

IRAN

1400 BRIEF

۱۴۰۰

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

ایران



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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Middle East and North Africa

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SUMMARY



Last week, Iranian officials from both the so-called moderate and hardline camps have devoted some energy to offer alternative readings and justifications for the Islamic Republic's lowest-ever presidential election voter turnout. Internationally, the combination of uncertainty and optimism still cast a shadow on reviving the nuclear deal, but the Biden administration has been trying to send a different message to Tehran last week. In the economic security realm, workers of the oil and gas industry have started their "Campaign 1400" (1400 being the current Iranian year) of strikes demanding higher wages amid high inflation and time off. Moreover, while Iranian officials claim that the "made in Iran" vaccine against COVID-19 will be exported in the near future, all over the country elderly people are waiting in long queues for their vaccination while affluent Iranians have embarked on "vaccine tourism" to get vaccinated in neighboring countries, such as Armenia.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

With the outcome of the presidential election in Iran, Iranian media and officials made efforts to justify the historically low voter turnout. *Kayhan*, a hardline daily close to the Supreme Leader, claimed that “A significant percentage of the elderly or people with underlying illness who used to take to the polls in the past, despite the desire to vote, did not take the risk [this time].” Mohsen Mansouri, deputy of President-elect Ebrahim Raisi’s campaign, has tried to [reinforce this allegation](#), suggesting that it was due to the coronavirus pandemic that voter turnout was driven down by 10 to 19%. Mohammad-Javad Haj Ali Akbari, one of Tehran’s Friday Prayer Imams (who are directly appointed by the Supreme Leader), also [repeated the latter claim](#). Furthermore, *Javan*, a daily close to the IRGC, in an article entitled “The free fall of the reformists’ social capital”, has blamed the performance of the reformist/moderate camp as an important factor for the voter turnout, especially in terms of economic dissatisfaction. However, President Rouhani [rejected](#) this idea and emphasized that economic issues had nothing to do with the people’s low participation. He implicitly blamed the Guardian Council, an ultra-conservative body that decides who can run for president. In fact, Rouhani and [some reformists, who released a statement](#), believe if the Guardian Council allowed them to have more presidential candidates, turnout would have been higher.

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However, the result of the Iranian local elections, which was held simultaneously with the presidential election, showed a different outcome from what reformists/moderates claim. With the reformists having their own list in the local election, supported by former President Mohammad Khatami, considered as the main leader of reformist camp, in Tehran where more than 6.5 million people were eligible to vote, [they merely recorded 36,000](#) votes for the top candidate of their list.

