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Freedom in the World 2023 - 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 hard-line Guardian Council, an unelected body that disqualifies all candidates it deems insufficiently loyal to the clerical establishment. Ultimate power rests in the hands of the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 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 2022

- Protesters mounted mass demonstrations in more than 100 cities across the country beginning in September. They called for freedom and denounced state violence against women in response to the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who had been arrested and beaten by the so-called morality police in Tehran for allegedly not wearing her hijab properly.
- Security forces responded to the protests with a violent crackdown, reportedly using live ammunition, water cannons, tear gas, and beatings against demonstrators. The deaths of nearly 500 people had been confirmed by year's end, and an estimated 14,000 people were arrested, including protesters as well as journalists, lawyers, activists, artists, and athletes who voiced support for the movement. The crackdown was particularly harsh among ethnic and religious minority populations in Iran's Kurdish region and the province of Sistan and Baluchistan.
- Torture and rape of detained protesters was reported, and in December two men were executed in connection with the protests following summary trials without due process. At least 40 others had received death sentences and remained at risk of imminent execution at year's end.
- The regime continued a recent trend of sharp increases in the overall number of executions, reportedly putting more than 500 people to death over the course of the year—the highest such figure since 2017. The surge was driven in part by a rise in the number of executions for drug-related offenses.
- In September, the country's Supreme Council for Cyberspace quietly implemented parts of a highly controversial bill that had yet to win parliamentary approval, appointing representatives from the security forces to a new commission with broad powers to regulate online content and internet access. After the outbreak of protests later that month, the authorities severely disrupted internet service and blocked access to the social media platforms Instagram and WhatsApp.

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—a body tasked with mediating 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 current supreme leader, 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. Ebrahim Raisi, then head of the judiciary, won the presidency in June 2021 with 62 percent of the vote in a heavily manipulated contest. The Guardian Council had rejected most of the nearly 600 aspiring candidates—including 40 women—in May 2021, approving only seven applicants. Among those rejected were outgoing first vice president Eshaq Jahangiri, a reformist, and former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a conservative. Three approved candidates dropped out several days before the poll.

The election was also affected by official pressure on the media, with journalists told to refrain from issuing reports that were critical of the balloting or Raisi. Voter turnout, at just 48.8 percent, was the lowest for a presidential election in the Islamic Republic's history.

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 2020, with most seats going to hard-liners and conservatives loyal to the supreme leader. Ahead of the vote, the Guardian Council disqualified more than 9,000 of the 16,000 people who had registered to run, including large numbers of reformist and moderate candidates. Voter turnout, the lowest for parliamentary elections in the history of the Islamic Republic at 42.6 percent, was likely depressed by factors including the mass disqualifications and the announcement of the first COVID-19 cases just two days before the balloting. The outbreak was believed to have begun weeks earlier, raising suspicions that the authorities delayed disclosing it for political reasons; Khamenei denounced foreign “propaganda” for supposedly exaggerating the health threat to frighten voters.

Elections for the Assembly of Experts, a group of 86 clerics chosen by popular vote to serve eight-year terms, were last held in 2016. Only 20 percent of the would-be candidates were approved to run, a record low. A majority of the new assembly ultimately chose hard-line cleric Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, as the body's chairman. Jannati was reelected to the Assembly of Experts' chairmanship in 2021. In July 2022, the 95-year-old Jannati was also retained as the head of the Guardian Council following an order by Khamenei.

A3 0-4 pts

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

1 / 4

The electoral system in Iran 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, as well as women seeking to run in the presidential election. 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. Reformist groups have come under increased state repression, especially since 2009, and affiliated politicians are subject to arbitrary detention and imprisonment on vague criminal charges.

B2 0-4 pts

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

1 /
4

While some space for shifts in power between approved factions within the establishment has existed in the past, the unelected components of the constitutional system represent a permanent barrier to opposition electoral victories and genuine rotations of power. In May 2021, for example, then outgoing first vice president Jahangiri, who is considered a reformist, was disqualified from running for president.

Top opposition figures face restrictions on their movement. Mir Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnava, and Mehdi Karubi—leaders of the reformist Green Movement, whose protests were violently suppressed following the disputed 2009 presidential election—have been under house arrest without formal charges since 2011. Restrictions on Mousavi and Karubi have sometimes been loosened in recent years. Reformist former president Mohammad Khatami is the subject of a media ban that prohibits the press from mentioning him and publishing his photos. Former hard-line president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who fell out of favor for challenging Khamenei, was barred from running in the 2017 and 2021 presidential elections.

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. While President Raisi appointed Ehsan Larijani as vice president for women and family affairs in September 2021, he nominated no women to serve in the cabinet the month before. 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. However, members of non-Persian ethnic minorities and especially non-Shiite religious minorities are rarely awarded senior government posts, and their political representation remains weak.

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 June 2021 presidential election was tightly controlled by the regime, further reducing the democratic legitimacy of the executive.

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. The council often rejects bills it deems un-Islamic. Nevertheless, the parliament has been a platform for heated political debate and criticism of the government, and legislators have frequently challenged presidents and their policies.

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.

