

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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FREEDOM HOUSE

IRAN

Press Freedom Status:

Not Free

Legal Environment:

30 / 30

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

Political Environment:

36 / 40

(0=BEST, 40=WORST)

Economic Environment:

24 / 30

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

Press Freedom Score:

90 / 100

(0=BEST, 100=WORST)

QUICK FACTS

Population:

78,483,446

Net Freedom Status:

Not Free

Freedom in the World Status:

Not Free

Internet Penetration Rate:

39.4%

Overview

Iran's media environment remains repressive. Certain topics—including criticism of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—are subject to long-standing redlines, enforced in part through harsh online and offline censorship. The ruling establishment took steps in 2015 to silence media criticism of a nuclear agreement with the United States and other world powers. Several publications were closed or suspended during the year, and a number of reporters were arrested and prosecuted. Journalists practiced self-censorship, though some said the atmosphere had improved slightly since the 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani, who presented himself as a moderate.

Key Developments

- The Rouhani administration engaged in extensive internet surveillance and interference throughout the year, announcing in January that more than 130 Facebook pages had been closed and more than 30 internet users detained in connection with their online activity.
- As part of the government's efforts to promote Iran's nuclear agreement with the United States, in July the Supreme National Security Council issued guidelines to newspapers, ordering them to refrain from criticizing the accord and to praise its achievements.

- Authorities took action against several conservative publications that had criticized the nuclear deal, including the weekly paper *9 Dey*, which was suspended in August.

Legal Environment: 30 / 30

Constitutional provisions and laws restrict what can be covered in the press and fail to provide protections for journalists. The authorities regularly invoke vaguely worded laws to criminalize dissenting opinions.

Article 24 of the constitution guarantees freedom of the press, but with a broad exception for content that is deemed “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” The Press Law, first drafted in 1986 and amended in 2000, states that “publications and news media shall enjoy freedom of expression provided what they publish does not violate Islamic principles of the civil code.” Article 3 of the law states, “The press have the right to publish the opinions, constructive criticisms, suggestions and explanations of individuals and government officials for public information while duly observing the Islamic teachings and the best interest of the community.”

Article 500 of the penal code states that anyone who undertakes any form of propaganda against the state will be sentenced to between three months and a year in prison, but the code leaves “propaganda” undefined. Under Article 513, certain offenses deemed to be an “insult” to religion are punishable by death, or prison terms of one to five years for lesser offenses, with “insult” similarly undefined. In 2010, the government broadened the definition of the crime of *moharebeh*, or “enmity against God,” in order to convict activists and journalists. Iranian law also provides for sentences of up to two years in prison, up to 74 lashes, or fines for those convicted of intentionally creating “anxiety and unease in the public’s mind,” spreading “false rumors,” writing about “acts that are not true,” and criticizing state officials; however, many prison sentences have been arbitrarily harsh, ranging from 6 to 10 years or more. Courts also frequently set exorbitant bail for detained journalists. The high bail amounts and suspended jail sentences often discourage journalists from engaging in media activities and criticism of the establishment even when they are not behind bars.

In July 2015, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council issued a set of guidelines to newspapers regarding coverage of the country’s nuclear agreement with the United States and other major world powers. The document instructed editors to praise the accord, under which Iran agreed to limit its

nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. Editors were also told not to criticize the Iranian negotiating team, to avoid sowing “doubt and disappointment among the public,” and to avoid giving the impression of a rift between competing factions within the government.

Several journalists faced arrest, indictment, or imprisonment during 2015. The intelligence branch of Iran’s powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was behind a number of the arrests. In January, the Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) reported that Zahra Khandan, a student activist and journalist, was arrested at her home in Tehran by a “security body.” The French media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said the IRGC’s intelligence operatives were responsible. Khandan was reportedly released on bail in March, but the reason for her arrest and the exact charges against her were not immediately clear.

In November, at least four journalists were arrested by the intelligence branch of the IRGC for allegedly belonging to an “infiltration network” controlled by Western powers. Among those detained was Issa Saharkhiz, a prominent journalist and former Culture Ministry official who was also jailed from 2009 to 2013. His family said he was accused of “insulting the supreme leader” and “propaganda against the regime.” Also detained were Ehsan Mazandarani, editor of the daily *Farhikhtegan*; journalist Saman Safarzaee, who worked with the magazine *Andisheh Pouya*; and Afarin Chitsaz, a reporter with the state-run newspaper *Iran*.

