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[Robert Naiman](#)

National Coordinator of Just Foreign Policy

Posted: June 25, 2009 10:22 AM

## **\$10,000 Reward: Show How the Iranian Election Was "Stolen"**

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I will pay \$10,000 to the first person or organization that presents a coherent story for how the Iranian election was stolen that is consistent with knowable facts about the Iranian election process as it took place on June 12-13 and the information that has been published since, including the ballot box tallies that have been published on the web by the Iranian government.

In order to collect the reward, you don't have to prove your case beyond a shadow of a doubt. But your numbers have to add up. To collect your reward, it's not sufficient to cite press reports or anecdotal evidence of election irregularities, or to claim as authority Western commentators or NGOs who have not themselves put together a coherent story. To collect your reward, your story has to tell how on June 12, a majority of Iranian voters voted for other candidates besides Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, yet this was transformed by the Iranian election authorities into a majority for Ahmadinejad.

Here are the numbers you have to explain. According to the official tally, Ahmadinejad got about 24.5 million votes. Mir Hossein Mousavi got 13.2 million votes. That's a difference of more than 11 million votes.

So, when I say your numbers have to add up, I mean your story of stolen votes has to add up to more than 11 million stolen votes. (The number would differ somewhat if you only want to say that Ahmadinejad didn't get a first round majority, as opposed to merely beating Mousavi, but it would not differ by much, since the third and fourth place candidates took such a small share of the vote.)

To illustrate: much has been made of the Guardian Council's "admission" that in about 50 cities or towns, the number of votes exceeded the number of people eligible to vote in that area. Note, first of all, that **unlike in the United States**, where in general you can only vote where you are registered, in Iran you can vote wherever you happen to be that day. So the fact that more votes were recorded in a jurisdiction than there are eligible voters in that jurisdiction, in a high turnout election, in itself proves nothing. But put that to the side. The Guardian Council noted that the **total** number of votes in the 50 cities and towns was about 3 million, and that even if you threw away all 3 million votes from all the people voting in the 50 cities and towns, it wouldn't affect the election result. Note that 3 million wasn't the difference between votes and voters, still less an estimate of the impact on the total, it was the total number of votes. The Guardian Council was simply making the commonsense argument that even if you take a number which is clearly much bigger than the likely impact of any discrepancy in the 50 towns, and throw that number away, it still doesn't come close to affecting the overall result.

If you've been getting your "information" from the TV, or some usually liberal commentators who shot from the hip with unsubstantiated "stolen election" claims in the days after the election and now can't back down, you may be surprised by this reward offer.

But remember: "everybody who was anybody" thought that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Why? Because that's what the TV said. There was no evidence, but that didn't matter.

Here we go again. Most people are not getting their information from print media, they're getting it from TV. And of course, even in the print media, you have to search for dissenting views from the TV narrative.

Ken Ballen and Patrick Doherty had an op-ed in the *Washington Post* pointing out that Ahmadinejad's election victory was consistent with their pre-election polling data. (By the way, contrary to the claims of some analysts who cited their own unsubstantiated claim that Ahmadinejad could never have won the majority of Azeris as evidence of fraud, the Terror Free Tomorrow poll found Ahmadinejad had a strong lead among Azeris. And those who say Mousavi automatically had to win his home province should tell Al Gore.) Some folks who are lazy or bad at math have tried to discredit the TFT poll data, because it was taken three weeks before the election, there was a subsequent surge for the opposition and there were a high number of people who didn't state a candidate preference in the poll. But even if you allocate two-thirds of those not stating a preference to the opposition, you still get an election victory for Ahmadinejad in the first round. And some of the same folks who want to dismiss the Terror Free Tomorrow data because it was three weeks old want to cite election results from four years and even eight years earlier to claim the election was stolen. Of course, we don't predict elections in the U.S. like that.

Former NSC staffers Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett have had two pieces in the *Politico* pointing out how implausible the "stolen election" claim is. Iranian economist Djavad Salehi-Isfahani - professor at Virginia Tech and guest scholar at Brookings - noted in the *New York Times* online evidence that Ahmadinejad's programs to distribute income and wealth more evenly have begun to bear fruit, explaining his support in rural areas and small towns:

"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. "

Of course, now that it's becoming increasingly clear that the "stolen election" story was a hoax, people are saying it doesn't matter if the election was stolen. This is predictable - it's hard for people to admit that they were wrong.

