

The Iranian Moment

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Although the election of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came as a shock to many observers, it actually represented the final step in a gradual shift within the country's political mainstream. The conservatives now control all levers of power in the Islamic Republic, with opposing factions effectively neutralized. And while the 2005 presidential election seemed to signal a sudden break from the conciliatory tone of the Khatami administration, the municipal elections of 2003 and the legislative elections of 2004 were clear harbingers of this shift.

In this new Washington Institute Policy Focus, Iran expert Frederic Tellier examines each of these three key elections in order to trace the development of the conservative resurgence. He demonstrates how the conservatives won over constituencies that had previously supported the reformists, exploiting the full gamut of nostalgia, frustrations, and fears that motivate the common Iranian citizen. In particular, the regime's nuclear program has garnered support that stretches far beyond clerical circles, despite its potentially fatal effect on Iran's relations with the international community. In the conservatives' eyes, the Islamic Revolution rests on three pillars: ideology, nationalism, and technological development. Although the first of these pillars is crumbling, the other two can still keep the regime stable. Iran may have a new face, then, but many of its features have long been familiar to anyone who cared to look.

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