



Iran

Events of 2009

Following the disputed June 12 presidential election and the massive protests it provoked, the government unleashed the most widespread crackdown in a decade. Security forces were responsible for at least 30 deaths, according to official sources. On August 13, Judiciary spokesman Ali Reza Jamshidi said that authorities had detained 4,000 people following the election, mostly in street protests that were largely peaceful. Security forces also arrested dozens of leading government critics, including human rights lawyers, whom the government held without charge, many of them in solitary confinement. The Judiciary, the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij militia, and the Ministry of Intelligence—all of which report to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—were responsible for many serious human rights violations. Meanwhile, long-standing human rights issues, including restrictions on freedom of expression and association, religious and gender-based discrimination, and the frequent use of the death penalty, including on juvenile offenders, continued unabated.



Supporters of former presidential candidate Mirhossein Mousavi attend a rally in Tehran, June 15, 2009.

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Torture and Ill-Treatment of Political Prisoners

Following the disputed election, both ordinary protestors and prominent opposition figures faced detention without trial, harsh treatment including sexual violence and denial of due process including lack of access to lawyers of their choosing. Human Rights Watch documented at least 26 cases in which detainees were subjected to torture and/or coerced to make false confessions, though local activists believe that there were many more such cases. Some released detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were held in solitary confinement, and deprived of food and proper healthcare. Security forces used beatings, threats against family members, sleep deprivation, and fake executions to intimidate detainees and to force them to confess that they instigated post-election riots and were plotting a "velvet coup." The government held a series of show trials in which prominent political figures such as former Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi, Mohamed Atrian Far, Saeed Hajarian, Saeed Shariati, Abdullah Momeni, Hedayat Aghaie, and journalists and analysts such as Maziar Bahari, Amir Hussein Mahdavi, and Hussein Rassam publicly "confessed" to these charges.

Freedom of Expression

Iranian authorities continued to imprison journalists and editors for publishing critical views, and strictly controlled publishing and academic activities.

In the aftermath of the election authorities arrested more than 30 journalists and bloggers. Some imprisoned journalists and their families claimed that security forces subjected them to mistreatment and abuse during detention.

Throughout 2009 Iran's National Security Council gave newspapers formal and informal warnings against covering issues such as human rights violations and social protests. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance continues to monitor and censor independent newspapers before publication.

On June 15 the authorities suspended the publication of *Kalameh Sabz* (The Green Word), a newspaper owned by opposition presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi. On August 17, *Etemad Melli*, a newspaper aligned with another candidate, Mehdi Karrubi, was shut down for publishing a letter by Karrubi alleging that some post-election detainees in Iran were sexually harassed and raped in detention.

State universities prohibited some politically active students from registering for graduate programs despite undergraduate test scores which ordinarily would have guaranteed them access.

Following the election, the government sharply increased restrictions on domestic and foreign media, detaining at least two journalists working with foreign outlets and prohibiting at least a dozen journalists from covering the post-election developments, forcing them to leave the country. In early October security forces confiscated the passports of three prominent Iranian journalists-Badrolsadat Mofidi, Farzaneh Roostai and Zahra Ebrahimi-at Tehran airport, preventing them from leaving Iran.

The government systematically blocks Iranian and foreign websites that carry political news and analysis and disrupted SMS services prior to gatherings by opposition groups.

Freedom of Association

The government increased restrictions on civil society organizations that advocate human rights and freedom of speech. Security forces on December 23, 2008 shut down the Center for Defenders of Human Rights, led by 2003 Noble Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. The authorities later threatened human rights lawyers associated with the center and demanded that they stop cooperating with Ebadi.

On August 17, on the basis of a warrant issued by Saeed Mortazavi, Tehran's prosecutor general, officials shut down the Association of Iranian Journalists on the day of the association's annual meeting, putting an end to operations of the only independent and the largest journalists' association in Iran, with more than 3,700 members.