But it does matter. It matters a great deal.

The widely-believed story of the "stolen election" is already being used to argue for a toughening of U.S. policy against Iran and the abandonment of President Obama's promised diplomatic engagement. Recall that prior to the Iranian election, the alternatives that had been put before the American people were diplomatic engagement and war - or "crippling economic sanctions" - like cutting off Iran's gas imports - that are tantamount to war and will very likely lead eventually to a shooting war. So, in the U.S. political context - the U.S. is almost certainly not going to just leave Iran alone - if you argue that the U.S. cannot engage diplomatically with Iran, you're effectively arguing for eventual war.

That's why I was shocked that Avaaz, for example, is demanding that governments "withhold recognition" from the Iranian government. Apart from being a

fantastically unrealistic demand - China is going to withhold diplomatic recognition from Iran because of the stolen election claims of the Iranian opposition? - Avaaz's current position is totally at odds with its earlier advocacy of diplomatic engagement. You cannot simultaneously campaign for diplomatic isolation of the Iranian government and promote diplomacy with it. You have to choose. And the alternative to diplomacy is war.

Of course people will say it's not about the election now, it's about the violent repression of the protests afterwards.

But whether we believe the election was stolen has a great bearing on our understanding of what happened afterwards. If the election was not stolen, and the real fraud was the opposition's claim that it was, then much of the opposition was organized around a fraudulent claim. It should go without saying that that doesn't morally justify violent repression. In a democracy, people have the right to believe whatever they want and advocate for it, even if - like people who believe Bush blew up the World Trade Center - their beliefs are obviously false. But if the Iranian election was not stolen, it does make the protest and crackdown fundamentally different political events: it fundamentally undermines the claim of the protesters to be speaking for the majority of the Iranian population, who just voted for a different candidate than the one supported by the protesters. And when the powerful media institutions of the West - which are regarded in much of the world, not without significant justification, as creatures of their host governments - promote the false claim that the election was stolen, the claim of the Iranian government of foreign intervention in Iran's internal politics becomes quite plausible to Iranians - the majority - who support the policies of their government more than they support the policies that the U.S. would like to impose on them.

Some will say it doesn't matter, because Iran is not a true democracy, regardless of what happened on June 12. Debate is restricted, and candidates are limited. It's obviously true that democracy in Iran is restricted. But that doesn't justify lying about the election, especially with all the terrible consequences those lies will likely have.

Furthermore, those who want to "support the protesters" by affirming their unsubstantiated claims of a stolen election aren't doing the opposition any favors. If the opposition in Iran wants to win a fair national election in the future, it will likely have to deal with the reasons that it didn't have majority support on June 12. It has to engage the majority of the Iranian population who likely have more illiberal social views, and it has to engage the majority of the Iranian population who want the government to engage in redistributive economic policies, not "Washington Consensus" winner-take-all policies that might please the International Monetary Fund and some better-off Iranians. It has to give up on the fantasy of riding to power on the backs of foreign intervention, and instead dedicate itself to a "long march" through Iranian institutions and Iranian public opinion.

I empathize with the Iranian protesters. I also wanted Mousavi to win. It would have made the job of promoting diplomacy with Iran a lot easier. I strongly sympathize with the protesters' desire for more social freedom, and empathize with their outrage over the crackdown.

I also know what it's like to lose such a national election that seems to validate and empower the most reactionary currents in society. I remember well when Reagan clobbered Mondale. I had campaigned for Mondale - without illusion about Mondale's cold war liberalism - to defeat Reagan. When Reagan won, it meant four more years of Reagan's unionbusting and terrorist war in Central America, among many other brutal and cruel Reagan policies. Reagan's re-election was a terrible event for America and the world.

But when Reagan was re-elected, I did not dissociate from reality into a fantasyland in which the election had been "stolen" and the majority of the American electorate shared my views. Neither should the Iranian opposition, nor its foreign sympathizers, dissociate from reality into a fanstasyland in which the majority of Iranian electorate shares their views. Accepting that Ahmadinejad won doesn't mean you love Ahmadinejad. It means you want to deal with the world as it exists in reality, not the world as it exists in your fantasy.