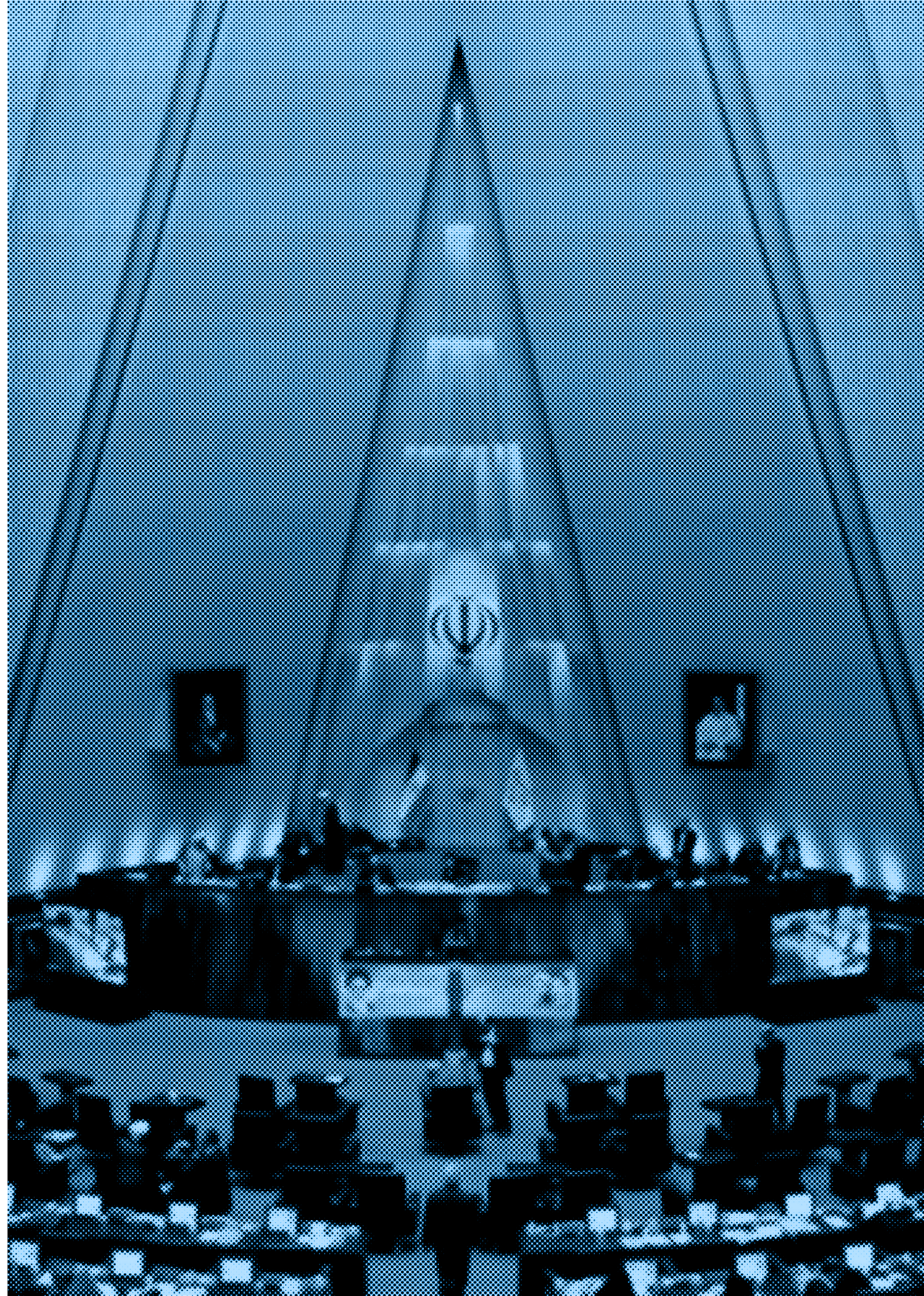
In the presidential election, it seems abstentions and spoiled ballots, which in Tehran has amounted to 86% of the total vote, indeed a strong message was sent, in a sign of moving beyond the duality between moderates and hardliners.

While so-called moderates and hardliners are engaging in efforts to present a different story about the low voter

turnout in the 18 June presidential election, it should be considered that the historically low voter turnout of 48.8% (which, in reality, is certainly lower than that – [according to prominent University of Tehran politics professor Sadegh Zibakalam](#) around 30%), of which 12% (or over 3.7 million) were spoiled votes, has been a resounding rejection of the entire establishment – hardline or moderate – by a clear majority of Iranians. One of the winners has been the boycott campaign that wanted to strip the Islamic Republic of its ability to leverage voter turnout as proof of its legitimacy, especially to the outside world. While the Islamic Republic’s leaders have traditionally used high voter turnout in the past as an index of the legitimacy of the regime, this time around state media argues that there is no relationship between legitimacy and voter turnout. For that, they [compare](#) Iran’s presidential election with that in the U.S., the UK, and France, concluding that there was no reason to be concerned about the outcome of the recent presidential election in Iran as Western people are more reluctant to vote. They deliberately overlook the fact that no country in the West has used high voter turnout as a proof for the legitimacy of their political system.

Regarding the future, internal stability will continue to be challenged by re-emerging protests, driven by a combination of socio-economic and political grievances. Increasingly devoid of legitimacy and amid the impossibility of any reform, the Islamic Republic will continue to heavily rely on repression and violence to contain popular disaffection. What is clear is that many people and activists see the boycott election campaign as a first step in which the Iranian people were successful to be united in raising their voice domestically as well as internationally. Indeed, with this election, the mask that the Islamic Republic has been willing to project onto the outside world and to a lesser extent domestically that its political system is based on equally important theocratic and republican pillars has now fallen. As such, the true nature of the Islamic Republic has been revealed, in that the theocratic institutions are omnipotent, and the so-called republican ones are just an impotent façade. Whereas in the definition of republicanism supreme power resides with the people, in the case of the Islamic Republic supreme power resides with the Supreme Leader, with people’s voices being dispensable or a pawn in the hands of the elites – be they hardline or even moderate.

