



Several Iranians standing in line to cast their votes in an election

Hardliners In Iran Say Not Voting Is A 'Cardinal Sin'

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An influential hardliner in Iran has threatened the Reformists that they might be barred from next year's presidential election if they continue to boycott the March parliamentary vote.

Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of hardline daily Kayhan and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative at the flagship hardline newspaper who made the threat, has no executive position and no responsibility about the elections.

Shariatmadari's threat came two days after Iran's main collective reformist organization, **the "Reform Camp of Iran" announced in a statement** that reformist parties and groups will not take part in the parliamentary elections in Tehran because the system is biased against Reformists and elections in Iran are not free and fair.

Iran's ultraconservative election watchdog, the Guardian Council, has **banned almost all Reformists** from running in the March 1 parliamentary vote. The reformists were effectively banned from taking part in the previous parliamentary election in 2020 and the presidential election in 2021.

The general dissatisfaction among voters about the deteriorating economic and political situation in Iran and a completely uncompetitive election has led to predictions of extremely low turnout on March 1.



Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of hardline daily Kayhan

However, **Shariatmadari also insisted earlier in the week**, without presenting any evidence, that turnout in Tehran will be 20 percent higher than what it was in 2020. This comes while all forecasts in Iran put the expected turnout between 8 to 15 percent.

During the past weeks, hardliners in Iran have been doing whatever they could to encourage people to go to the polls. **Khamenei's leading religious singer Saeed Haddadian said** on state TV that not taking part in elections is a cardinal sin in Islam! Earlier Hossein Shariatmadari had said that **voting in elections is tantamount to Jihad!** Many clerics who are on the payroll of the state have also made extravagant statements about the urgency to vote and in praise of Iran's ruler Ali Khamenei.

Earlier in this week, former lawmaker **Hedayatollah Khademi told the press** that after his disqualification for the upcoming elections, he was approached by go-betweens from the Guardian Council who demanded \$120,000 to have his qualifications endorsed by the clerics at the election watchdog. Khademi said that various go-betweens wanted 100 billion rials to have his credentials approved by the Guardian Council. He added: "The figures they demanded were almost similar. They wanted 100 billion rials, or 300 standard gold coins, or \$120,000."

Meanwhile, **it was disclosed by hackers who targeted the parliaments servers** that the current ultraconservative lawmakers receive a monthly salary of over 2 billion rials per month, or about \$4,000.

That is more than 20 times the salary of an ordinary government employee. Following the hacking, the parliament held closed-door sessions on Wednesday and banned the entry of journalists. Subsequently, the parliament claimed that what the lawmakers actually receive is one tenth of what the hackers have claimed. This comes while the hackers have published the parliament's own documents about the lawmakers' salaries.

In the meantime, **reports from Tehran say** that while less than two weeks remain before the voting day, even the conservatives who have been allowed to run, have not been able yet to form any alliance to determine who will be on their lists of candidates particularly in the significant constituency of Tehran.

The reports said that a fierce battle is going on over the speakership in the new parliament. What is clear is that the ultraconservative Paydari party is adamant to replace the current Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. If they manage to do so, they will literally take over the entire legislature.

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