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## The New Iranian Parliament Is Loyal to Khamenei but Advocating for Rouhani

03/02/2016 03:31 pm ET | Updated 2 days ago



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**Seyed Hossein Mousavian**  
Head of Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council (1997-2005)



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On Feb. 26, Iran held its 10th parliamentary election since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and fifth election for its Assembly of Experts, the clerical body that appoints the supreme leader. Members of parliament serve four-year terms, while members of the assembly serve 8-year terms. The elections were relatively competitive; nearly 5,000 candidates vied for 290 seats in parliament and 161 for 88 seats in the Assembly of Experts.

A record-breaking 12,862 individuals had originally [signed up](#) to run; 12,067 for the parliament and 795 for the Assembly of Experts. While there is no cost or gathering of signatures required to register as a political candidate in Iran, candidates do have to be vetted by an institution known as the Guardian Council. This time around, after the vetting process was all said and done, 6,372 candidates were deemed [qualified](#). Of those, roughly 5,000 ultimately decided to stay in the race. There were [over 55 million eligible voters](#) and [55,000 polling stations](#) were made available across the country for voting.

### Ten points stand out from these elections:

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1. In 2015, the nuclear agreement between Iran and global powers was the only positive and hopeful news coming out of the Middle East and marked the only diplomatic solution reached to a regional crisis. Now, in 2016, the rest of the Middle East is on fire and ravaged by war and terrorism. [According to the Israeli defense minister](#), the region is already in the midst of World War III. The elections in Iran are a beacon of light in a region otherwise shrouded in violence and political discord.
2. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was the foremost public official [urging Iranians](#), even those who oppose the political system, to participate in the election. He made this call right up until the day of voting. The enthusiastic participation of Iranians in the election, with an [official turnout of 62 percent](#), was a triumph for the Islamic Republic. At the same time, the election was conducted in a reliable and fair manner and with complete security. These are all signs of Iran's stability, strength and democratic prowess -- rare traits for a state in today's Middle East.
3. While forces close to centrist President Hassan Rouhani made impressive gains in the election, media across the world [incorrectly cast](#) the results as a victory for reformists. The reality is that the outcome of the election will see the next parliament consisting of three political groupings: principlists, otherwise known as hard-liners, centrists/reformists and independents, with each group garnering [about equal representation](#). Generally, in the past, one major political grouping would earn a strong majority in the parliament. In the current outgoing parliament, for example, principlists have an absolute majority. But with this election, for the first time since the revolution, there will be a fair balance between the various groups. This is a development that will lead to the strengthening of democracy in Iran.
4. Upwards of 66 percent of incumbent MPs will be [replaced](#) as a result of this election. However, the real unprecedented development of this election is the huge gains made by a third faction: the independents. How these [independents act](#) will determine what direction the next parliament takes and what decisions it makes.
5. Many of the MPs who opposed the nuclear deal [were voted out](#), particularly those who were most vitriolic in their attacks on Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. This is a clear sign that the majority of the Iranian people support the nuclear deal and that the majority of the new MPs will uphold it. This ensures that the deal will not be undermined from the Iranian side.



ATTA KENARE via Getty Images

An Iranian woman displays her ink-stained finger after casting her ballot at a polling station in Tehran on Feb. 26. (ATTA KENARE/AFP/Getty Images)

6. On the Assembly of Experts, 43 percent of incumbent members [will be replaced](#). The list announced by two big clerical organizations in Qom and Tehran on behalf of the principlists [won](#) 47 percent of the seats, while candidates from the centrist/reformist list [won](#) 19 percent. The remainder were common candidates in both lists. Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, the head of Iran's judiciary, has released [a statement](#) expressing his dissatisfaction with some of the principlist clerics failing to win enough votes. He is referring to figures like Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, who

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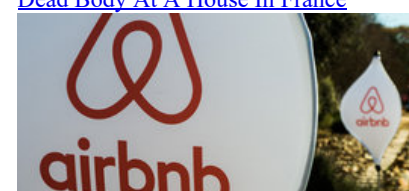
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leads the Society of Seminary Teachers in the Shia holy city of Qom and is the current chairman of the Assembly of Experts, and Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, the godfather of the [Jebheye Paydari](#) (Perseverance Front) party, which supported former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

