*On November 15, 2011,* [*Mohammad Javad Ardashir Larijani*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/people/mohammad-javad-ardashir-larijani) *spoke at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs on a variety of topics concerning Iranian politics. At the time of the talk, he was a senior advisor to the head of the Judiciary and secretary general of the High Council for Human Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Previously, he has served as a Majlis representative (Member of Parliament), the director of Majlis Research Center, and a vice minister of Foreign Affairs.*

*In the excerpt found below, Mohammad Javad Ardashir Larijani explains why he views Iran's government as a "democratic structure based on Islamic rationality," and what exactly that means. The full text of the talk can be found* [*here*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20111115-report-from-iran)*.*

**Iran's Government System as a "Democratic Structure Based on Islamic Rationality"**

"If you ask me what is the greatest achievement or the main task that we [the Iranian government have been] engaged in in the past three decades in Iran, it is not the great scientific achievements [although] we are one of the best in science and technology in the Middle East...Our main achievement is that we try to create a polity [political organization] based on Islamic rationality, incorporating the democratic procedures which are practiced in the Western liberal system. We thought to ourselves that democracy is good, but [secular liberalism,](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_liberalism) we don't like it, so let us create a democratic structure based on Islamic rationality.

The main assumption was that this is possible. The best way to prove something is possible, in the practical sense, is to make it possible. We had, before the [revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Revolution%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), a lot of discussion on the theoretical level of whether it is possible; whether democracy should be only liberal, only secular.

We went beyond that. We just started this practice. Our main experience, which we think is of utmost importance, is to create a polity which has a democratic power structure. People are getting to power by lateral vote and coming down by lateral votes. Main decisions are based on the vote of the people. But it is different from Western experience, in the sense that it is not liberal. It is a democracy based on Islamic rationality.

...[I]f we say that our government is [Islamic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), it means that it is a theocracy based on frozen text; take it or leave it. This is not Islamic rationality. Islamic rationality means a rational structure stemming from ingredients that basically has Islam and other needs.

...We see ourselves as masterminds of this experience. It is intellectual, it is cultural, and it is political. We see that in other parts of the Islamic world, especially recently in the Middle East, there are [movements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_spring%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) [Arab Spring of 2011]. In our view, these are very good movements in the sense that they are moving toward what we thought before—that in order to be democratic, we don't have to be Western.

We could be democratic [while] still enjoying a lot of things from our indigenous culture. Culture is not frozen things from museums and paintings or music or things like that. Culture in this sense is the engine of daily life and the way that we judge, that we understand."