On January 21, Minister of Science, Research and Technology Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi declared *Daftar-e-Tahkim Vahdat* (Office for Consolidating Unity), a national independent student association an illegal organization, and prohibited it from continuing to operate on the premises of any university. On October 2, authorities arrested 14 of the association's leaders when they met informally at a park in northern Tehran. The government also continues to ban the activities of civil society organizations such as Volunteer Actors (a resource center for civil society organizations), the NGO Training Center, and the Rahi Institute, all led by prominent civil society activists and all of which the government had arbitrarily shut down in 2007 and 2008.

Since 2006, authorities have responded harshly to workers, teachers, and women's rights groups who advocate for better working conditions, better wages, benefits, and demands for changes in discriminatory laws. In 2009 the authorities arrested

union leaders, women activists, and suppressed gatherings of teachers and workers.

Death Penalty

Iran carries out more executions annually than any other nation except China. These executions frequently occur after unfair or political crimes with inadequate access to legal counsel. In 2009 authorities hanged 20 persons in the city of Karaj on charges of drug trafficking, and 13 members of Jondollah, an armed opposition group operating in Sistan and Baluchistan province.

Iran leads the world in the execution of juvenile offenders. As of October Iran had executed three juvenile offenders in 2009. Iranian law allows death sentences for persons who have reached puberty, defined by Iranian law as age 9 for girls and 15 for boys. At least 130 other juvenile offenders are currently on death row. In many cases these sentences followed unfair trials.

On January 21 Iran executed a 21-year-old Afghan citizen Molla Gol Hassanm, for a crime allegedly committed when he was 17 years old. On May 1 Iran secretly hanged Delara Darabi, 22, accused of a murder committed when she was 17, despite a flawed trial and a two-month stay of execution issued on April 19 by Ayatollah Shahrudi, Head of the Judiciary. On October 12 despite an initial pardon by the victim's family, authorities executed Behnoud Shojaie for a killing that he committed in 2005, when he was 17.

Human Rights Defenders

The government escalated its crackdown on human rights lawyers in 2009, subjecting some to arbitrary detention, travel bans, and harassment. Since the contested June 12 election, authorities arrested at least four human rights lawyers, including Abdolfattah Soltani, Shadi Sadr, Mohammad Mostafayee and Mohammad Ali Dadkhah. The government's crackdown on such prominent lawyers was an attempt to intimidate not only them but also younger, less prominent lawyers who are considering representing political detainees.

Judiciary officials did not allow families of detainees to choose prominent independent human rights lawyers to represent their detained family members. Family members of detainees said that officials told them that if they picked from those lawyers, their loved ones would "stay in prison for a long time." Several released detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were forbidden to name Shirin Ebadi or other prominent human rights lawyers when they applied for an attorney.

Treatment of Minorities

The government continues to deny members of the Baha'i faith, Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority, freedom of religion. In May 2008 authorities arrested seven leaders of the national organization of Baha'i based on fabricated security related accusations. The government accused them of espionage without providing evidence and has denied their lawyers request to release them on bail and promptly conduct a free and fair trial. As of November 2009 the seven remain in detention.

In the northwest provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, the government restricts cultural and political activities, including the organizations that focus on social issues. The government also restricts these minorities from promoting their cultures and languages.

Key International Actors

The government accused foreign media and governments of instigating demonstrations after the contested presidential election in mid-June, expelled most foreign correspondents, and arrested Iranian nationals employed in the British embassy in Tehran.

Following the elections, the Obama administration condemned violence against protestors and urged respect for human rights in Iran, while steering clear of language that would imply support for the opposition movement.

On October 26, Sweden, which then held the European Union presidency, issued a strong statement condemning the human rights situation in the aftermath of the election, and in particular the rise in death sentences, the mass trials of around 150 prisoners accused of crimes against national security, and the arbitrary detention of journalists, human rights defenders and political activists.

Since 2005 the government has prevented independent experts of the United Nations Human Rights Council from visiting to investigate alleged human rights violations. On November 20, the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, which comprises all the member states of the General Assembly itself, approved a resolution criticizing Iran for "harassment, intimidation and persecution, including by arbitrary arrest, detention or disappearance, of opposition members" as well as "violence and intimidation by government-directed militias."

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