

**Iran**

## Iran election: turnout sinks to record low as polls close

**Extending polling hours fails to boost turnout beyond previous low from 2020 election, strengthening claims people are rejecting the regime by staying at home**

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Polling closed in Iran's parliamentary elections on Friday night, with officials claiming the nationwide turnout was a record low of 40.6%.

After 10 hours of voting, turnout had stood at only 27%, and in Tehran it was just 12% after eight hours, before the polls were unexpectedly kept open for an extra two hours.

Officials had predicted the eventual figure would be above the 42.5% recorded the last time parliamentary seats were contested, in 2020, but it fell short of that figure.

The total number of participants was 24,861,542, they said, after a late surge in voting made possible by keeping the polls open for longer.

The Iranian regime had placed great store in boosting turnout above the [2020](#) figure, a historic low, since it believes a strong show of political engagement would ward off claims it has run out of legitimacy, or is unable to deliver on the basic requirements of the Iranian people for economic progress and personal freedom.

Social media outlets opposed to the regime showed - albeit inconclusively - near empty polling stations, but a spokesperson for the Guardian Council, the body that vets candidates, said earlier there were no problems with the election and turnout would reach 2020 levels.

The authorities announced they had extended polling hours due to rising numbers going to the polls, but opposition groups said it was a panic measure.

Turnout in [elections in 2016](#) was 62%.

It is a foregone conclusion that the increasingly factionalised hardliners will tighten their grip on the parliament and on the Assembly of Experts, an 88-strong body charged with appointing the next supreme leader when the incumbent, Ali Khamenei, dies.

Many reformists were disqualified from standing, making the election a sham in the eyes of many voters who already believe the country is not run by politicians but by branches of the security services and the army.

The reformist movement has been in steady decline for years and was damaged by the previous president, Hassan Rouhani, since they backed him in the elections even though he was not a reformist. He proved unable to deliver change during his two four-year terms, one of which was marred by the Covid outbreak that claimed thousands of Iranian lives.

As many as 10 million people are eligible to vote in Tehran province, and turnout is likely to be lowest there. Balochistan province has been hit by floods and is also likely to have a low turnout.

Rouhani has been succeeded as president by **Ebrahim Raisi**, a hardliner and former judge close to the supreme leader who has edged the country towards a more pro-Russian and anti-western stance.

Internal phone surveys conducted 24 hours before the poll showed three-quarters of the population did not intend to vote and only 16% were definitely planning to do so. Three-quarters of those surveyed said they would not be voting due to opposition to the Islamic Republic or to the lack of free and fair elections.

A challenge for the regime in the days ahead will surround whether to publish accurate turnout results if they show only about a third of the country voted, and two-thirds rejected the regime by **staying at home**. Concern was aired on social media that invalid votes would be counted as part of the turnout. Official government news agencies started to delete previously published turnout figures for specific provinces as the figures failed to climb through the day.

In an attempt to quell the boycott movement, police officers in West Azerbaijan province announced the identification and arrest of 50 “virtual page operators” that had acted “to disturb the public’s mind and call for non-participation in the elections”.

In a sign of the continuing oppression that leaves millions of voters alienated, the regime used election day to announce an Iranian court had sentenced the Grammy winner Shervin Hajipour to nearly four years in prison. His song Baraye became an anthem of the “women, life, freedom” protests in 2022, with versions played at concerts by Coldplay. He has also been ordered to write music critical of the US.

Hajipour has been handed eight months in prison for “propaganda against the establishment” and three years for “encouraging and provoking the public to riot to disrupt national security”. Hajipour will serve only the longer of the two prison sentences.

This article was amended on 1 March 2024. A previous version incorrectly described Hassan Rouhani and Ebrahim Raisi as, respectively, the former and current prime ministers of Iran.

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