

Reformist, ultraconservative lead Iran presidential vote

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Online Desk : Reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian and ultraconservative Saeed Jalili are leading in Iran's presidential election, according to early results on Saturday from the Interior Ministry, reports AFP. According to the latest count, Pezeshkian has won more than 8,300,000 votes and Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator, has above 7,100,000. Should the current trend continue, both candidates would head into a runoff set for July 5. The second round is required if no candidate wins 50 percent of the vote, plus one. The Interior Ministry reported that more than 19,000,000 ballots had been counted so far.

Coming third in the early results is the conservative speaker of parliament, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, with 2,600,000 votes. The fourth of the candidates, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, a conservative cleric, had 158,314 votes. Around 61 million Iranians were eligible to cast ballots in the election necessitated by the death of ultraconservative president Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash last month. The ballot comes against a backdrop of heightened regional tensions over the Gaza war, a dispute with the West over Iran's nuclear programme, and domestic discontent over the state of Iran's sanctions-hit economy.

The four candidates were approved to run by the Guardian Council, which vets all contenders. Ahead of the last election, which brought Raisi to power in 2021, the Council disqualified many reformists and moderates.