

'Moderate' Defeats 'Hardliner' in Sham Iranian Presidential Election

Reformist Masoud Pezeshkian defeated Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's protege Saeed Jalili Friday to become Iran's next president, winning the runoff election by 16.3 million votes to Jalili's 13.5 million.

Pezeshkian was the leading candidate in the first round of Iran's sham election on June 28, but he did not clear the 50-percent threshold necessary to win outright. He advanced to Friday's runoff vote along with hardliner Jalili, leaving onetime favorite Mohammed Bagher Qalibaf behind.

Turnout for the first round hit a record low of 39 percent, as many Iranians have grown disgusted with the regime's farcical elections and preferred to show their contempt by boycotting the vote.

Many opposition leaders and human rights activists urged the boycott as a means of embarrassing the theocratic regime and depriving it of legitimacy. The opposition also pointed out that even if a "moderate" like Pezeshkian were to win, he would not be able to reform the system very much, since absolute power - and control over most of Iran's wealth - remains in the hands of the Ayatollah and his senior clerics.

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