



[Iranian Election Sees Record-Low Turnout](#)

Religious hardliners in Iran had a strong showing in the country's recent parliamentary election, although their success is tainted by the lowest turnout in an Iranian election since the 1979 revolution. Only 42.5% of eligible voters turned up at the ballot box, as a combination of renewed U.S. sanctions and an outbreak of the coronavirus deterred people from coming out. Iranians avoided voting to show their displeasure with the regime, despite Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei saying Iranians had a "religious duty" to vote. Khamenei also accused Western powers of exaggerating the effects of the coronavirus in Iran, despite the country having the highest number of deaths from the disease outside of China. Most recently, Iran's deputy health minister Iraj Harirchi was diagnosed with the coronavirus, and Tehran has been accused of withholding internal information about the disease.

Prior to the elections, over 7,000 candidates, most of them reformists, were disqualified from running by Iran's Guardian Council for having insufficient ideological loyalty. Of those disqualified, 90 sitting members of Iran's parliament were included. Experts have said that this move heavily reduced voter participation and added to Iranians' growing disenchantment with their political system. Another factor in the low turnout was the government's response to anti-regime protests that have occurred in recent weeks. Activists and critics of the government called on citizens to boycott the elections to show their opposition to the human rights violations committed by the Iranian regime.

In Tehran, 75% of the electorate failed to vote, and all 30 seats at stake were won by conservatives loyal to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The roughly 25% turnout in Tehran was high in comparison to other areas in Iran, and this facilitated sweeping victories for Khamenei loyalists across the country. As a result of this, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani will likely see his influence in the country decrease because of his comparatively moderate views. Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said the low turnout was "completely acceptable" and that the recent bad weather, protests, and outbreak of the coronavirus were rational explanations as to why turnout was diminished.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei asserted the media had overstated the influence of the coronavirus in Iran, even as his deputy health minister tested positive for the disease, and fatalities jumped. 14 provinces across Iran have closed schools, universities, and cultural centers, and Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Afghanistan have closed their borders with Iran. Additionally, officials in Tehran have been accused by local leaders of suppressing the facts about the virus. A legislator in Qom asserted that there had been 50 deaths in his city, which was refuted by regime officials in Tehran. He also said that over 250 people had been quarantined in Qom, a statement that was also denied by the Iranian government. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo voiced similar concerns earlier this week, saying he believed Iran was withholding "vital details" about the virus. Experts have warned that concealing information about the coronavirus could have international ramifications, and this has been proved true by new cases of the disease in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Canada that are traced back to Iran.