

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1235
Land:	Iran
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2026 – Iran
Udgivet:	19. marts 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. april 2026

Freedom in the World 2026 - Iran

Overview

The Islamic Republic of Iran holds elections regularly, but they fall short of democratic standards due in part to the influence of the Guardian Council, an unelected body of hard-line conservatives that disqualifies all candidates it deems insufficiently loyal to the clerical establishment. Ultimate power rests in the hands of the country's supreme leader, and the unelected institutions under his control. These institutions, including the security forces and the judiciary, play a major role in the suppression of dissent and other restrictions on civil liberties.

Key Developments in 2025

- Israeli forces fought a 12-day war with the Iranian regime in June. Within Iran, the conflict largely consisted of Israeli bombings and air strikes, culminating in a US strike on three key nuclear facilities. More than 1,000 people were estimated to have been killed in the country. Iranian authorities imposed an internet shutdown for several days, depriving citizens of access to information, and conducted mass arrests of individuals accused of spying for Israel. By year's end, at least 10 people had been executed based on such charges.
- Executions surged overall during the year as the regime sought to suppress dissent, with Amnesty International reporting in September that the annual total had already passed 1,000, and the Norway-based group Iran Human Rights estimating in December that the ultimate figure would be more than double the previous year's total of about 975 executions.
- Security forces also intensified a crackdown on religious and ethnic minority populations and pursued an aggressive campaign to expel Afghan migrants and refugees, forcing about 1.8 million people to return to Afghanistan despite the dangers and hardships associated with Taliban rule in that country.
- Prominent human rights activists continued to face arrest and abuse. In December, authorities detained and assaulted Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi along with more than 35 other activists and dissidents who had gathered at a memorial service for human rights lawyer Khosrow Alikordi. Separately, despite the broader efforts to suppress dissent, an increasing number of Iranian women appeared in public without a headscarf in a direct challenge to the country's hijab law, continuing a trend from previous years.
- In late December, protests broke out in cities across Iran as merchants, students, and other citizens voiced their frustration with the government amid soaring inflation, a collapsing currency, and other dire economic problems. Authorities used force in their attempts to disperse the assemblies, though President Masoud Pezeshkian initially acknowledged the protesters' grievances and urged "dialogue" on how to address them.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

The supreme leader, who has no fixed term, is the highest authority in the country. He is the commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints the head of the judiciary, the heads of state broadcast media, and the Expediency Council, which mediates disputes between the Guardian Council and the parliament. He also appoints six members of the Guardian Council; the other six are jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary and confirmed by the parliament, all for six-year terms. The supreme leader is appointed by the Assembly of Experts, which monitors his work. However, in practice his decisions appear to go unchallenged by the assembly, whose proceedings are kept confidential. The supreme leader as of 2025, Ali Khamenei, succeeded Islamic Republic founder Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989.

The president, the second-highest-ranking official in the Islamic Republic, appoints a cabinet that must be confirmed by the parliament. He is elected by popular vote for up to two consecutive four-year terms. In July 2024, reformist Masoud Pezeshkian was elected in a runoff vote, defeating prominent conservative Saeed Jalili with 54.8 percent of the ballots. The election had been called after the death of then-President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash that May. The Guardian Council disqualified numerous candidates ahead of the vote, including the former parliament speaker Ali Larijani. Many voters boycotted the process, and turnout was reported at just 39.9 percent in the June first round and 49.6 percent in the July runoff.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1 / 4

Members of the 290-seat parliament are elected to four-year terms. Elections for the body were held in March 2024, with most seats going to hard-liners loyal to the supreme leader. Ahead of the vote, the Guardian Council disqualified many reformist and moderate candidates. Voter turnout was 41 percent, the lowest recorded for parliamentary elections in the history of the Islamic Republic.

Elections for the Assembly of Experts, a group of 88 clerics elected by popular vote to serve eight-year terms, were also held in March 2024, and hard-liners dominated the body. Ahead of the elections, the Guardian Council banned prominent centrist candidates, including former President Hassan Rouhani.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1 / 4

Iran's electoral system does not meet international democratic standards. The Guardian Council, controlled by hard-line conservatives and ultimately by the supreme leader, vets all candidates for the parliament, the presidency, and the Assembly of Experts. The council typically rejects candidates who are not considered insiders or deemed fully loyal to the clerical establishment. No woman has been allowed to run for president in the Islamic Republic. As a result, Iranian voters are given a strictly limited choice of candidates.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

0 / 4

Only political parties and factions loyal to the establishment and to the state ideology are permitted to operate.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

1 / 4

While there has been some space for shifts in power between approved factions within the establishment, the unelected components of the constitutional system represent a permanent barrier to opposition electoral victories and genuine rotations of power.