In addition, there is also speculation that the hardliners’ power grab may pave the way for modifications of the Islamic Republic’s political system, toward a more authoritarian one.



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS: AHEAD OF THE SEVENTH ROUND OF JCPOA TALKS, A DIFFERENT U.S. MESSAGING?



With the seventh round of talks in Vienna looming, the revival of the nuclear deal is still in limbo. Last week, U.S. Secretary of State Antony [Blinken](#) warned that the Biden administration will decide to abandon efforts to rejoin the JCPOA if negotiations in Vienna continue without progress. Meanwhile, he said Biden still supports the revival of the JCPOA. In this vein, Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Foreign Minister, [said](#): "We expect the Iranian authorities to take the final decisions – no doubt difficult ones – which will allow the negotiations to be concluded." On the other hand, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Saeed Khatibzadeh has [stressed](#) that "We want the lifting of US sanctions, their verification by Tehran, and then the resumption of Iran's compliance ... It is Washington, not Tehran, that should make a decision." Meanwhile, in an interview with NPR, U.S. Special Envoy to Iran Robert Malley [made clear](#) that "we've said we're prepared to remove those [sanctions] that we think we need to remove to be back in compliance with the JCPOA. But we're not going to lift all of the sanctions that the Trump administration imposed." As a new voice on the deal, Ebrahim Raisi, President-elect of Iran, [said](#) in his first press conference that "We will not allow negotiations to be for negotiations' sake. Negotiations should not be dragged out but each sitting should bear results. A result-oriented [negotiation] is important to us and it should have an outcome for the Iranian nation." Again, as in past weeks, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov [made the claim](#) that a nuclear deal with Iran is "within reach." Meanwhile, the extension of the agreement between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which allows the latter to monitor Iran's nuclear activities, is still a challenge. "An immediate response from Iran is needed in this regard," the IAEA [emphasized](#).

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Last week's remarks from various parties suggest that a main problem lies in the messaging of the Joe Biden administration toward reaching an agreement on the revival of the nuclear deal. In fact, since the Biden administration has publicly emphasized that Trump's "maximum pressure" Iran policy had failed, it had emboldened Iranian officials to believe that they could obtain maximum concessions from the U.S., which can be seen as one of the most important challenges in the ongoing negotiations. However, beyond U.S. inter-party competition, the Biden administration knows it cannot simply drive back all of Trump's legacy, especially the sanctions.

It seems the recent statements from Blinken and Malley may be an effort from the White House to rectify its former

messaging. Notwithstanding, the willingness of the Biden administration and Iran’s economic needs can still push the two sides to reach a common point and restore the deal. Even with the revival of the JCPOA, it remains to be seen how Tehran and Washington will handle their disputes in other issues, particularly Iran’s missiles programme and its footprint in Middle East conflicts. It seems, while Iranian leaders know what they want in Vienna talks, the Biden administration has no comprehensive policy on Iran yet.

To suggest, as Malley did in his NPR interview, that the revival of the JCPOA will be a first step before embarking on a second step of reaching a more comprehensive deal with Iran may be both (a) wishful thinking as by then the bulk of sanctions pressure would be lifted and thus Tehran would not need the urge to enter such talks on issues it now declares non-negotiable and (b) reduce Iranian confidence that Washington is merely seeking a compliance-vs.-compliance return to the JCPOA “Obama era” with only some minor additional concessions from Tehran in the nuclear field. While Tehran has, beyond that, signalled it may be willing to limit the range of its ballistic missiles to 2,000 km (thus sparing much of Europe), this concession alone is unlikely to be sufficient to guarantee a breakthrough in any possible scenario, but would need to be accompanied by others.

ECONOMIC & SECURITY: THE STRIKE “CAMPAIGN 1400”

Workers of Iran's oil and petrochemical industries **have gone on strike** since last week. Strikes had started in South Pars plants, the hub of oil and gas projects in and along the Persian Gulf, and have expanded to Tehran, Isfahan, and other cities, demanding higher wages amid high inflation and time off. Iran’s inflation rate **has surpassed** 50% and food prices have gone up by around 70% over the past 12 months.