Authorities have resisted recent attempts to uncover official corruption. In July 2021, four journalists working for state-run news sites were convicted of defamation and disseminating false news after they reported on suspected corruption in the Oil Ministry, though they reportedly received no prison terms. In July 2022, activist Vahid Ashtari received a two-year prison sentence and was banned from media-related activities after he revealed information about a controversial shopping trip taken earlier in the year by the family of parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

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 access to information law, for which implementing regulations were finally adopted in 2015, grants broadly worded

exemptions allowing 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. For example, officials are known to promote COVID-19-related disinformation; in January 2021, the supreme leader banned the use of vaccines produced in the United States and Britain, calling them “completely untrustworthy.” Nevertheless, the country accepted US- and British-developed vaccines that were manufactured in other countries.

In response to the protests triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, authorities tightly restricted access to related information, including the number, status, and treatment of arrested demonstrators and other political prisoners.

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. Police periodically raid private homes and confiscate satellite dishes. Iranian authorities have intimidated journalists working for Persian-language media outside the country, in part by summoning and threatening their families in Iran.

Amid the nationwide protests that began in September 2022, authorities arrested dozens of journalists, and at least 62 were behind bars as of early December, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). *Shargh* newspaper reporter Niloofar Hamed, who was among the first to report about Amini’s hospitalization, and *Hammihan* reporter Elahe Mohammadi, who was attempting to cover Amini’s funeral, were among those arrested. Authorities also attempted to suppress coverage of the protest movement by imposing severe restrictions on internet services, including curbs on access to the social media platforms Instagram and WhatsApp.

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 complain 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. In September 2022, new charges were brought against jailed journalist Kasra Nouri, a member of the Gonabadi dervish community, who had been arrested in 2018 following violent clashes between dervishes and security forces. The new charges accused Nouri of signing a statement with other political prisoners.

The government also 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. Beginning in July 2022, the clerical establishment intensified its crackdown on the Baha'i faith, arresting or imprisoning dozens of people, demolishing homes, and confiscating property, especially in the northern province of Mazandaran.

D3 0-4 pts

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

1 / 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.

Since Raisi became president, students have reported tighter restrictions, including stricter hijab rules, which prompted protests in April 2022. Separately, in January it was reported that three university professors who were widely praised for their work had been dismissed, allegedly for political reasons. In June, an appeals court upheld 16-year prison sentences for two elite university students who had been convicted in April of endangering national security, destroying public facilities, cooperating with opposition groups, and other charges that were rejected by their families. Amnesty International said the two, Ali Younesi and Amirhossein Moradi, had been tortured in detention and held in prolonged solitary confinement.

As part of their efforts to suppress the nationwide protests that began in September, authorities raided university campuses and arrested several hundred students.

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

Iran's 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. Despite the risks and limitations, many do express dissent on social media, in some cases circumventing official blocks on certain platforms.

In September 2022, the Supreme Council for 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.

After mass protests began later in September, authorities arrested thousands of people, including celebrities, human rights defenders, and others who had expressed support for the movement through posts on social media or by publicly disobeying the hijab requirements that had led to Mahsa Amini's arrest and death. The IRGC called on the judiciary to prosecute anyone spreading "false news and rumors."

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to the regime's expansive efforts to punish anyone who expressed support for a nationwide protest movement, including through social media posts or refusal to obey dress codes in public places.

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 in recent years been forcibly dispersed by security personnel, who detain and use lethal violence against participants.

In 2022, authorities responded harshly to nationwide protests triggered by the September death of Mahsa Amini after her arrest and beating by enforcers of official hijab requirements. Nearly 500 people had been killed in the ensuing violence by year's end. Security forces used water cannons and tear gas against protesters, but fired birdshot and live rounds as well, according to Amnesty International and other sources. Videos posted online showed security personnel violently beating demonstrators, including women. Authorities were also accused of using rape and other sexual violence to suppress protests.

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 (NGOs) that seek to address human rights violations are generally suppressed by the state. For example, the Center for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) remains banned, with several of its members imprisoned. In 2021, CHRD vice president Narges Mohammadi was sentenced in absentia to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment and 80 lashes. She was taken into custody by intelligence agents that November, after which she was sent to Tehran's Evin prison to serve her sentence. She received multiple additional prison sentences in 2022.

Groups that focus on apolitical issues also face crackdowns. In May 2022, an appeals court upheld a 2021 ruling to dissolve the Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society, a prominent NGO that supported the poor and survivors of natural disasters. In the 2021 decision, the court sustained an Interior Ministry assertion that the NGO had deviated from its mission and “questioned Islamic rulings.”

E3 0-4 pts

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

Iran does 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 engage in strikes are vulnerable to dismissal and arrest. Despite such reprisals, labor protests have increased in recent years due to growing economic hardship. In June 2022, the Iranian Teachers' Union's Coordination Council reported that more than 100 teachers had been arrested the previous day for participating in a nationwide protest calling for improved working conditions and the release of previously imprisoned teachers.

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 July 2021, succeeding Raisi after he won election as president. Ejei had 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.