Opposition figures face arbitrary restrictions on their movement and activities. In March 2025, the authorities lifted the house arrest of Mehdi Karroubi, who along with Mir Hossein Mousavi and his wife and university professor Zahra Rahnavard had been leaders of the reformist Green Movement following the disputed 2009 presidential election. All three had been under house arrest without formal charges since 2011.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

0 / 4

The choices of both voters and politicians are heavily influenced and ultimately circumscribed by Iran's unelected state institutions and ruling clerical establishment.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

1 / 4

Men from the Shiite Muslim majority population dominate the political system. Women remain significantly underrepresented in politics and government. Women held only 4.8 percent of the parliament's seats after the March 2024 elections. Pezeshkian appointed three women to his government after taking office. No women candidates have ever been allowed to run for president.

Five seats in the parliament are reserved for recognized non-Muslim minority groups: Jews, Armenian Christians, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Zoroastrians. Members of non-Persian ethnic minorities and especially non-Shiite religious minorities are rarely awarded senior government posts, and their political representation remains weak. However, the administration of President Pezeshkian appointed several Sunni Muslims to leadership positions in 2024, including a provincial governor and the first Sunni to be appointed to the cabinet.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

The elected president's powers are limited by the supreme leader and other unelected authorities. The 2024 presidential election was tightly controlled by the regime, though Pezeshkian, a previously little-known reformist, was allowed to run.

The powers of the elected parliament are similarly restricted by the supreme leader and the unelected Guardian Council, which must approve all bills before they can become law.
C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

0 / 4

Corruption remains endemic at all levels of the bureaucracy, despite regular calls by authorities to tackle the problem. Powerful actors involved in the economy, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and *bonyads* (endowed foundations), are above scrutiny in practice, and restrictions on the media and civil society activists prevent them from serving as independent watchdogs to ensure transparency and accountability. While Khamenei has criticized corruption in the past, high-ranking officials and those closely affiliated with the regime have been implicated in corrupt activity.

Ayatollah Kazem Sedighi resigned as Tehran's Friday prayer leader in August 2025, a few weeks after his son and his daughter-in-law were arrested on corruption charges.
C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0 / 4

The transparency of Iran's governing system is extremely limited in practice, and powerful elements of the state and society are not accountable to the public. A 2009 law on access to information includes broadly worded exemptions that allow the protection of information whose disclosure would conflict with state interests, cause financial loss, or harm public security, among other stipulations.

The ruling establishment has actively suppressed or manipulated information on important topics. During the 12-day war with Israel in June 2025, authorities imposed severe internet disruptions while also intimidating and detaining journalists who attempted to cover the Israeli strikes and their aftermath.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

0 / 4

Media freedom is severely limited both online and offline. The state broadcasting company is tightly controlled by hard-liners and influenced by the security apparatus. News and analysis are heavily censored, while critics and opposition members are rarely if ever given a platform on state-controlled television, which remains a major source of information for many Iranians. State

television has a record of airing confessions extracted from political prisoners under duress, and it routinely carries reports aimed at discrediting dissidents and opposition activists.

Newspapers and magazines face censorship and warnings from authorities about which topics to cover and how. Tens of thousands of foreign-based websites are filtered, including news sites and major social media services. Satellite dishes are banned, and Persian-language broadcasts from outside the country are regularly jammed. Iranian authorities have intimidated journalists working for Persian-language media outside the country, in part by threatening their families in Iran.

Multiple Iranian journalists were arrested, summoned for interrogation, sentenced to prison, or otherwise harassed by security forces over the course of 2025. During the war with Israel in June, in addition to imposing an internet shutdown, Iranian authorities tightened censorship and ordered media to “observe and respect redlines” in their coverage. Also during the conflict, two journalists were killed when Israeli forces attacked the headquarters of the state broadcaster in Tehran.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

0 / 4

Iran is home to a majority Shiite Muslim population and Sunni Muslim, Baha’i, Christian, and Zoroastrian minorities. The constitution recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and certain Christian communities as non-Muslim religious minorities, and these small groups are relatively free to worship. The regime cracks down on Muslims who are deemed to be at variance with the state ideology and interpretation of Islam.