Previously, on 26 May, hundreds of oil and gas industry workers protested against Petroleum Minister Bijan Zanganeh. Workers gathered in Tehran outside parliament as well as in Ahvaz, capital of the oil-producing Khuzestan province, chanting slogans against lack of proper pay amid rising prices. Over the 42-year history of the Islamic Republic, Zanganeh has been a minister for a total of 27 years, 16 years as Petroleum Minister and 11 years as Energy Minister.



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While the presidential election boycott was successful, Iranian laborers have taken this opportunity to raise their voice with a strike “**Campaign 1400**”, which demands better conditions for the workers. As workers from ten additional petrochemical plants joined a nationwide strike of refinery and power generation employees in Iran, Tehran refinery officials **threatened** to fire 700 strikers, although they later **denied** that. However, what is clear is that a 50% inflation rate threatens workers’ life, even if they decide to finish their strike without any desired results. *Tejarat News*, an economy-focused news agency, has **reported** that “The workers are now on strike, refusing to hand over the tankers, and also have been on hunger strike for two or three days.” ILNA (Iranian Labor News Agency) **has written** that “Why is it that these active laborers [who have no permanent contract with the oil industry] and the main operators of the country’s oil industry have no right to protest? Why is it that, as soon as there is a protest against the poor living conditions, there are immediate news of the firing and laying-off of these workers? And beyond that, why is it that in areas such as South Pars, which is a hub for contracting companies, protesters are included on a ‘blacklist’, and practically no company will employ them anymore?” In the last four years, the number of protests and labor strikes in Iran has grown significantly, which is a sign of the severe decline of Iran’s economy as well as the authorities’ lack of willingness to address existing grievances. As such, the dire condition of Iran’s lower classes may well be the most formidable challenge for the incoming Raisi administration as such labour activism and strikes pose a threat to the Islamic Republic’s most vital economic lifeline.

COVID-19 VACCINATION



Last week, paradoxical news regarding vaccination against Covid-19 has continued in Iran. While the Rouhani administration has failed to vaccinate people with an acceptable speed (with Iran's vaccination rate being only a small portion of its neighbors Afghanistan and Iraq), the claim for effective "made in Iran" vaccines is still propagated by officials and state media. Mehr News Agency has [written](#) that "Reports from vaccination centers in Tehran and, of course, some metropolises, show crowds and long queues." According to the [latest statistics](#), 4,416,983 people have received the first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine and 1,196,157 people have received the second dose. Last week, the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei [appeared](#) on state TV to receive his first dose of the Iranian-made vaccine (the authorities have released no testing data, yet they claim a 85% protection rate), while there has been unconfirmed speculation that he had already received a Western vaccine a few months ago after banning them for the nation. In fact, for months, Khamenei was seen giving indoor speeches without wearing a mask, whereas attendees did. Moreover,

Payam Tabarsi, the head of the infectious department of Masih Daneshvari Hospital (the national research institute for tuberculosis and lung diseases), [expressed](#) concern, emphasizing that the country is now in the fifth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with many cities in the country's south being considered red zones (i.e. of high infection rates) and a total of 32 "red" cities.

"Travelers in Armenia can get the vaccine, so a lot of people are calling and booking tickets these days,"

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In late May, Saeed Namaki, Minister of Health and Medical Education, had [announced](#) that people will receive their Iranian vaccine from early June onward, yet there is still no official report that the vaccination programme has effectively started so far. Regardless of the efficacy of Iranian vaccines, there is no indication when people could receive them. According to some reports, Iranians who can afford traveling to neighbouring countries, did travel to Armenia and even Afghanistan to receive coronavirus vaccines. "Travelers in Armenia can get the vaccine, so a lot of people are calling and booking tickets these days," a travel agent told [Tejarat News](#). "With a four-day trip, travelers can have both fun and get vaccinated, vaccination in Armenia is free, but the passenger has to pay \$15 to the tour leader," he added. While the Iranian people grow increasingly frustrated about vaccination, officials still pursue their propaganda. For instance, Saeed Namaki has recently said that Iran will [export](#) "made in Iran" vaccines this late fall. However, in reality, only about 5.5 million Iranians have been vaccinated. In comparison, Turkey, Iran's neighbour, [vaccinated 8 million people](#) last week alone.