An estimated 14,000 people were arrested in connection with the antiestablishment protests that began in September 2022, and due process violations were reportedly widespread. More than 40 of the detainees were sentenced to death, and many were reportedly denied access to legal counsel of their choice and were forced to accept state-appointed lawyers who took little action to defend them. Their trials were extremely brief and relied on confessions obtained under duress. At least two of the convicted defendants were known to have been executed by year's end, and many others awaiting trial faced charges that carried the death penalty.

Lawyers who take up the cases of dissidents have been jailed and banned from practicing, and a number have been forced to leave the country to escape prosecution. In 2019, prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was reportedly sentenced to an additional 33 years in prison and 148 lashes for her activities; she had been in prison serving a five-year sentence since mid-2018. In 2020, Sotoudeh was temporarily released amid concerns about her health following a hunger strike; she remained on leave as of late 2022. During the 2022 protests, authorities arrested at least 44 lawyers, including defense attorneys who represented demonstrators. Some of the detained attorneys were also targeted after taking part in protests led by lawyers in Tehran and Shiraz.

Earlier in the year, in June 2022, the authorities sentenced five individuals—three lawyers, an activist, and a human rights defender—to prison terms ranging from 95 days to four years on charges of colluding to commit crimes against national security. When they were arrested in 2021, the five had been preparing to file a lawsuit alleging that state officials had mismanaged the COVID-19 pandemic. An appeals court upheld the sentences in August.

Dual nationals and those with connections abroad have also faced arbitrary detention, trumped-up charges, and denial of due process rights in recent years. In July 2022, reports emerged that Iranian authorities had been detaining Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele in isolation for several months, and that his health was deteriorating. In December, it was reported that Vandecasteele had been sentenced to 28 years in prison on dubious espionage and money-laundering charges.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the authorities, in response to nationwide protests, carried out thousands of arrests and detentions, as well as a number of summary trials and executions, without observing basic due process safeguards.

F3 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

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. In 2021, Amnesty International reported that at least 72 prisoners had died in custody since 2010; most of these deaths were caused by torture, the use of firearms or tear gas, or other ill-treatment.

Prisons are overcrowded, and prisoners often complain of poor detention conditions, including denial of medical care. Video recordings taken in Evin prison and distributed in 2021 captured incidents in which prisoners were assaulted or mistreated, along with evidence of overcrowding. Criminal cases against six prison guards were opened as a result of the leaked videos. In October 2022, a series of fires destroyed parts of Evin prison under unclear circumstances, killing at least eight people. Security forces reportedly attacked prisoners who attempted to flee the blazes.

Iran has generally been second only to China in the number of executions it carries out, putting hundreds of people to death each year. 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. Legislation enacted in 2017 significantly increased the quantity of illegal drugs required for a drug-related crime to incur the death penalty, prompting sentence reviews for thousands of death-row inmates. However, the number of executions has increased since Raisi took office as president. According to the Norway-based group Iran Human Rights, more than 500 people were executed during 2022, compared with 333 in 2021 and 267 in 2020.

In addition to the violence stemming directly from state repression, the country faces a long-term security threat from terrorist and insurgent groups that recruit among disadvantaged Kurdish, Arab, and Sunni Muslim minority populations.

F4 0-4 pts

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

1 / 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 minorities 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 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.

Members of the LGBT+ community face harassment and discrimination, though the problem is underreported due to the criminalized and hidden nature of these groups 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. In September 2022, a rights group reported that two LGBT+ activists had been sentenced to death for supposedly promoting homosexuality. The judiciary confirmed the sentence but said the case was connected to human trafficking.

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. In August 2022, authorities allowed women to attend a professional domestic soccer game. 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.

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, and arrest. It was reported in July 2022 that officials in Qom had closed three cafés due the presence of female customers who were not wearing headscarves. In early September 2022, the secretary of the regime's Headquarters for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice said that authorities were planning to use facial recognition technology in public places to identify women who were not obeying official hijab requirements.

Following Mahsa Amini's death in September 2022, an increasing number of women appeared in public without their headscarves as an act of civil disobedience. Dozens were arrested, including a number of prominent actresses. The police unit that enforces the hijab rules reportedly disappeared from the streets of major cities, however, and in December 2022 an official stated that morality patrols had been abolished.

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. In 2019, the Guardian Council approved a legal amendment that would enable Iranian women married to foreign men to request Iranian citizenship for their children. The first identification cards for such children were issued in 2021.

Iranians can receive an abortion within the first four months of a pregnancy if three doctors decide that the mother's life is at risk or if the fetus shows signs of severe disability. In 2021 the Guardian Council ratified the Youthful Population and Protection of the Family Law, which strengthened enforcement of abortion restrictions and established a committee that includes judicial representatives, Islamic jurists, doctors, and legislators to develop new regulations. The law also bans voluntary sterilization and the distribution of free contraceptives.

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 has allegedly used coercive tactics to recruit thousands of Afghan migrants living in Iran to fight in Syria. Human Rights Watch has reported that children as young as 14 are among those recruited.

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. In September 2022, Alena Douhan, the UN special rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures, said in a report that sanctions on Iran affected most aspects of life in the country, and she called for them to be lifted.