Sunni Muslims say that they have been prevented from building mosques in major cities and face difficulty obtaining government jobs. In recent years, there has been increased pressure on the Sufi Muslim order Nematollahi Gonabadi, including destruction of its places of worship and the jailing of some of its members.

The government subjects some non-Muslim minority groups to repressive policies and discrimination, including Baha’is and unrecognized Christian groups. Baha’is are systematically persecuted, sentenced to prison, and banned from access to higher education. They have also faced property confiscations and home demolitions. The regime sharply intensified its crackdown on Baha’is during and after the June 2025 conflict with Israel, raising alarm among international human rights groups. Separately, in late June, authorities summoned and interrogated at least 35 members of the Jewish community in Shiraz and Tehran, reportedly warning them not to communicate with relatives in Israel.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

0 / 4

Academic freedom remains limited in Iran. Khamenei has warned that universities should not be turned into centers for political activities. Students have been prevented from continuing their studies for political reasons or because they belong to the Baha’i community. Foreign scholars visiting Iran are vulnerable to detention on trumped-up charges.

University professors have been dismissed in large numbers for supporting the Woman, Life, Freedom protests that began in 2022 or for other political reasons. In many cases they have been replaced with individuals who are more supportive of the regime. In 2024, the *Shargh* newspaper reported that President Pezeshkian had instructed ministers to review the dismissal of professors and the expulsion of students. In December 2025, however, *Shargh* found that about half of the professors dismissed since 2022 had not been reinstated.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

0 / 4

Vaguely defined restrictions on speech, harsh criminal penalties, and state monitoring of online communications are among several factors that deter citizens from engaging in open and free private discussion. Self-censorship is prevalent online, though Iranians do express dissent on social media, in some cases circumventing official blocks on certain platforms. In 2022, the Supreme Council of Cyberspace quietly implemented three articles of a draft bill under consideration by the parliament, establishing a reorganized regulatory commission that included representatives of the security forces and had extensive authority over online content and services.

In July 2025, the government submitted a bill that would have further restricted freedom of expression by imposing prison sentences of up to 15 years on those found guilty of publishing poorly defined categories of illegal content, such as material that disturbs public opinion or undermines state security. The bill was withdrawn after facing sharp criticism, with opponents dubbing it a “bill of suffocation.” Also during the year, authorities accelerated their practice of deactivating the SIM cards of people who posted critical online content about the regime or its interests, effectively cutting the individuals off from mobile telecommunications services. Those seeking to have service restored were required to take down the posts in question, sign pledges that they would not repeat the offense, and promote content that was favorable to the regime.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0 / 4

The constitution states that public demonstrations may be held if they are not “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam.” In practice, only state-sanctioned demonstrations are typically permitted, while other gatherings have been forcibly dispersed by security personnel, who detain and use lethal violence against participants.

Authorities responded harshly to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, which began in 2022 with a series of protests to denounce state violence against women following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who had been arrested and beaten in Tehran for allegedly wearing her hijab improperly. To suppress the demonstrations, security forces used lethal force and allegedly engaged in rape and other forms of sexual violence against detainees. In early 2024, a United Nations fact-finding mission reported that at least 551 protesters had been killed.

A new wave of protests erupted across the country in late December 2025, when merchants, students, and other groups of citizens mobilized to demand government action or wholesale political change in the face of soaring inflation, a collapsing currency, and other dire economic and policy problems. Security officials used force and threats of harsh punishment in their attempts to disperse the assemblies, though President Pezeshkian initially acknowledged the protesters’ grievances and urged “dialogue” on how to address them.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

0 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations that seek to address human rights violations are generally suppressed by the state. For example, the Center for Human Rights Defenders remains banned, with several of its members imprisoned. Civil society leaders and groups that focus on apolitical issues

have also faced crackdowns in recent years. In December 2025, dozens of human rights activists and dissidents, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, were violently arrested during a memorial service for human rights lawyer Khosrow Alikordi, who had recently died under suspicious circumstances in the northeastern city of Mashhad. Mohammadi was among those who remained in detention at year's end.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 1 / 4

Iranian authorities do not permit the creation of labor unions; only state-sponsored labor councils are allowed. Labor rights groups have come under pressure in recent years, with key leaders and activists sentenced to prison on national security charges. Workers who strike are vulnerable to dismissal and arrest. Despite such reprisals, labor protests have increased due to growing economic hardship.