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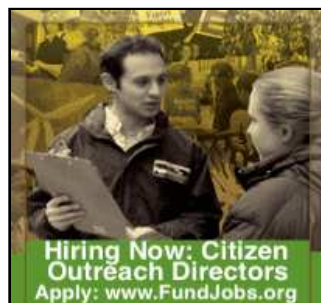
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Many Iranians say, Iranian peaceful demonstration was turned into street riot, burning buses, destroying property, and looting instigated by MKO and others. Some Iranians suggest that Neda Agha Soltan was killed by one of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) agents. She was killed to create emotional reaction by Iranians against their government.

What did we do during Watts Riots of 1965, a large-scale race riot which lasted 6 days in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, causing mayhem and public property damage? What do we do if a peaceful demonstration in Washington about any issue would be taken over by outsiders to the demonstration and made into Watts type of riot? What can they do? They must restore order or accept anarchy. What did we do at Watts, Detroit and DC, and at Kent State? USA called in the National Guard.

Why did we not respond to the 2000 and 2004 flawed elections? The Supreme Court decided the vote for the 2000 election. An equivalent organization, Guardian Council will decide the result of the vote for Iran.

The Iran Freedom and Support Act " 2005, created a \$10 million fund for support of Iranian democracy " as a starting point on how to lead Iranian protesters, create sabotage and mayhem to lead to regime change in Iran. We had provided MKO with technical and financial support for anti-Iranian activities.

We must allow Iranian people to solve their own internal problems.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 09:52 PM on 06/25/2009

- [Ayyar I'm a Fan of Ayyar](#) [permalink](#)

Please keep your money. I offer you a \$10 reward if you can prove beyond a doubt that massive fraud did not take place. Hell, I will even give you the money if you can show beyond a doubt that independent observers had access to counting the votes, and actually confirmed the counting results of 40 m votes in less than 12 hours, and were actually present at sealing all the ballot boxes.

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- [piul05 I'm a Fan of piul05](#) [permalink](#)



Superb article. Thank you for keeping your head over your shoulders among all the hysteria.

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- [BiBiJan I'm a Fan of BiBiJan](#) [permalink](#)

Thank you Mr Naiman for once again courageously bucking the trend. As always, balanced, well thought out.

However, you tend to underestimate MSM's role in the events following 6/12. Would the passions be as aroused and as destructive to the cause of reform had the MSM not reported a mere allegation as slam-dunk certainty? As you know many Iranians look at BBC and VOA, and Sky, etc.

take a look at the following for further assurance that you will not be parting with your \$10,000.

<http://www.bibijon.org/iranimage/articles/Iran-election.htm>

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- [eblue562 I'm a Fan of eblue562](#) [permalink](#)

I think the vast majority of the problem stems from a lack of information on both sides of the equation here; what we the Americans perceive from media and the Iranian nation and process.

For instance, your comment about voting in whatever jurisdiction they feel like was not once mentioned on any of the news channels that I browse daily. My first thought when I read that line was "Oh, that doesn't make it so bad." I'm sure there are other processes or consistencies that are not similar in any way to the American way of dealing with elections.

Likewise, the other problem comes from Iran. In America's last election, we have up to the minute, state by state coverage with independent polling sources and all kinds of access to the information. In Iran, once you dropped your ballot in the box, you waited until the government declared a winner. That's the major problem with voting in Iran, EVERYTHING is in the governments control. Imagine the huge problems that would have happened had every major news organization and independent pollsters showing an Obama win, but the US. Department releases a statement saying McCain had won by their account.

Bottom line, everyone on all sides of this argument are massive victims of mis-information.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 12:18 PM on 06/25/2009  
- RickenPatel I'm a Fan of RickenPatel [permalink](#)

Thanks for this piece - I think you make a lot of excellent points. Just one clarification - at Avaaz we've never taken a position on the election result - our campaign has been to stop the violent crackdown on protesters, and we have called on governments to withhold recognition until the Iranian government deals with the protesters and their election concerns in a way that respects fundamental human rights. As far as diplomatic engagement goes, our members remain overwhelmingly committed to that sane approach.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 11:48 AM on 06/25/2009  
- RobertNaiman I'm a Fan of RobertNaiman [permalink](#)

Thanks for your response. But here's what it leaves unanswered: suppose that, to your satisfaction, the Iranian government never "deals with the protesters and their election concerns in a way that respects fundamental human rights." Then, according to your demand, diplomatic recognition will be withheld. How will diplomacy proceed?

