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Iranian Candidate Turns to Twitter

By [ROSHANAK TAGHAVI](#)

TEHRAN -- As a challenger to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Friday's vote, candidate Mehdi Karroubi doesn't get a lot of air time on state TV and radio.

So, his campaign manager, Gholamhossein Karbaschi -- like political operatives around the world -- has turned to Twitter, the social messaging tool, as the newest weapon in his campaign arsenal. He's been tweeting from the campaign trail for just nine days and has 1,200 followers.

"We don't have state TV and radio, and we don't have state media, so we are forced to use these types of things," says Mr. Karbaschi, a former Tehran mayor. In an effort to maximize voter turnout, especially among Iran's youth and its relatively affluent and educated middle class, two of Mr. Ahmadinejad's main rivals in the June 12 vote have turned to the Internet like never before.

The youth vote is especially key, with around 70% of Iran's estimated 70 million under the age of 30. Both Mr. Karroubi and candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, two so-called reformist candidates running against the hard-line conservative Mr. Ahmadinejad, are trying to woo young, middle-class voters, who have grown disenchanted with politics in recent voting. Mr. Ahmadinejad dominates state TV and radio.

For his opponents, cyber tools like Twitter and Facebook have been ways to get their message out to these voters. Mr. Mousavi's presidential campaign uses Facebook to send out daily news updates and announce events.

It's an effective medium to stimulate debate about the elections with students and educated members of Iran's middle and upper classes who have internet access, according to Majid Zamani, who works with Mousavi's campaign team. "This socioeconomic class is the one that tends not to vote, and this was another means to fire them up and convince them to vote," Mr. Zamani says.

Former president Mohammad Khatami -- who is supporting Mr. Mousavi's campaign--recently had a live question-and-answer chat session, on Twitter, Yahoo messenger, Facebook and Friendfeed. Iran briefly blocked Facebook in late May, but rescinded the ban one day after Mr. Ahmadinejad denied ordering the closure of the website at a Tehran press conference.

Mohsen Rezaei, a conservative challenger to Mr. Ahmadinejad doesn't seem to have joined the Internet fray. Mr. Ahmadinejad himself was an early enthusiast. He started a blog, called "Personal Memos" during his presidential term, answering questions in Farsi, English and French. But his last English post was in December 2007 and there have been just two Farsi posts this year. (The last one was this week.)

There is also a Twitter account in Mr. Ahmadinejad's name, but there are only three posts.

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