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## Winner in Iran Calls for Unity; Reformists Reel

BY [MICHAEL SLACKMAN](#)

TEHRAN, June 25 - Iran's newly elected president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said Saturday that he wanted to create a strong Islamic nation and issued a call for unity in his first comments after a landslide victory that left the country's reformist movement virtually powerless and threatened to further complicate relations with the United States.

In an address on state radio, Mr. Ahmadinejad, a religious conservative, said he would work toward building "an Islamic, exemplary, advanced and powerful nation," and urged Iranians to "forget all our rivalries and turn them into friendships."

But his rival in the race, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was anything but conciliatory, lashing out in a statement that accused his opponents of smearing him during the campaign. "I am sure that those who spent billions from the public funds to ruin the reputation of me and my family in a vicious way, and those who took advantage of the regime's tools and intervened in the elections in an organized way will pay back in life and after death," he said in the statement.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's rise to the presidency - the most important elected post in the country - reflected a desire by Iranian voters to change the economy and rid the nation of corruption.

In his campaign, Mr. Ahmadinejad (pronounced ah-ma-DEE-nay-jahd), who came from humble origins as a blacksmith's son to become an engineer and in 2003 the mayor of Tehran, outlined a domestic agenda that can be described as Islamic socialism - protecting the core values of the Islamic revolution while using state resources to provide a financial safety net for all Iranian families, especially the poor.

But the consolidation of power in the hands of conservatives could prove troublesome for United States and the European Union, which is scheduled to resume talks with Iran in July over its nuclear program. While the election might not fundamentally change the country's foreign policy positions, which are controlled by the clerics who have final say over all government actions, Mr. Ahmadinejad's fierce nationalism could undermine any chance of a reconciliation with the United States, as well as complicate the nuclear talks.

Members of the European Union expressed concern about those talks on Saturday. The British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, said he hoped Iran under Mr. Ahmadinejad would "take early steps to address international concerns about its nuclear program."

The White House responded to the election result by reiterating charges made previously by President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice over the legitimacy of the vote, noting that "over 1,000 candidates were disqualified from running and there were many allegations of election fraud and interference."

Mr. Ahmadinejad's victory, like the victory in 1997 of the departing president Mohammad Khatami, amounted to protest votes by an electorate eager for change. In Mr. Khatami's case, it was

a desire for social change - this time for economic change. But in both elections, the vote was a rebuff of the candidates voters perceived as representing the ruling elite.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's opponent in the runoff election on Friday, the former two-term president Mr. Rafsanjani, saw his prospect for victory fade in part because he was widely viewed as the candidate of the system that voters wanted to reform.

Yet Mr. Ahmadinejad is also an insider. He has long worked with some of this country's most conservative institutions, from the Basij - the militia that often patrols the streets and enforces strict codes of dress and conduct - to the Revolutionary Guards. In addition, his main support came from the conservatives, including the supreme religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who control the most powerful institutions in the country. His victory on Friday gives the conservatives a monopoly on power and is expected to give those forces a freer hand in running the country.

The nation's leading reformers seemed stunned by the victory of Mr. Ahmadinejad. Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president and chief aid to the departing president, said in an analysis posted on his popular blog that Mr. Ahmadinejad won in part because of missteps by reformists, from offering unrealistic campaign promises, to losing touch with average people.

"In the political atmosphere of the advertisements, little was said about the economic issues," he wrote. "We focused our attention on elites and forgot the ordinary people who are trying to get their daily bread."

Assadollah Athari, a political analyst with close ties to the reform movement said Iranians were "just frustrated with the bad economy and high prices."

"They are frustrated with a small group that is in power and is filthy rich," he said. Part of the vote was also a protest vote for the founders of the revolution. They wanted to vote for somebody else to get rid of the older leaders.

In the runoff election on Friday, voters chose between candidates with very different visions for the country: Mr. Rafsanjani, 70, who promised social changes, privatization and better relations with the United States; and Mr. Ahmadinejad, 49, who focused almost exclusively on the nation's economic needs and appealed to Iranians' national pride.

According to final figures issued Saturday by the Interior Ministry, Mr. Ahmadinejad won 17.2 million votes compared with just over 10 million for Mr. Rafsanjani. The ministry said about 28 million voters went to the polls, for a turnout of about 60 percent, about the same as in the first round.