Separately in November, reformist journalist Reyhaneh Tabatabaei was sentenced to a one-year prison term and banned from joining political parties or practicing journalism for two years for allegedly “spreading propaganda against the regime.” In December, the editor of *Ettelaat*, one of Iran’s oldest newspapers, was summoned before a court after defying a ban on coverage of former president Mohammad Khatami, imposed by conservative judges in February. Although the court announced that it had obtained a commitment from the paper to refrain from further violations of the ban, *Ettelaat* published a front page editorial criticizing the blackout the next day.

Bloggers and online activists face many of the same legal repercussions for their work as do professional journalists. The judiciary frequently denies accused journalists and bloggers due process by referring their cases to the Revolutionary Courts, which generally feature closed-door hearings and denial of access to an attorney. Among other arrests during 2015, reports emerged in September that well-known technology blogger and internet entrepreneur Arash

Zad had been arrested at a Tehran airport while attempting to exit the country the previous month. He was believed to have been arrested by the intelligence unit of the IRGC. Authorities did not provide a reason for his arrest or information about where he was being detained.

Political cartoonists and satirists are also frequently targeted by authorities. In June 2015, artist and activist Atena Farghadani was sentenced to 12 years and 9 months in prison for her work, including a satirical cartoon that depicted legislators as animals. She was reportedly forced to undergo so-called “virginity testing” while in custody, a widely condemned form of violence against women. In November, prominent cartoonist Hadi Heidari was arrested and taken to Tehran’s Evin Prison to serve the remainder of a suspended one-year jail sentence for his previous work, of which he had earlier served one month.

In November 2014, the government issued regulations for the implementation of a moribund 2009 law on access to official information. The law had called for the regulations to be produced within three months, but the government apparently failed to act for over five years. The legislation includes no penalties for failure to release information; exemptions apply to state secrets, personal information, and information that conflicts with public morality.

Press licenses are issued by the Press Supervisory Board and have been rescinded in retaliation for criticism of the ruling establishment. The authorities also target journalists’ associations and civil society organizations that support freedom of expression. The Association of Iranian Journalists, a professional syndicate dedicated to protecting journalists’ rights, was shut down in 2009. Despite numerous attempts by members of the association, officials refuse to permit it to resume its activities. State media and other loyalist outlets are used to propagate false claims about freedom of expression activists. Hard-line media, including the daily *Kayhan* and the Fars and Tasnim news agencies, are notorious for attacking reformists, establishment critics, and others.

Political Environment: 36 / 40

The Iranian media landscape is dominated by official, semiofficial, conservative, and reformist news outlets that support the authorities or particular factions of the ruling establishment. Hard-line outlets strongly oppose reformists and opposition figures. *Kayhan* in particular is often seen as the mouthpiece of the supreme leader, although in some cases—namely on the nuclear issue—the daily has not necessarily reflected Khamenei’s official

stance. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), a state agency with a monopoly on domestic television and radio broadcasts, airs programs aimed at smearing and discrediting dissidents and critical journalists. IRIB also has a record of working with security forces and airing forced confessions by dissidents and others. Its news and analysis are censored and biased in favor of the establishment.

Media outlets that carry independent, critical, or reformist-leaning content regularly face closure. In January 2015, the newspaper *Mardom-e-Emrooz* was suspended after it published a front page expressing solidarity with the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in Paris. In April, the magazine *Zanan Emrooz* was banned for seven months over a special issue on the cohabitation of unmarried couples, which is reportedly on the rise. In recent years, conservative publications that are critical of the Rouhani government have been increasingly targeted as well. In August, the weekly *9 Dey*, run by conservative lawmaker and government critic Hamid Rasaei, was suspended after it criticized the government for making too many concessions in the international nuclear deal. Two other conservative publications were also warned against further criticism after they expressed displeasure with the accord.

In addition to the print media, blogs and news websites—particularly those in the Persian language—are subjected to state censorship and periodic filtering. In February 2015, authorities reportedly blocked two websites, Jamaran and Bahar, for posting coverage and photos of former president Mohammad Khatami despite an official ban. Jamaran was quickly allowed to go back online after it agreed to abide by the restriction.