AUTHOR

Dr. Ali Fathollah-Nejad (Ph.D. SOAS) is a German-Iranian political scientist with a focus on Iran, the Middle East, the post-unipolar world order, and right-wing populism in Europe. He is the author of the much-acclaimed *Iran in an Emerging New World Order: From Ahmadinejad to Rouhani* (Palgrave Macmillan's Studies in Iranian Politics, May 2021) and of the *Iran 1400 Brief: Beyond the Headlines* weekly newsletter (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's Middle East and North Africa program). Based in Berlin, he is a Non-Resident Senior Research Fellow at the Afro-Middle East Centre (AMEC), South Africa's think-tank specialized on the Middle East, as well as affiliated researcher with *Centre d'Études de la Coopération Internationale et du Développement (CECID)* at *Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)* as well as *Freie Universität (FU) Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics*. In 2020, he published two monographs: *The*

Islamic Republic of Iran Four Decades On: The 2017/18 Protests Amid a Triple Crisis (Brookings Analysis Paper) and *The Politics of Culture in Times of Rapprochement: European Cultural and Academic Exchange with Iran (2015–16)* (Wissenschaftsverlag WeltTrends).

Ali holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Department of Development Studies at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) University of London and was a *post-doctoral Associate* with the Harvard Kennedy School's Iran Project. Also, he had been the in-house Iran expert at the Brookings Institution's Middle East center in Doha (BDC, 2017–20) and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP, 2015–18).

He has taught globalization and development in the Middle East, contemporary Iran, the Arab Revolts and great-power politics at the University of Tübingen (as

Senior Lecturer in Middle East and Comparative Politics), in the Ph.D. program of Qatar University's Gulf Studies Center, at FU Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, the University of Westminster, SOAS etc. Due to COVID-19, his Visiting Professorship at the Centre for International Studies of the University of Economics in Prague is postponed.

His about 200 analytical pieces in English, German, and French have been translated into a dozen languages. A frequent speaker at academic conferences and political forums, he regularly contributes to leading international media outlets in English, German, and French. Ali is fluent in German, French, English, and Persian, and reads Dutch.

<https://www.fathollah-nejad.eu/>





اتحاد جماهیر شوروی

U. S. S. R.

TURKEY

ترکیه

CASPIAN SEA

دریای مازندران

عراق

TEHRAN

**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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Middle East and North Africa

نمایش علامات

LEGEND

1. خاکهای بدون محدودیت یا با محدودیت کم
1. دارای مشکلات زیادی از نظر انجام امور کشاورزی نیستند
2. خاکهایی که بیش از حد دارای محدودیت هستند
2. دارای کمبود آب مورد نیاز است و در نتیجه تولید محصول کم است
3. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
3. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
4. خاکهایی که دارای محدودیت نسبتاً زیاد هستند
4. کمبود آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
5. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
5. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
6. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
6. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
7. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
7. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
8. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
8. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
9. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
9. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست
10. خاکهایی که به دلیل محدودیت در آب و عمق کم، تولید محصول کم است
10. نیاز به آبیاری زیاد و سبب نیست

1. SOIL WITH NO OR SLIGHT LIMITATIONS

1

No important problem except locally

2. SOIL WITH SLIGHT TO MODERATE LIMITATIONS

2

Limitations due to moderate deficit of water and undulating relief

2. Limitation due to poor or moderate drainage

3. SOILS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE LIMITATIONS

3

Limitations due to moderate to strong deficit of water or shallow depth

3. Limitations due to dissected relief and or shallow depth

3. Limitations due to dissected relief, shallow depth and moderate deficit of water

4. SOILS WITH SEVERE TO VERY SEVERE LIMITATIONS

4

Limitations due to dissected relief, shallow depth and severe deficit of water

4. Limitations due to salinity, stoniness, shallow depth and severe deficit of water

5. SOILS WITH ALMOST NO POTENTIALITY

5

Sand dunes

5. Solonchaks, salt marshes, saliferous and gypsiferous marls

دریاچه

Lake

SCALE 1:2,500,000

PREPARED BY M.L. DEWAN AND J. FAMOURI

freiheit.org/mena

THE WORLD SOIL RESOURCES OFFICE
LAND AND WATER DEVELOPMENT DIVISION - FAO

عربستان سعودی
SAUDI ARABIA

KUWAIT

کویت

شیراز

SHIRAZ

اهواز

AHWAZ