In his campaign, Mr. Ahmadinejad presented himself as eager to help Iran improve its international relations, acknowledging that it is impossible for Iran to cut itself off. But he has maintained that foreign relations must always be on Iran's terms.

"In our foreign policy, in addition to the Islamic world and the Iranian domain of civilization, any country that has no intention of enmity with the Islamic Republic can enjoy broad relations with us," he said at a news conference last week when he announced he had made it into the runoff.

But Mr. Ahmadinejad has lashed out at foreign governments he views as hostile. In 2001, for example, when German officials formally complained about the arrest and conviction of reformers who had taken part in a conference in Berlin and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder then postponed a trip to Tehran, Mr. Ahmadinejad was quoted in the Iranian daily Resalat as saying, "Germany's mentality is exactly the same as during the Hitler era." At the time he was a leading member of the

Islamic Association of Engineers, a conservative group.

But that kind of vitriolic language was largely missing from the campaign for the presidency. Mr. Ahmadinejad and his campaign surrogates rejected extremism, refusing even to publicly criticize Mr. Rafsanjani, whom they complimented as a leader and a statesman whom they would turn to for advice if Mr. Ahmadinejad were elected.

Mr. Ahmadinejad instead emphasized his piety and independence, insisting that he did not represent any political party but was a man of the people. His core supporters, the ultrareligious, spoke of him with reverence, as though he were a religious figure and not a politician. It was his everyman posture, compared to the regal style of Mr. Rafsanjani, that won many people over. On election day, Mr. Ahmadinejad waited with average citizens before casting his vote.

"All through my life I have never seen a presidential candidate standing in a queue like ordinary people," said Seyed Mohammad Shekarabi, 75, who broke into tears when he saw Mr. Ahmadinejad take his place in the line.

It was Mr. Rafsanjani whom voters perceived as the embodiment of a system they have grown to distrust. A former president and cleric, who has become a very wealthy businessman, Mr. Rafsanjani carried himself as royalty during the campaign, never taking to the streets, and never seeming to understand that his history as an elder statesman of the republic was viewed as a liability, not an asset.

Sadeq Zibakalam, a political analyst and supporter of Mr. Rafsanjani, said conservatives had a core support of 7 million to 10 million voters nationwide.

"The rest of the votes," Mr. Zibakalam said, "were from people convinced it was Rafsanjani who was responsible for the awful mess of the economy."

Mr. Rafsanjani tried to win by taking his cues from Mr. Khatami's playbook, holding campaign events with loud rock music where young men and women mingled, and promising to protect social freedoms.

But interviews with voters, political analysts and politicians demonstrated that Mr. Rafsanjani did not understand the priorities of the public. With modest social successes already achieved, many voters said they turned their attention to more immediate concerns like jobs, food prices, health insurance and, perhaps most of all, a perception of honesty.

Some said that they valued the social reforms that had given them more control over their personal lives, but that they were voting for Mr. Ahmadinejad because they wanted better management of the country and because they no longer viewed reformist parties as viable vehicles of change.

President Khatami's failure to push through significant social and economic reforms during his eight years in office left many people as distrustful of the left as the right.

"Iranians are not fed up with reforms because they are still interested in change," said Amir Ali Nourbakhsh, a political and economic consultant based in Tehran. "But what they are looking for is someone they can trust."

Mehdi Ebrahimi, 32, is exactly the kind of voter Mr. Rafsanjani should have been able to attract. He is upper middle class and lives in the leafy neighborhood of northeast Tehran. Mr. Ebrahimi, who is married and is not conservative in his religious views, owns a business that does landscaping for the city of Tehran.

Under previous mayors, Mr. Ebrahimi said, his company was often paid as late as six months after completing the work. He said he found that especially annoying, given the lavish lifestyles of the former officials. But, he said, since Mr. Ahmadinejad became mayor, the city has been paying on time while the mayor has continued to live as an average citizen.

This mayor streamlined the municipal bureaucracy, Mr. Ebrahimi said of Mr. Ahmadinejad. "He is not like other mayors. He is simple. He has been able to cut spending in the city. He is honest."