



Hardliners dominating the parliament celebrate President Ebrahim Raisi's inauguration in August 2021

## Iran's Ultraconservatives Gear Up To Win Parliamentary Elections

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Author: Iran International Newsroom

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Hardliners hold such a strong sway within Iran's regime that media discuss their intentions to seize control of the political system for the upcoming decade.

They have almost been in total control of the presidential administration since 2021, while also holding the majority of seats in the parliament (Majles) following the controversial elections of 2020, when no moderate or reformist regime loyalists were allowed to run.

The ultraconservatives' near-monopoly of power is already strong enough so that traditional conservatives such as the elderly members of the Islamic Coalition Party find it hard to consider themselves as players in the upcoming parliamentary election in March.

**In a report this week, Khabar Online** website described the pre-election ultraconservatives move of the hardliners as "the radicals' onslaught against the conservative camp," and wrote that it is part of a political purification process taking place. The term purification was coined by moderate conservative politician Ali Larijani to describe the ultraconservative's attempt to create their monopoly of power in Iran.

While different conservative factions are fighting over the pie, most politicians and analysts expect **a very low voter turnout in March**. People are disillusioned with all politicians of the Islamic Republic amid a serious economic crisis and the brutal crackdown during recent protests.

Khabar Online explained the political scene ahead of the elections as a confrontation between the ultraconservatives on the one hand and other factions in the conservative camp. Larijani, a traditional conservative who has always been loyal to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has been the victim of the purification process.

### **Khamenei and Ali Larijani seen before the ascendance of hardliners in 2020**

The main battle, according to Khabar Online, will take place between the members of the ultraconservative Paydari Party and the neo-cons around Majles Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. The former, wishes to turn the Iranian government into a totalitarian religious regime and the latter advocates the idea of a military dictatorship.

Paydari, as the advocate of a religious state based on the ideas of late Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi wishes a political brand of Shiite Islam to rule in Iran. The regime they have in mind does not get its legitimacy from the people. Mesbah Yazdi had said openly that the people and their votes should have no part in running the affairs of the state. He argued that democracy was created for the West. In his ideology the true ruler of the

country is God who directly appoints the supreme leader as his representative on earth.

According to Khabar Online, the Paydari Party's plan is to hold all the three branches of the government as well as all other institutions in the country in its hands based on a 10-year project.

The neo-cons, on the other hand, are a group of technocrats with a background in the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) or the academia, like Ghalibaf himself who has both academic and military credentials. They follow the idea of a "New Governance" the outlines of which have never been laid out at least publicly. They are the left wing of "other conservatives" as opposed to their right wing where seasoned politicians such as Larijani and Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri are active as potential kingmakers in the next election.

Traditional conservatives, who are mainly the members of the Islamic Coalition Party, which played a major role in the 1979 Islamic revolution, struggle to find their place in the competitions to win at least half a dozen seats in the Majles. Their Leader, **Assadollah Badamchian, said in an interview** with Rouydad24 website that "The upcoming election is going to be eventful as there are multiple conservative parties involved in the competition."

It is interesting that neither Paydar members, nor Ghalibaf's camp or Badamchian talk about moderates and reformists as contestants. It seems they are certain to be the only runners.

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