7. The centrist/reformist political grouping gained absolute majority in Iran's capital, Tehran. However, the results in the provinces were more balanced -- even slightly in favor of principlists. Even so, this has not stopped principlist cleric Jafar Shojooni from [stating](#): "Tehran is the center for opposition to the revolution and *velayat-e faqih* (clerical jurisprudence) and these people winning the vote demonstrates this problem." On the other side, reformist Hossein Marashi has [opined](#): "We can now see that the level of political maturity in Tehran is 100, in provincial capitals is 50, and in smaller cities is 30." In my view, both of these statements are wrong. The vote in Tehran was influenced more by the nuclear deal because most of the known opponents of the deal and the Rouhani government were MPs from Tehran who have now been voted out. Furthermore, Iran's supreme leader was the [most important defender](#) of the nuclear deal and consistently [defended the Rouhani administration](#).
8. Since the Islamic Revolution, how the Iranian people vote in elections has typically been unpredictable. Officials in Iran and across the world have repeatedly been shocked by the results of Iranian elections. In this election, too, there were shocking results. As mentioned above, the current chairman of the Assembly of Experts [did not win](#) enough votes to keep his office. Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, who led the principlists in parliament, was also [not reelected](#). A reformist, Mohammad Aref, received the [most votes in Tehran](#) for parliament. On the other hand, [Mojtaba Zolnoor](#), a principlist politician and supporter of the [Jebheye Paydari](#) party, won the [most votes in Qom](#) for parliament. Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, meanwhile, got the [most votes in Tehran](#) for the Assembly of Experts. The meaning of all of this is that the Iranian people are free to elect for themselves whomever they wish.
9. With the new makeup of the parliament, it can be said that practically all of the elected representatives are loyal to the supreme leader. What is known of the independent candidates is that they are mainly pragmatic and realistic. It can be confidently said that majority of the new parliament will support the Rouhani administration and its policies to enhance Iran's foreign relations, develop the economy and industries and further privatization.
10. The Middle East is currently experiencing its most unstable period in the modern era. Iran is undeniably a stabilizing weight in the region. The 2013 presidential election in Iran, the reaching of the nuclear deal in 2015, the speedy release of American sailors who had drifted into Iranian waters, the prisoner exchange in 2016, the progress in the Syria peace talks after Iran was invited to join in late 2015, and now the conclusion of successful elections for two important political bodies in Iran, are all clear signs of the importance of engagement and cooperation with Iran and the continued need for global powers to have a new approach towards Iran. After 10 years of being under the most deadly sanctions and harshest of economic pressures, the Iranian people have showed with their massive turnout in these elections that they will strongly be present in their country's political scene and will not bow down to pressure and force.

The message of these elections to global powers is that they should approach Iran with respect rather than with threats and drop anti-Iranian rhetoric. The United States Congress and its future president should take policy initiatives that advance beyond the Iran deal and move towards a new vision that reduces pressure and sanctions on Iran. Those Iranians who went to the voting booths have a palpable sense of the indifference of the West to the existence of democracy and elections in Iran. The Iranian people know that any claims by the West to respect public participation in Iran loses its credibility, because they see that Western allies in the region have zero democracy.

Ambassador [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) is a research scholar at Princeton University and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His nuclear book, "[The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir](#)," was published by the Carnegie Endowment

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for International Peace. His latest book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace" was released in May 2014.

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Rouhani has turned into anything but a moderate. Rouhani's sole purpose in being hand selected by Khamenei and all other candidates cleared from the field beforehand was to convince the West of a moderate image and secure a deal lifting crippling sanctions. In his tenure, he has instead presided over the highest increase in executions ever in Iran, cracked down hard on journalists and presided over three proxy wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen in a show of extremist Islamic expansion that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, his much-reviled predecessor, could only dream about.

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**Elim Ahmed**

You're right. He's the blue-eyed boy of the Shiite extremists. Nejad now appears to be a lame duck when compared to the so-called moderate Rouhani's evil policies.

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100's of billions for mosques in America and Europe, not a dime to try and feed children in Arab nations? Why when slave state America will be more faithful to the pillars of Islam's and build civilizations in Iraq and Afghanistan by rejecting wealth and for pure charity send food to Arabia while million Americans children starve as Afghan slaves are forced to grow more heroin instead of food to ship to America instead of grow food for Arab children, as China steals billions of natural resources from Afghanistan as Americans die to protect Afghan people from being killed and mistreated under Chinese rule and hatred against anyone of the Abraham religions

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**Chris Walker** · Security regulation at Indiana Grand Casino

China steals mineral wealth, what's up with this posting, can't get my poor words correct? Anything but feed child drenched on a water world garden planet! You think all the tech schools would figure a way to evaporate ocean water for fresh water and salt by now like survivor man does on a island beach

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**Elim Ahmed**

What democracy? Another addition to the endless propaganda of the mullahs and barrel bombers being advanced by Mr. Mousavian.

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**Maziar Malek**

Nonsense. Elections in Iran under the regime of mullahs are BS.

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**Shariat Marc** · Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)

Absolutely Correct. Regime change is only answer

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