

Iran: The bloody summer of 2009
A new project: Documenting the peoples' movement during the presidential elections

The peoples' movement in Iran during the presidential elections was unique and unequalled both in the history of Iran and the Middle East.

The definitive selection of candidates for the tenth presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran was published on May 20, 2009. Four candidates had been selected from a long list of hundreds.

The election campaign was accompanied by an avalanche of statements, reports, articles, and posters expressing the ideas and slogans of the candidates. In Tehran and other large cities the presidential candidates organized meetings and addressed vast audiences to explain their programs. Political parties, trade unions, and religious organizations pledged their support for their favorite candidate in official statements.

The live televised broadcasts of the debates between the various presidential candidates injected an enormous vitality into the election campaign. The first debate of candidates took place on June 1 and the last on June 7. The ratings for these debates were the highest in the history of Iranian television. The fervor of the debates heightened the political temperature in the streets and people talked with one another about matters that had been discussed on television. This led to an intensified politicization of public life and an unequalled participation of the population in the election campaign. For instance, on June 7 the adherents of candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, dressed in green, formed a human chain of 25 kilometers through Tehran. In other cities similar actions took place.

One week before the elections, the streets in Tehran were transformed into a battle among the adherents of the various presidential candidates. The daily rituals of masses of supporters waving banners, yelling slogans, and debating with each other lasted until dark. This dazzling climate attracted more and more people as active proponents for their favorite candidate. The presence of the candidates themselves in the streets and squares gave the campaign a face.

The massive participation of the population and their manifestations in the streets was a novelty in Iranian election campaigns. The intense participation of the middle classes and young people was particularly noticeable. Decisive was the fact that 70 percent of the Iranians are city dwellers and 60 percent of them are younger than 30. Despite the enormous discontent about the political system among the middle classes and the young, they cherished the hope that the elections would enable social and political change. The peaceful debates in the streets and the large amount of tolerance for people with dissenting opinions marked the development of a new orientation among an increasing segment of the population. Approximately 90 million text messages were sent every day

in the week before the elections. This represented an increase of 38 percent over the average messages before the elections.

The 10th presidential election in Iran was held on June 12, 2009, under the watchful eyes of more than 650 journalists from abroad. The first messages of the press agencies announced a high turnout. In Teheran and other cities, long queues in front of the polling stations formed as early as 8 o'clock in the morning. Later, the turnout was recorded as 85 percent, which was extremely high both for Iran and internationally.

After the Home Office announced the results that Mahmud Ahmadinejad had won, there were widespread protests by the adherents of the other candidates. They claimed there was fraud in the elections. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated on June 13 and 14, mainly Mousavi's followers, the most important competitor of Ahmadinejad. Tehran witnessed the most massive protests, but in other cities such as Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Orumiyeh many thousands took to the streets. Between 1 and 3 million people demonstrated in Tehran on June 14, the largest demonstration since 1979. The demonstration ended with shooting by the riot police and the paramilitary Basij. Dozens of people were killed or wounded. The next morning, militias entered the dormitories of Tehran University campus, wrecked the rooms and molested dozens of students. On June 16, 17, and 18, peaceful protests again took place. Manifestations and demonstrations to show solidarity with the Iranian protests were organized abroad.

Paramilitary troops arrested hundreds of journalists, political activists, and demonstrators. The government branded the demonstrators as rioters who wanted to destabilize the country. Political parties advocating reform and a few well known religious leaders also cast doubt on the official results of the elections and condemned the violence used against the demonstrators. Human rights organizations followed suit. They reported that many of the people under arrest were sent to the Kahrak prison on the outskirts of Tehran, where they were tortured. In other cities as well torture and rape occurred.

The bloody repression did not extinguish the protests, however. They continued in various ways: small scale actions of distributing flyers and posters, writing slogans on the walls, and shouting slogans from the rooftops during the night. Official feasts such as the Friday Prayer and the Day of Jerusalem (September 18) offered the opportunity to once again raise one's voice to call for resignations from the government.

While Iranian presidential elections have always resulted in highly charged feelings, the 10th election in 2009 stands out as especially charged. Never before has such a vast crowd participated in the campaign, hoping for change. Never before have so many people demonstrated in the streets against the government. Many political taboos were broken, including the branding of the president as a "dictator" and the condemnation of the Foremost Leader. The campaign and the subsequent revolt represent very special moments in the political and social history of Iran. This period will go down in history as "the Bloody Summer of 2009."

The IISH has started an extensive project to document the tumultuous presidential elections in Iran on June 12, 2009.

Thousands of photographs, videos, films, leaflets, posters, and weblogs were made during the campaign, documenting the massive demonstrations shortly after the elections as well as the bloody repression of these protests. The protest movement continued its activities on a smaller scale by distributing leaflets and posters or shouting slogans at night from the rooftops. The collection includes documents, both in digital and alternative forms, in Farsi and other languages, with speeches, statements, interviews, slogans, poems, memos, jokes, songs, and lists with names of detained and missing persons. All these documents have been systematically collected in the IISH project, and the materials will be available for research. IISH welcomes additions and contributions to this important collection.

To contribute to this valuable collection on the Bloody Summer, we urge you to donate any relevant materials you may have! Please contact the Middle East and Central Asia Department, meca@iisg.nl, P.O. Box 2169, 1000 CD Amsterdam, The Netherlands.