The authorities' systematic internet controls and pervasive censorship have continued despite Rouhani's promises to ease restrictions on media and information. The government has relaxed curbs on media coverage of topics that were previously deemed sensitive, including the state of U.S.-Iran relations and some very limited discussion of the house arrest of opposition leaders. However, the wholesale blocking of social media websites including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, and surveillance of the activities of Iranians who manage to reach such platforms, remained in effect in 2015. In January, the IRCG's cybercrime unit confirmed the existence of an extensive internet surveillance program believed to have been initiated the previous year. The unit said that more than 130 Facebook pages had been taken down as part of the operation, and that more than 30 individuals had been arrested or detained. In April, Iran's communications minister announced that the government had begun implementing a so-called "intelligent filtering" program, which allowed

it to surveil online activity and caused disruptions to a number of popular mobile messaging applications, including WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram. Disruptions to Telegram's service persisted into October. The government denied that it was deliberately enforcing a ban, though it did admit that authorities had previously asked Telegram to block "immoral content."

Foreign media are unable to operate freely in Iran. The government requires all foreign correspondents to provide detailed itineraries and proposed stories before visas are granted, and visas are regularly denied to foreign reporters who have previously been critical of the regime. Authorities have in recent years arrested a number of Iranian journalists and documentary filmmakers for suspected ties with Persian-language media outlets based abroad, particularly the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Persian service.

In July 2014, *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian, a dual Iranian-American citizen, was arrested in Tehran along with his wife, Yeganeh Salehi, a reporter with the Abu Dhabi English-language newspaper *National*. Salehi was released on bail in October 2014, but Rezaian remained in jail. In October 2015, Rezaian was convicted on espionage charges, and in November he was sentenced to an unspecified jail term. His family said he faced difficult conditions and had lost a significant amount of weight, and he remained imprisoned at year's end amid diplomatic efforts to secure his release.

As of December 2015, Iran had the third-largest number of incarcerated journalists in the world, after China and Egypt, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). While the number of imprisoned journalists declined from 30 in 2014 to 19 in 2015, CPJ's December census did not account for the dozens of journalists who were arbitrarily arrested and released throughout the year, some of whom were freed on bail and continued to face charges or restrictions on their ability to work. Authorities have sometimes extended the intimidation and harassment to journalists' family members. Prison conditions remain harsh, and detained journalists are often held in solitary confinement in the first weeks or months of their imprisonment.

Economic Environment: 24 / 30

Given the limited distribution of print media outside large cities, radio and television serve as the principal sources of news for many citizens. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of residents receive their news from

television. Article 175 of the constitution forbids private broadcasting. The state maintains a monopoly on all domestic broadcast media and presents only the official political and religious viewpoints. In the print sector, the newspapers with the widest circulation and influence adhere to a conservative editorial position or are directly operated by the government. A state-run English-language satellite station, Press TV, was launched in 2007. The IRGC largely controls the Fars news agency. Several other hard-line news outlets, including Tasnim news agency, are also closely associated with the IRGC and state security forces.

Many Iranians use banned satellite receivers to watch international channels. Their number, according to Iranian officials, is on the rise despite a state campaign of raiding homes, confiscating dishes, and fining owners. In January 2015, Iranian media reported that 6,000 confiscated satellite dishes were destroyed in a stadium in the city of Shiraz. The authorities also engage in systematic jamming of foreign satellite signals for viewers in Tehran and other cities, stepping up the effort during sensitive political times, including elections. In recent years, some officials and media reports have raised concerns over the jamming's interference with meteorological forecasts and its potential health hazards for citizens. Iran has repeatedly jammed the Persian television service of the BBC, whose popular programming challenges the government's portrayals of both the domestic political scene and Iran's foreign relations. The uncensored news broadcasts of U.S.-backed Radio Farda have been also jammed.

Although access to the websites of international Persian-language media outlets and other organizations is similarly blocked by Iranian authorities, many Iranians use circumvention tools to reach censored information on the internet and discuss taboo subjects on banned social-media sites. The regime's increased monitoring of such activity in recent years is a tacit acknowledgment of its inability to completely silence online dissent through blocking. The internet in general is subject to extremely slow speeds and other practical obstacles in Iran, but it continues to expand as an important source of diverse news coverage and analysis. The penetration rate reached about 44 percent in 2015.

In 2009, as part of an ostensible privatization process, a corporation linked to the IRGC bought a majority stake in the Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI) with little outside competition. The government retains ownership of

most of the remaining portion. The transaction effectively gave the IRGC indirect control over the country's dominant provider of fixed-line, mobile, and internet communications services. The country's other major mobile carriers are also linked to the IRGC or the state.

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