

## A SNAPSHOT OF ELECTIONS IN IRAN 2024

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



On July 30, 2024, Dr. Masood Pezeshkian, former health Minister, will assume office as the 9th President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He was elected to office during the runoff elections on July 6, 2024. Dr. Pezeshkian secured nearly 3,000,000 more votes than his closest competitor, Saeed Jalili, Iran’s former nuclear negotiator. Voter turnout was recorded at 49.8 % -- higher than the record low of 39.92% in the first round. The snap election was necessitated by the tragic demise of former President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May 2024. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stated that Dr. Pezeshkian’s victory resulted from a ‘free and transparent election.’ The Supreme Leader holds the highest level of authority in Iran and wields the greatest amount of power. However, the president retains the ability to exert influence over both domestic and certain foreign affairs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Iran’s Presidential Election, Explained,” US News, June 27, 2024.  
<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2024-06-27/explainer-iran-holds-presidential-election-after-raisi-crash-death>

## ELECTION

## Iran's presidential candidates

Four candidates are vying for the presidency in Iran's election on June 28, following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash.



**Mostafa Pourmohammadi**  
Former Interior and  
Justice minister



**Saeed Jalili**  
Former chief nuclear negotiator



**Masoud Pezeshkian**  
Member of parliament



**Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf**  
Former mayor of Tehran



**Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi**  
(Dropped out on June 26)



**Alireza Zakani**  
(Dropped out on June 27)

Source: Al Jazeera | June 27, 2024



The runoff election provided an opportunity for 61 million eligible Iranian voters to participate, as no contender had obtained a majority in the initial election held on 28 June 2024. With voter participation of approximately 40%, the lowest in the 45-year history of the Islamic Republic, two candidates with starkly contrasting profiles emerged as the front-runners. The reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian emerged at the top, garnering 10.4 million out of the total 24.5 million votes cast. In close pursuit was the hard-liner, former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, who secured 9.4 million votes. Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf and Shiite cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi received 3.3 million and around 206,000 votes respectively.<sup>2</sup> On June 27, two more candidates, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani and government official Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, out of the six who were approved by Iran's Guardian Council to participate in the election, withdrew from the race.

### Regional Impact

In an article published on 12 July 2024 in the *Tehran Times*, Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian outlined that Iran's foreign policy is rooted in the principles of 'dignity, wisdom and prudence.' He expressed a strong desire to collaborate with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE as well as regional organizations to strengthen economic ties, enhance trade relations, promote joint venture investments, jointly address shared challenges, and establish a regional framework for dialogue, confidence-building and development. Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian highlighted the region's longstanding issues including war, sectarian conflict, terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, water

<sup>2</sup> Kim, Juliana. "Iran will hold a runoff election between a reformist and a hard-liner." NPR, June 29, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/06/29/g-s1-7288/iran-runoff-election-presidential>.

scarcity, refugee crisis, environmental degradation, and foreign interference. He stressed the urgency of tackling these common challenges for the benefit of future generations and asserted that cooperation for traditional development and prosperity would be the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy. As an initial step, he said that his administration will call upon neighboring countries to collaborate and leverage all political and diplomatic efforts to achieve 'a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, aiming to halt the massacre and prevent the conflict from escalating'.<sup>3</sup>

Under President Raisi's leadership, Iran's regional influence expanded. One of the most notable successes was the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023, brokered by China. Additionally, throughout his tenure, Iran has fostered stronger economic connections with India, China, and the African continent. Dr. Pezeshkian has indicated his willingness to reassess his nation's strong alliance with Russia and at the same time expressed a desire for enhanced relations with the United States, potentially including a resumption of the nuclear agreement. To strengthen his stance, he has appointed Javad Zarif, the former Iranian foreign minister who was directly involved in the negotiation and conclusion of the 2015 nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as his foreign policy advisor.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is ultimately the Supreme Leader who will determine Iran's overall trajectory.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pakistan-Iran Relations**

Dr. Pezeshkian has emphasized that under his administration Iran will prioritize the strengthening of relations with its neighbors. He envisions the establishment of a 'strong region', where no single country seeks hegemony or dominance over the other. Dr. Pezeshkian writes that he believes the neighboring countries should not squander their valuable resources on erosive competitions, arms races, or the unwanted containment of each other. Instead, according to him, his administration will strive to create an environment where resources are devoted to the progress and development of the region benefiting all inhabitants.

On 8 July 2024, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated Dr. Masood Pezeshkian on his electoral victory during a phone conversation. The Prime Minister emphasized the deep-rooted ties between Pakistan and Iran and expressed his eagerness to enhance bilateral cooperation in

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<sup>3</sup> "My message to the new world," Tehran Times, July 12, 2024.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/501077/My-message-to-the-new-world>

<sup>4</sup> "Iran under Masoud Pezeshkian: Aiming for change without rocking the boat," Chatham House, July 8, 2024. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/07/iran-under-masoud-pezeshkian-aiming-change-without-rocking-boat>

<sup>5</sup> "What's Next for Iran After Raisi's Death?," United States Institute of Peace, May 21, 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/05/whats-next-iran-after-raisis-death>.

trade, energy, and regional security. Dr. Pezeshkian reciprocated by expressing his desire to deepen these bilateral ties.<sup>6</sup>

The economic relationship between Pakistan and Iran is characterized by both opportunities and challenges. The Iran-Pakistan pipeline, an important project aimed at strengthening Pakistan's energy security, exemplifies the economic interdependence both countries have. In this regard, the revival of the JCPOA could remove the prime obstacle hindering the construction of the pipeline on the Pakistan side – U.S. sanctions. Moreover, while Dr. Pezeshkian has not specified a particular approach to the border issues between Iran and Pakistan, his earlier campaigns and advocacy promoted the idea of opening local bazaars at the border to create more jobs for border residents. Overall, significant changes regarding Pakistan-Iran border issues are not anticipated, with both countries likely to continue their shared goal of eliminating separatist militant groups.

All in all, Iran's new administration under Dr. Masood Pezeshkian has several promising avenues to enhance relations with Pakistan. A significant undertaking is the completion and operationalization of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and bolstering economic linkages. Additionally, bolstering border trade infrastructure and optimizing customs procedures are crucial steps that can significantly amplify economic activities in the border regions, thus facilitating a seamless flow of goods and services. Furthermore, there is substantial room for collaboration in areas such as agriculture, technology, and education. Initiatives such as joint ventures and knowledge exchange programs in these fields can drive mutual advancement and prosperity. Moreover, promoting tourism and cultural exchanges can play a vital role in strengthening people-to-people links, allowing for a richer understanding and appreciation of each country's heritage and values. In conclusion, the new Iranian leadership holds the potential to strategically expand and deepen the relationship with Pakistan. By prioritizing these diverse sectors and initiatives, Pakistan and Iran can forge a resilient and dynamic partnership that not only benefits both sides but also contributes to regional stability and development.

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<sup>6</sup> "PM Shehbaz congratulates Pezeshkian on his election as Iranian president," Geo News, July 9, 2024. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/553302-pm-shehbaz-congratulates-pezeskian-on-his-election-as-iranian-president>