
TAJIKISTAN VOTES ON WHETHER TO ALLOW PRESIDENT LIFELONG POWER

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Voters in Tajikistan went to the polls in a referendum Sunday that could pave the way for President Emomali Rahmon to solidify his hold on power and cement his crackdown on moderate Islamic opponents.

The former Soviet republics election commission said nearly 80% of voters had gone to the polls by late afternoon, the news agency Interfax reported. Results are expected late Sunday or Monday.

Tajikistans citizens will vote on a series of constitutional amendments, including one that would allow Mr. Rahmon to run for office an unlimited number of times. Another amendment would lower the age requirement for presidential candidates, potentially changing the law to allow his son to run for future office, observers say.

Mr. Rahmon, who has been in power since 1992, has already moved to oust opposition figures from the government. He has also shut down moderate Islamic parties, a move he says is meant to protect the country, which shares a lengthy border with Afghanistan, from Islamic extremism. Critics say the moves are aimed at stifling dissent.

The Muslim-majority country is heavily dependent on remittances from workers abroad to keep its economy afloat. Many opponents of Mr. Rahmon have left politics.

Observers say a referendum will likely end any meaningful opposition in the countrys political system and force more loyalty to Mr. Rahmon.