



Iran's ruler Ali Khamenei casting his vote in the 2017 presidential election

Ahead Of Iran's March Elections, All Eyes Are On Khamenei

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Hardliners dominating Iran's parliament and others in the regime do not know what to expect from elections next March, with no signal so far from the Supreme Leader.

The fact that hardliners are Ali Khamenei's preferred political force has been proven in the past, but others have to wait and see if the Supreme Leader will allow them to compete in the upcoming parliamentary vote.

Some are speculating that possible coalitions among relatively moderate groups could boost their chances success, but whether they will be approved by the Guardian Council controlled by Khamenei is entirely unclear.

If most political forces outside the hardliners are banned from running, the elections will turn into another low-turnout event, further eroding legitimacy.

Some are warning, however, that powerful groups of politicians do not want high voter turnout, so that conservatives and hardliners keep control of the legislature, despite deep public anger at multiple crises gripping the country.

While insiders wait to see in what direction the wind will blow, most ordinary Iranians have long given up on regime politicians and elections to shape a

better future for them. One of the slogans in recurring nationwide protests has been, "No conservatives, no reformists."

Moderate conservative **Politician Mehrdad Lahooti told reporters** in Tehran that politicians such as former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, who do not belong to the regime's leading political factions, might form a coalition with moderate conservatives in a bid to increase their chance of being elected during the March 2024 parliamentary elections.

Lahooti is a relatively moderate politician and a former lawmaker

He called Larijani a national political figure whose influence goes beyond the boundaries defined by political factions. Lahooti added that both the moderate conservatives and the independents have already started their election campaigns. However, there is no indication in the media showing independent politicians starting electoral campaigns, while candidate registration for the March 2024 vote is still three months away.

In a recent interview with IRGC-linked Fars news agency, Mansour

Haqiqatpoor a politician close to Larijani accused some conservative circles of trying to tarnish the former Speaker's image by spreading the rumor that he has sought political asylum in Scotland. Refuting the rumors, Haqiqatpoor said Larijani will certainly speak about the upcoming elections soon but reiterated that there is no indication yet that he is interested, although that can change in the coming months.

In fact, Larijani and other moderate, centrist, independent and proreform politicians are waiting to see a signal from Khamenei and his instruction to the Guardian Council.

Haqiqatpoor said: "Larijani is the Supreme Leader's soldier. If he receives a signal that the leader does not want him to nominate himself as a candidate, he will certainly not put a step forward, but if he comes to the conclusion that the leader wants him to come forward, he will surely announce his candidacy."

Ali Larijani, former speaker of the Islamic Republic parliament

Meanwhile, former presidential candidate and pragmatist **politician Mostafa Hashemi Taba told reporters** that "some powerful groups do not want the people to go to the polls" in March. By "powerful people" Hashemi was likely alluding to officials at Khamenei's office, the top echelon of the IRGC and its intelligence service and last but not least, the mighty ultraconservative Paydari Party, that wants to hold all the political power and not share it even with other conservatives.

Hashemi Taba further explained that groups with a radical approach want to continue the rule of the all-conservative government. He added: "I see no indication of any effort on the part of the country's officials to hold a high-turnout election, and I do not believe that this situation is going to change during the coming months.

In another development, **Bijan Moghaddam, a political analyst close to Khamenei's office** told Nameh News website in Tehran: "Usually conservative groups have two objectives in every election: To win the election, and to ensure a high turnout." He added that high turnout can be an outcome of either a coalition between all the conservative groups, or competition."

So far, it appears that the regime's choice between the two options is to forge a major coalition rather than holding a competitive election.

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