In July 2024, authorities sentenced labor activist Sharifeh Mohammadi to death after charging her with "armed rebellion against the state" based on her alleged membership in Komala, a Kurdish political group that maintains an armed wing. Mohammadi denied the allegations. Although the first verdict was overturned on appeal, she was convicted and sentenced to death a second time after a trial that also denied her basic due process rights, and the Supreme Court upheld that outcome in August 2025.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 1 / 4

While the courts have a degree of autonomy within the ruling establishment, the judicial system is regularly used as a tool to silence regime critics and opposition members. The head of the judiciary is appointed by the supreme leader for renewable five-year terms. Deputy head Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei was named to the judiciary's top post in 2021. Ejei previously served as an intelligence minister and prosecutor general.

Political dissidents and advocates of human and labor rights have continued to face arbitrary judgments, and the security apparatus's influence over the courts has reportedly grown in recent years.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 0 / 4

The authorities routinely violate basic due process standards, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Activists are arrested without warrants, held indefinitely without formal charges, and denied access to legal counsel or any contact with the outside world. Many are later convicted on vague security charges in trials that sometimes last only a few minutes. Individuals accused of national security offenses are only allowed to select legal counsel from a preapproved list, further limiting their due process rights. Human rights lawyers who take up the cases of dissidents have been jailed and banned from practicing, and a number have been forced to leave Iran to escape prosecution.

More than 20,000 people were reportedly detained in the three months following the 12-day war with Israel in June 2025, including prominent activists, perceived dissidents, families of slain protesters, and foreigners. Members of ethnic and religious minority groups were also targeted.

Dual nationals and those with connections abroad have faced arbitrary detention, trumped-up charges, and denial of due process rights in recent years.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0 / 4

Israeli forces fought a 12-day war with the Iranian regime in June 2025. Within Iran, the conflict largely consisted of Israeli bombings and air strikes, culminating in a US strike on three key nuclear facilities. More than 1,000 people were estimated to have been killed in the country, including military commanders and personnel, individuals involved with Iran's nuclear program, and ordinary civilians. One attack targeted Evin prison in Tehran, where many political prisoners were detained; dozens of people were killed, and international human rights groups argued that the strike had likely violated the laws of war. Iranian authorities allegedly subjected the surviving prisoners to further abuse and mistreatment after the attack.

Prisons in general are overcrowded, and prisoners often complain of poor detention conditions, including denial of medical care. Deaths in custody are not uncommon. Former detainees have reported being beaten during arrest and subjected to torture until they confess to crimes dictated by their interrogators. Some crimes can be formally punished with lashes in addition to imprisonment or fines. Political prisoners have repeatedly engaged in hunger strikes in recent years to protest mistreatment in custody.

Iran has typically been second only to China in the number of executions it carries out, and the annual total has increased in recent years. Convicts can be executed for offenses other than murder, such as drug trafficking, and for crimes they committed when they were younger than 18 years old. Executions disproportionately affect members of marginalized groups, such as ethnic minority populations. The pace of executions surged during 2025 as the regime sought to suppress dissent, with Amnesty International reporting in September that the year's death toll had already passed 1,000, making it the highest number that the organization had recorded in Iran for at least 15 years. The Norway-based group Iran Human Rights estimated in December that the ultimate figure would be more than double the previous year's total of about 975 executions, though the regime does not release complete data.

In addition to the violence stemming directly from state repression or foreign military attacks, Iranian civilians face a long-term security threat from terrorist and insurgent groups that recruit among disadvantaged Kurdish, Arab, and Sunni Muslim minority populations within the country.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0 / 4

Women do not receive equal treatment under the law and face widespread discrimination in practice. For example, a woman's testimony in court is given half the weight of a man's, and the monetary compensation awarded to a female victim's family upon her death is half that owed to the family of a male victim.