P.S. In general, I love Avaaz, have been a member for some time, signed petitions, sent money, and expect to do both in the future. That's why I was so disappointed in this.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 12:06 PM on 06/25/2009  
- benjaminblue I'm a Fan of benjaminblue [permalink](#)

It was stolen with pluck. Can I have the \$10,000 now?

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 11:46 AM on 06/25/2009  
- Henry I'm a Fan of Henry [permalink](#)

It does seem looking back on the history of America that the press has been the purveyor of party-line propaganda to mobilize and hype up a nation born & bred of marketing mentality. It seems terrible that in both these instances (Iraq and Iran) the war party of the state of Israel seems to be the beneficiary of information that seems and appears embellished. I mean where was the press disgust with elections in Zimbabwe?? Am I to conclude the press are all racist and as such "we" could care less about those "lesser peoples". It's getting pretty sickening to the average Joe in America.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 11:23 AM on 06/25/2009  
- ArtDir I'm a Fan of ArtDir [permalink](#)

This election would be a lot more credible if the interior ministry in Iran was not completely under the control of the hard-liners. Furthermore, analysis of voting patterns in this election vs. the last showed serious statistical abnormalities, with huge swings in virtually ALL of the provinces that had supported reformers in the past. Finally, how do you count tens of millions of votes within 2 hours of poll closings, and how does one explain the consistent margin for Ahmadinejad throughout the election period - this would be highly unlikely in a fair election.

The present Iranian authorities were ready for the backlash, although didn't seem to anticipate the level of resistance this likely fraud created among the people. They announced the result of the vote within two hours and the Supreme Leader seemed anxious to quickly certify the result. Text messaging was shut down almost immediately. The web was "slowed" by the next morning.

Finally, if this election were so above board why has the government consistently refused the insistence of the unified opposition to recount the votes?

Something is rotten here, and it's not with the opposition. We shall see.

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- RobertNaiman I'm a Fan of RobertNaiman [permalink](#)

1. I certainly agree that if for example there had been international observers allowed, we'd be in a different situation now. But that's not an argument that the election was stolen.
- 2) According to Western press reports, all the votes were not counted Friday evening, only some of them. More were counted on Saturday. There was an announcement on Friday evening based on the partial tally. My understanding is that in Canada they do a similar count and it takes a few hours. Moreover, that the counting speed was similar to Iran 2005, and the counting speed was not cited as evidence of fraud at the time.
- 3) A relatively consistent margin would be expected, depending on the distribution of votes coming in. In fact, if the samples were random, one would expect them to be quite consistent. And furthermore, one would expect the cumulative shares to be quite consistent (Nate Silver explained this on his blog.) Finally, even the cumulative share changed somewhat over the course of the counting.
- 4.) The opposition - no longer totally unified, one candidate dropped out - is not asking for a recount, but a new election. The Guardian Council offered a 10% recount, but the opposition refused, saying only a new election would be sufficient.

As you say, though, hopeful we will understand this better as more information comes out.

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- [BobLablah I'm a Fan of BobLablah](#) [permalink](#)

You should offer the same reward for anyone who can prove any Bush election was stolen. It would be awesome to read all the comments from the nutters who think they can prove it.

[Reply](#) [Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 10:51 AM on 06/25/2009

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This is simply revolting. You have no idea what it is to lose a stolen election unless you experienced 2004. Everyone knows that 2000 was stolen. The winner lost because the Supreme Court blocked a recount of a travesty of an election in Florida.

There are so many things wrong with this election, it took just a day or two to figure it out. But here you are cheapening the dialog with this reward.

People are putting their lives on the line in Iran for a fair vote count and now a change in regime.

It doesn't matter what party you're in, a review of the facts shows clearly there was fraud.

But here you are, rep'ing for a holocaust denier and a religious zealot as they commit murder.

Nice work.

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[http://www.apj.us/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2455&Itemid=2](http://www.apj.us/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2455&Itemid=2)

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