

REPORT

Larijani Brothers Pushed Aside in Iran's Power Struggle

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Iran's powerful Guardian Council, the body responsible for approving candidates for the country's forthcoming presidential race on June 18, has disqualified former Parliament speaker Ali Larijani from the race. Larijani was Parliament speaker for 12 years until 2020. The swift move signals the fall from power of a powerful family whose fortunes were closely tied until recently to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

According to Larijani's [information staff](#), the presidential hopeful accepted God's will regarding his disqualification. However, he criticized the move to shrink the number of power holders in Iran. He believes this move will lead to further [factionalism in the country](#). He also questioned moves to tarnish his image, including accusations that his daughter Fatemeh lives in the United States with a second foreign passport.

At least one Larijani brother, five in total, has been accused by Iran's "hardliners" of having family members who collaborate with foreign governments. Ali Larijani's elder brother Sadegh Larijani's daughter was accused of spying for the [British government](#).

The accusations leave the Larijani brothers and their political backers in dismay. They are a signal that the Larijanis will be marginalized in Iran's political corridors. After being disqualified, Larijani's tight circle of supporters hoped he might receive [a state order](#) to permit him to run in the election. According to reports, President Hassan Rouhani even stepped in to ask Iran's supreme leader to use his powers to permit more figures like Larijani to [run in the race](#). But the Guardian Council insists it will not change its vetting decision due to [government demands](#).

Not surprisingly, [Sadegh Larijani](#) accepted the Guardian Council's decision but attacked his family's critics for playing [games](#). The [Guardian Council](#) warned him when he questioned the vetting process.

The supreme leader thanked the potential presidential candidates who respectfully accepted their disqualification and stepped aside. He also added that their disqualification did not mean that they lacked qualifications or competency, but only the high qualifications and standards that the Guardian Council seeks in potential candidates.

Clearly meant as a slap in the face, the supreme leader's remarks reveal that Ali Larijani may have over-played his hand when he decided to run in the presidential race. Over the years, Larijani was seen as a reliable political broker who worked to coordinate the views of the supreme leader with Iran's different political factions. Larijani was perceived as a "center conservative," but he invariably backed the "hardliners" that support the supreme leader. Still, in recent years, he criticized the "hardline" critics of the 2015 [nuclear deal](#) and reiterated that he supports a [liberal economy](#). He also opposed Iran's military and judicial figures competing for positions in the [executive branch](#).

After leaving Parliament, Larijani became an advisor to the supreme leader, a largely ceremonial position. He decided to contest the presidential election before his main competitor Ebrahim Raisi entered the fray. Raisi appears to have the supreme leader's full backing. He is also hostile towards the Larijani brothers. Raisi in fact replaced Sadegh Larijani as Iran's chief justice two years ago and swiftly brought corruption charges against Larijani's inner circle.

In the run up to the presidential race, Larijani supporters hoped that [Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei](#) would ignore the corruption charges against Sadegh and endorse the candidacy of Ali Larijani. However, opinion polls showed that Larijani was far behind Raisi in the race. What may have also pushed the supreme leader away from the Larijanis was their ambitions. It was speculated that Sadegh Larijani hoped to become Iran's next supreme leader, particularly after he was appointed as the country's chief justice. Earlier, four years ago, he aspired to preside over the Assembly of Experts, which appoints the supreme leader. After leaving the judiciary, Sadegh served in Iran's Expediency Council, and for the past two decades has served as member of the Guardian Council. There are concerns among "hardliners" that he

aspires to preside over the Guardian Council after its current chairman, the elderly cleric Ahmad Jannati, passes away.

The fate of the other Larijani brothers remains uncertain as well. The eldest brother Mohammad Javad Larijani remains a loyalist to the supreme leader by defending Iran's poor human rights record. Ten years ago, Fazel Larijani, the youngest brother, was accused of taking bribes. Another brother, the fourth, [Bagher Larijani](#) is a physician by training who served in the Ministry of Health and later headed the Medical Department at Tehran University.

The disqualification of Ali now leaves the whole Larijani family in a vulnerable position. And it remains to be seen if further investigations will be brought against Sadegh. Added to this vulnerability is the fact that the supreme leader is surrounded by figures who oppose the Larijanis. In addition to Raisi, another presidential candidate [Alireza Zakani](#) is a fierce critic of the Larijani brothers as well. Zakani exposed Sadegh's corruption ring in the judiciary. Despite these growing moves to marginalize the Larijani family, it is quite clear that this family still depends on the supreme leader for its political future, and it will be interesting to see whether the supreme leader allows the Larijani family some respite or whether he shuts the door completely, signaling the end of this political dynasty's political fortunes.



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