A majority of the population is of Persian ethnicity, and members of ethnic minority groups experience various forms of discrimination, including restrictions on the use of their languages. Some provinces with large non-Persian populations remain underdeveloped. Activists campaigning for the rights of ethnic minority groups and greater autonomy for their respective regions have come under pressure from the authorities, and some have been jailed. The Kurdish population played an important role in the 2022 protests triggered by the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, who was Kurdish, and the state crackdown was especially heavy in Kurdish areas. Disproportionate numbers

of protest-related deaths were also reported in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, where Sunni Muslim, ethnic Baluch residents form a majority.

LGBT+ people face harassment and discrimination, though the problem is underreported due to the criminalized and hidden nature of this community in Iran. The penal code criminalizes all sexual relations outside of traditional marriage, and Iran is among the few countries where individuals can be put to death for consensual same-sex conduct.

Iranian authorities accelerated a campaign to detain and expel Afghan migrants and refugees during 2025, particularly after the war with Israel in June. Some Afghans reported beatings and extortion by security forces. By year's end about 1.8 million people had been compelled to return to Afghanistan, including many who were born in Iran, with little or no opportunity for individualized assessment of their circumstances or of the harms they could face under Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the government's arbitrary mass expulsions of Afghan migrants and refugees.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1 /
4

Freedom of movement is restricted, particularly for women and perceived opponents of the regime. Many journalists and activists have been prevented from leaving the country. Women are banned from certain public places and can generally obtain a passport to travel abroad only with the permission of their fathers or husbands. Women had been barred from attending soccer matches in stadiums since the 1979 revolution, but in recent years a limited number of women have been allowed into stadiums for international matches amid increased pressure on Iran to remove the ban.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1 /
4

Iranians have the legal right to own property and establish private businesses. However, powerful institutions like the IRGC play a dominant role in the economy, limiting fair competition and opportunities for entrepreneurs, and bribery is said to be widespread in the business environment, including for registration and obtaining licenses. Women are denied equal rights in inheritance matters.

Authorities regularly shut down cafes, restaurants, and other businesses for allegedly hosting customers or employees who fail to comply with the mandatory hijab law.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1 /
4

Social freedoms are restricted in Iran. All residents, but particularly women, are subject to obligatory rules on dress and personal appearance, and those who are deemed to have violated the rules face state harassment, fines, confiscation of property, denial of services, and arrest.

Since Jina Mahsa Amini's death in 2022, an increasing number of women have appeared in public without headscarves as an act of civil disobedience, despite ongoing enforcement efforts. In 2023, the parliament approved a bill that would impose heavier penalties, including steeper fines and longer prison terms, on women who do not wear the hijab. Implementation was scheduled to begin in December 2024, but it was paused by the Pezeshkian administration and remained pending during 2025. Widespread defiance of the hijab mandate continued, and in December 2025 authorities arrested the organizers of a marathon on Kish Island in which many women competed without a headscarf.

Police have long conducted raids on private gatherings that breach rules against alcohol consumption and the mixing of unrelated men and women. Those attending can be detained and fined or sentenced to corporal punishment in the form of lashes.

Women do not enjoy equal rights in divorce and child custody disputes.

Abortion is permitted within the first four months of a pregnancy if a three-person panel decides that the mother's life is at risk or if the fetus shows signs of severe disability. The judiciary has increased its efforts to restrict abortions in recent years. A 2021 law strengthened enforcement of abortion restrictions and established a committee that included judicial representatives, Islamic jurists, doctors, and legislators to develop new regulations. The law also bans voluntary sterilization and the distribution of free contraceptives. Many Iranian women reportedly seek abortions despite the legal restrictions, using medication acquired on the black market along with other methods. According to Ministry of Health data reported in 2024, more than 600,000 illegal abortions are carried out each year in the country.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

**1 /
4**

The government provides no protection to women and children forced into sex trafficking, and both Iranians and migrant workers from countries like Afghanistan are subject to forced labor and debt bondage. The IRGC allegedly used coercive tactics to recruit thousands of Afghan migrants living in Iran—including children—to fight in Syria during the civil war that began in 2011.

The population faces widespread economic hardship driven by a combination of US-led trade sanctions and mismanagement by the regime. The crisis has resulted in the rapid devaluation of the national currency and soaring prices for basic goods.