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## Where Will the Power Lie in Iran?

By The Editors



(Photo: Ben Curtis/Associated Press) Hundreds of thousands protested the result of the election in Azadi Square in Tehran on Monday.

**Updated, June 16, 9:15 p.m.** | Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, an economist at Virginia Tech, reports from Iran on how young people in small towns are different from their urban counterparts.

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In the largest antigovernment demonstration since the Iranian revolution of 1979, thousands of people took to the streets in Iran on Tuesday to protest the disputed presidential election in which President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared winner this past weekend.

The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called for an examination of opposition charges of vote-rigging and the country's powerful Guardian Council said Tuesday that it would order a partial recount. That concession was rejected by the main opposition candidate, Mir Hussein Moussavi, and other opponents, who demand that a new election be held.

We asked some experts to give some background on the developments over the past few days, and what the Obama administration's reaction should be.

*(Continued on Reverse)*



## What if Ahmadinejad Really Won?



***Djavad Salehi-Isfahani** is a professor of economics at Virginia Tech and a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution.*

Iran's young people helped energize this election with the hope that it would bring relief to their twin problems of unemployment and social restrictions.

Moussavi appealed to young Iranians in cities, but not in small towns.

Young people ages 15-29 make up 35 percent of the population but account for 70 percent of the unemployed. In addition, they feel constantly harassed by restrictions on how to dress and who they can hang out with. In the weeks before the election, they had come to believe that, thanks to their sheer numbers (40 percent of the voting age population) and strong determination, they could take control of their destiny by electing a new president. Their optimism was underscored by the fact that though they have no memory of the Islamic Revolution, its founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, or of the 8-year war with Iraq, they chose as their leader — Mir Hussein Moussavi — a well-known figure with strong ties to all three.

Now that the results have gone completely contrary to their expectations, they are naturally very disappointed, and, as the world has witnessed, they are taking great risks to express it.

So far, protests are confined to Tehran and a few large cities, and smaller towns and rural areas have been very quiet. True, large crowds in large urban centers offer a degree of safety that is lacking in rural areas and small towns. But, behind the difference in reactions to Ahmadinejad's election may lie real divisions among the young Iranians in large cities and in small towns and rural areas. Mr. Moussavi's main appeal to them was on social, not economic, issues, which are more important to the more affluent youth in Tehran and large urban centers. Indeed, he confined his campaign to Tehran and a few large cities.

By contrast, Mr. Ahmadinejad spent the last four years traveling across the country courting the rural and small town votes. There is even evidence that his programs to distribute income and wealth more evenly have begun to bear fruit. The so-called "justice shares" that entitle each individual to receive about \$1,000 worth of equity in public companies pay out about \$70 a year have been distributed to many in rural areas, and many more are waiting for their turn. Others are waiting to receive funds for housing and marriage from various funds that his administration has established.

Once these factors are taken into account, it is not so implausible that Mr. Ahmadinejad may have actually won a majority of the votes cast, though not those cast in Tehran. The well-to-do urbanite Iranians and their political leaders would do well to allow room for the possibility that a recount may reduce but not eliminate Mr. Ahmadinejad's lead, and, in that case, respect the voters will and prepare for a comeback in 2013. After all, as the Moussavi camp has correctly pointed out, while Mr. Ahmadinejad's policies have put money in poor people's pockets, they have failed to provide more jobs for their young. If his critics are correct, the next four years will be difficult years for Mr. Ahmadinejad and may well see the undoing of his populist majority.