

# [***Iranian President's Death Shakes Up Succession For Regime's Supreme Leader***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C2V-XS11-JBFB-H0N8-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Daily Caller

May 20, 2024 Monday 08:49 PM EST

Copyright 2024 The Daily Caller, Inc. All Rights Reserved

**Section:** DAILY-CALLER-NEWS-FOUNDATION; world

**Length:** 1097 words

**Byline:** Jake Smith, Contributor, [*jakesmith@dcnf.org*](mailto:jakesmith@dcnf.org)

**Body**

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GettyImages-1487586431-scaled-e1716236436793.jpg)

The death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi raises questions as to who is next in line to eventually succeed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Raisi and several Iranian regime officials were [*killed*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/05/19/raisi-helicopter-rescuers-incident/) in a helicopter crash in northern Iran on Sunday, prompting Khamenei to order swift elections. There was domestic and international speculation that Raisi was possibly the leading candidate to succeed Khamenei, and his death throws into question who Khamenei may now choose to endorse. [***(RELATED: US Says No Foul Play Involved In Helicopter Crash That Killed Iranian President)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/05/20/no-foreign-involvement-helicopter-crash-killed-iranian-president/)

“I don't think it was an open and shut case that Raisi was going to be the next Supreme Leader. Not at all. But I think a lot of experts were independently able to come to the conclusion that, given his background and personality, he certainly would have been on the shortlist,” Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told the Daily Caller News Foundation. “What I will say with the passing of Raisi is that the shortlist to become Iran's next Supreme Leader, certainly just got a lot shorter.”

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GettyImages-2153861990-scaled.jpg)

TEHRAN, IRAN - MAY 20: Iranians gather at Valiasr Square in central Tehran to mourn the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a helicopter crash the previous day, on May 20, 2024. mourn the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a helicopter crash the previous day. (Photo by Majid Saeedi/Getty Images)

Though he enjoyed personal support from the supreme leader, Raisi was deeply unpopular among the Iranian population, having helped promote foreign policies that dramatically increased tensions with the West and domestic policies resulting in scores of human rights abuses and political oppression, [*according*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/20/world/middleeast/ebrahim-raisi-iran-dead.html) to The New York Times. Raisi also oversaw Iran's worsening economy as the value of the Rial, the country's currency, has plummeted to historic lows.

Whether Raisi's unpopularity hurt his chances of being chosen to succeed Khamenei is unclear, as the supreme leader had not issued an endorsement for the role prior to Raisi's death. But with Raisi out of the picture altogether, another talked about potential candidate - Khamenei's second son, Mojtaba Khamenei - may have a clearer shot at the role.

Mojtaba, a cleric and theology teacher, does not share the same public notoriety as his father and is not an official within the Iranian regime, [*according*](https://www.iranintl.com/en/202303226935) to Iran International and NYT. But he is said to have considerable political influence behind closed doors, aiding senior officials in dictating policy, and has close ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) and its respective Basij paramilitary forces, the latter of which he is believed to be its de facto leader. [***(RELATED: Princeton Tried To Bridge The US-Iran Gap - Then Tehran And Allies Kidnapped, Detained Two Students)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/05/09/princeton-tried-bridge-the-us-iran-gap-tehran-allies-kidnapped-detained-two-students/)

“Mojtaba has what many autocrats love, which is power without accountability,” Taleblu told the DCNF, recalling an article he wrote in April on Khamnei's possible successor. “A colleague and I were weighing the chances of Mojtaba above versus Raisi, and we came down on the side of Mojtaba. [Raisi's death] certainly makes the path even easier for Mojtaba.”

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GettyImages-2151707863-scaled.jpg)

TOPSHOT - Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gives a press conference after casting his ballot for the parliamentary runoff elections in Tehran on May 10, 2024. (Photo by ATTA KENARE/AFP via Getty Images)

“When people started talking about Mojtaba as a potential successor in 2009, I considered it a cheap rumor,” Arash Azizi, a lecturer at Clemson University specializing in Iran affairs, [*told*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/20/world/middleeast/iran-raisi-death-supreme-leader.html) NYT. “But it's not that anymore. It's very clear now that he is a remarkable figure. And he's remarkable because he's been almost entirely invisible in the public eye.”

But Khamenei may refrain from endorsing Mojtaba as his successor, to avoid returning to a period of hereditary rule that previously dominated Iran until the Islamic revolution and ousting of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, [*according*](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/death-irans-raisi-could-stir-race-khamenei-succession-insiders-say-2024-05-20/) to Reuters.

Another possible candidate is Alireza Arafi, a member of the Assembly of Experts, Iran's deliberative body made up of 88 clerics, according to the WSJ. Arafi is also not as publicly known but has a long history of holding senior religious roles and was chosen personally by Khamenei to lead the Al-Mustafa International University, which is responsible for promoting Shiite Muslim ideology across the world.

Arafi is currently the director of all Islamic seminaries across Iran, a prestigious and senior-level role, and is the Friday prayer leader at the religious center of the Qom, the holy city considered the center of learning in Iran, according to the WSJ.

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GettyImages-2153871194-scaled.jpg)

TEHRAN, IRAN - MAY 20: Iranians gather at Valiasr Square in central Tehran to mourn the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a helicopter crash the previous day, on May 20, 2024. (Photo by Majid Saeedi/Getty Images)

Any candidate Khamenei endorses would have to be unanimously confirmed by the Assembly of Experts. It isn't clear when Khamenei, at 85 years old with a history of illness, will endorse his successor or step down from his role.

Given the secretive nature of Iranian internal ***politics***, it is difficult to know how Khamenei will eventually decide, according to NYT.

“The reality is that nobody knows,” Mohammad Ali Shabani, an Iran analyst, told NYT. “And that is crazy. There is zero transparency on a process that affects millions of Iranians.”

In the immediate aftermath of Raisi's death, Khamenei [*downplayed*](https://x.com/khamenei_ir/status/1792249704199213321) the possibility of political turbulence, and [*appointed*](https://x.com/khamenei_ir/status/1792496749220675994) Vice President Mohammad Mokhber to serve as interim president while a new president is elected within the next 50 days.

“From Khamenei's perspective, the last thing you want to see is further destabilization ahead of the succession,” Mehrzad Boroujerdi, an Iran specialist at Missouri University of Science and Technology, [*told*](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-president-ebrahim-raisi-succession-politics-bb77748e?mod=hp_lead_pos1) The Wall Street Journal. “He wants to convey the message that the regime's stability is not dependent on individuals below him.”

All content created by the Daily Caller News Foundation, an independent and nonpartisan newswire service, is available without charge to any legitimate news publisher that can provide a large audience. All republished articles must include our logo, our reporter's byline and their DCNF affiliation. For any questions about our guidelines or partnering with us, please contact [*licensing@dailycallernewsfoundation.org*](mailto:licensing@dailycallernewsfoundation.org).

**Graphic**

(Photo by Borna News/Matin Ghasemi/Aksonline ATPImages/Getty Images)

**Load-Date:** May 20, 2024

**End of Document**