the distribution of 130 million ballots total for both the Majlis and Assembly elections, some polling locations appeared to be short on ballots. The ministry's thirtieth election notice, issued at approximately 1:45 pm, stated, "Due to the enthusiastic and epic presence of the nation of Iran...it is necessary for polling stations to count unused ballots and, in the case of shortage, contact local officials to address ballot shortfalls."

Data released by the Office of the Tehran Governor-General -- the only organ to publish complete results for all of the 1,021 Majlis candidates competing in the main Tehran district, Iran's largest -- suggests that there were only 31 serious candidates for the district's 30 seats. According to the Interior Ministry, prominent conservative incumbent Hadi Adel placed thirty-first and failed to win a seat, despite receiving nearly the same number of votes he did in the

2012 election, when he was the district's top vote-getter.

Similar to previous Majlis elections, the Guardian Council ratified the results of round one through official announcements between March 14 and April 13. In the 2012 elections, held March 2 of that year, initial results were ratified in stages between March 4 and April 8. Those elections also required a second round of voting for approximately one-fifth of the Majlis seats, with runoffs held May 4.

## RUNOFF PROCEDURES

**R**ound two will determine the results for 69 Majlis seats spread throughout 56 electoral districts in 21 of Iran's 31 provinces. The official ten-day campaign period began April 21 and ends at 8 am on April 28. Citizens with the stamp of one district in their *shenasnameh* (identity document) are ineligible to vote in a different district in the second round; citizens who lack a stamp altogether are eligible to vote in any district in round two. According to the Interior Ministry, an electronic system will check each voter's national identification number to verify that they did not cast ballots in a different district in round one.

Turnout for second-round voting in Iran is typically lower than in the first round. According to Deputy Interior Minister Muhammad Hussein Moqimi, 15,800 polling locations will be open, and other sources confirm that mobile polling stations will also be used as in previous elections. Interior Ministry spokesman Hossein Ali Amiri noted that 19 million new ballots are being printed for exclusive use in the runoffs.

## ISFAHAN REVERSAL

**O**n March 18, Amiri announced that "in Isfahan, the election's integrity is not being questioned, though it is possible that one of the winners in this district could be changed." On March 22, major Iranian news outlets quoted a source stating that "Mino Khaleqi, elected by the people of Isfahan, has been disqualified by the Guardian Council."

The Interior Ministry had previously announced final results for Isfahan's five seats on February 29, though at that point the powerful twelve-member Guardian Council had not yet confirmed them. Likewise, the website of Iran's vice president for women and family affairs included Khaleqi's victory in its count of fourteen women who won first-round races. As of this writing, there is no official explanation for her disqualification nor any mention of it on the Guardian Council's website; some sources suggest an incriminating picture was provided to the council showing her without a hijab or shaking hands with a man, both of which are illegal. A reformist group in Isfahan wrote an open letter to President Rouhani asking him to intervene on her behalf, but he has not made any public comments on the case. Although initial reports stated that Khaleqi's seat would be filled during the 2017 midterm elections, more recent coverage -- following meetings between the Guardian Council and Interior Ministry -- indicates that the seat may be given to the district's sixth-place candidate, Ali Reza Ajodani.

Other districts held recounts, including Maku, Mashhad, and Buyer Ahmad. In Maku, the question was whether the candidates with the most votes had met the 25 percent minimum threshold. The recounts in Mashhad and Buyer Ahmad were triggered by candidates complaining of voting irregularities.

## POLITICAL AFFILIATION

**T**he political affiliations of the runoff candidates are not entirely clear. On April 9, some media outlets indicated that the "List of Hope" -- a faction associated with Rouhani and former presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami -- would be represented by 68 candidates, but other sources published lower figures. Moreover, it is not clear whether all of the candidates named in these reports received support from the List of Hope during the first round. The semiofficial news outlet Fars has noted that 25 incumbents are competing in the runoffs; it also listed 70 incumbents who already won in round one and 115 who lost their seats.

Identifying the political orientation of the first-round winners is challenging as well, in part because the conservative "principalist" faction and the reformist faction were still adding candidates to their lists until shortly before February's election. A common political joke in Iran is that the most popular party is the "Hezb-e Bad," which literally translates to "party of the wind" and is often used to label political opportunists who switch their affiliation in different elections. The first-round results for the List of Hope seem to reflect the joke: of the 84 winners listed on the faction's website, 11 were also featured on other lists, in some cases with diametrically opposite political agendas (for more on this multiple-list phenomenon, [see PolicyWatch 2582, "Reformists Apply the 'Lesser Evil' Theory to Iran's Elections"](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/reformists-apply-the-lesser-evil-theory-to-irans-elections) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/reformists-apply-the-lesser-evil-theory-to-irans-elections>)). Similarly, Majlis Monitor identified 80 winners from that list, while the Iranian Students News Agency reported that 75 principalists, 83 reformists, and 58 unaffiliated candidates had won seats. The picture will presumably become clearer after the new Majlis holds its first session, currently scheduled for May 27. At that time, the membership will vote for a speaker. Past speaker elections have usually been contested, revealing much about the relative strength of different factions. The process also underlines the fact that Iranian parliamentary factions are loose coalitions that tend to form and transform based on individual issues.

*Patrick Schmidt is a research assistant at The Washington Institute.* ❖

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,  
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

### TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Democracy & Reform (/policy-analysis/democracy-reform)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)