



Iran: Interior Ministry says Protest Frequency Declining

OE Watch Commentary: Speaking at the inauguration of the new governor of the Qazvin province (just northwest of Tehran province), Iran's Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli, a veteran conservative politician, announced a decline in the frequency of protests and illegal rallies which Iran has experienced since December 2017. While Rahmani-Fazli says these have declined 38 percent in the first five months of the current Iranian year as compared to the same period in the past year, it is unclear whether this is accurate. Even at their height, the Iranian government sought to downplay the protests, which were the largest in Iran since the post-election unrest of 2009 and the broadest in terms of cities and towns impacted since the Islamic Revolution.



A photo distributed by the Tasnim News Agency on 3 January 2018 accompanying a message asking Iranians to identify protestors.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, https://twitter.com/Tasnimnews_Fa/status/948507708684161024

The Interior Minister's speech, covered by the semi-independent but pro-government *Islamic Students' News Agency* and excerpted here, suggests that the Iranian government remains concerned about the Islamic Republic's internal stability

as Iran approaches its next round of parliamentary elections in February 2020. Economic grievances largely motivated the unrest which spread around Iran over the past year and a half, during which period sanctions have undercut Iran's economy further. While the Iranian parliament's power is limited and largely symbolic, disputes between more conservative politicians and the so-called reformists could also create sparks to motivate further protests, as they did when former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won a second term in a poll most Iranians believed marred by fraud.

Rahmani-Fazli once again suggested that the government would use voter participation rates to prove that the Iranian people still embrace the Islamic Republic and the legitimacy of its elections. While the government regularly suggests participation rates above 80 percent in Tehran and across the country, Iranians from more peripheral provinces and minority groups suggest that true participation in areas outside the capital and major cities where Iran bans foreign journalists are closer to ten percent. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The enemies...want to use the election climate to sow discord.”

Source: “Vazir-e Dakhli: Tejam’at va ‘Etrazat dar Keshvar 38 dar sad Kahesh Yafteh Ast (Protests and Rallies in the Country have Fallen 38 Percent),” *Iranian Students' News Agency*, 5 September 2019. <https://www.isna.ir/news/98061407551>

Protests and Gatherings Down 38 Percent this Year over Last

...He [Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli] added, “In this regard, because of the people’s awareness of our enemies, protests and gatherings in the first five months of this year [March – August 2019] have declined 38 percent as compared to the same period last year. While pressures and discontent have increased in some quarters in society, the people’s awareness, empathy, compassion and camaraderie have allowed for us to have a more relaxed atmosphere.

The interior minister explained: “The enemies of the Islamic Revolution, for their part, want to use the election climate to sow discord in society and to take advantage of these conditions. We have secret information that will allow us to transform these parliamentary elections into a show of strength and hold the election in a calm and legal climate with a high turnout.”

He emphasized, “It is the duty of Qazvin province to organize these things even though the elections are a few months away, but we must act with more depth and accuracy in Qazvin, and the new governor as the head of the province must make every effort and use all capacities.