

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Iran

NOT FREE

17
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	7 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	10 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

18 /100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



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 2019

- Protesters took to the streets in some 100 cities and towns in mid-November following the announcement of a significant hike in the price of gasoline. Security forces responded with lethal violence, reportedly killing more than 300 people, injuring thousands, and arresting thousands more.
- Authorities implemented a near-total internet shutdown that lasted for nearly a week in an apparent bid to suppress information about the protests and related state violence.
- Earlier in the year, the courts imposed a series of heavy prison sentences on labor activists, human rights lawyers, and women protesting the country's compulsory hijab rules, among others.
- Hard-line cleric Ebrahim Raisi, who allegedly played a role in mass executions of political prisoners in the 1980s, was appointed as chief of the judiciary in March.
- The state reportedly executed close to 300 people over the course of the year, including at least two juvenile offenders who were put to death in April.

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?

1/4

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. In the 2017 presidential election, only six men were allowed to run out of some 1,600 candidates who had applied. All 137 women candidates were disqualified by the Guardian Council. The main challenger to incumbent president Hassan Rouhani, a self-proclaimed moderate, was hard-line cleric Ebrahim Raisi. In the run-up to the election, the authorities intensified their crackdown on the media, arresting several journalists and administrators of reformist channels on Telegram, the popular messaging application. However, Rouhani's victory, with 57 percent of the vote amid roughly 70 percent turnout, appeared to reflect the choice of the electorate among the available candidates.

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. In 2016, elections were held for the both the parliament and the Assembly of Experts, a body of 86 clerics who are elected to eight-year terms by popular vote. Only 51 percent of the candidates who had applied to run for parliament were approved by the Guardian Council, the lowest figure to date. Only 20 percent of candidates were approved to run for the assembly, also a record low.

At the end of the process, relatively moderate Rouhani supporters held more than 40 percent of seats in the parliament, while independents—who included a number of reformists—and hard-liners each took about a third. The result was perceived as a victory for moderates and reformists, though the exact orientations and allegiances of individual lawmakers are often unclear. Moderates and reformists similarly made symbolic gains in the Assembly of Experts, but because so many had been disqualified, the supposedly moderate lists included conservative candidates. A majority of the new assembly ultimately chose hard-line cleric Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, as the body’s chairman.

In December 2019, ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2020, a number of reformist candidates were reportedly disqualified from running.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	1/4
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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 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
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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 there is 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. In 2015, two new reformist parties—Nedaye Iranian (Voice of Iranians) and Ettihad Mellat Iran (Iranian National Unity)—were established ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections. However, most candidates from these and other reformist groups were disqualified by the Guardian Council ahead of the voting.

Top opposition leaders face restrictions on their movement and access to the media. 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. 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 presidential election.

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, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	1 / 4
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Women remain significantly underrepresented in politics and government. In 2017, Rouhani appointed two women among his several vice presidents but failed to name any women as cabinet ministers. No women candidates have ever been allowed to run for president. In June 2019, lawmaker Parvaneh Salahshouri complained that she and other women in the parliament had to contend with resistance from their male colleagues; she stated that the men often dismiss their proposals, prevent them from taking senior positions, and discourage them from speaking out.

Five seats in the parliament are reserved for recognized non-Muslim minorities: Jews, Armenian Christians, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Zoroastrians. However, ethnic and especially 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?	1 / 4
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The elected president's powers are limited by the supreme leader and other unelected authorities. 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
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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, and restrictions on the media and civil society activists prevent them from serving as independent watchdogs to ensure transparency and accountability.

In 2019, the judiciary launched a crackdown on corruption amid accusations that the effort was politically motivated.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	1/4
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The transparency of Iran's political system remains extremely limited in practice, and powerful elements of the state and society are not accountable to the public. An access to information law was passed in 2009, and implementing regulations were finally adopted in 2015. In 2017, the Information and Communications Technology Ministry unveiled an online portal to facilitate information requests. However, the law 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.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	0/4
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Freedom of expression and media independence are 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 pressured journalists working for Persian-language media outside the country by summoning and threatening their families in Iran. This form of intimidation increased following the November 2019 protests.

Before officials announced a significant hike in the price of gasoline, which triggered the protests, the press received instructions on how to cover potential unrest, according to the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran. During the subsequent demonstrations, the authorities implemented a near-total shutdown of internet service for nearly a week. The blackout was apparently aimed at halting the flow of news and information about the protests themselves and the violent response from security forces. The organization NetBlocks reported that connectivity dropped to just 5 percent of normal levels for several days during the shutdown.

Reporters Without Borders said in early December that at least 11 journalists, including photographers and cameramen, had been arrested since the start of the protests in mid-November. One journalist, Mohammad Mosaed, was arrested that month for tweeting about the internet shutdown. He was released on bail in December.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to efforts by the authorities to censor and control media coverage of protests that began in November, including through instructions to outlets, arrests of journalists, and an internet shutdown.

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, Baha'i, Christian, and Zoroastrian minorities. The constitution recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and certain Christian communities as 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. Mohammad Ali Taheri, a spiritual leader jailed since 2011 for founding a group centered on mysticism whose beliefs and practices are allegedly un-Islamic, was released to house arrest in April 2019 after his death sentence was overturned in 2015 and again in 2018.

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.

The government also subjects some non-Muslim minorities to repressive policies and discrimination. Baha'is are systematically persecuted, sentenced to prison, and banned from access to higher education. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said in December 2019 that at least 11 Baha'is were arrested during the November protests. There is an ongoing crackdown on

Christian converts; in the past several years, a number of informal house churches have been raided and their pastors or congregants detained.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	1/4
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Academic freedom remains limited in Iran, and universities have experienced harsh repression since 2009. 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. Xiyue Wang, a US citizen pursuing a doctorate in history who had been jailed in Iran for three years on espionage charges, was released in a prisoner exchange in December 2019. Several other academics remained behind bars at year's end. They included Iranian-French anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah, who had been arrested in June 2019, and Kylie Moore-Gilbert, a British-Australian researcher detained in September 2018.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	1/4
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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.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

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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 participants.

In addition to thousands of arrests, hundreds of people were killed and thousands were injured in the protests that erupted in mid-November 2019. Estimates of the death toll ranged from more than 300 to 1,500. The internet shutdown imposed by authorities suppressed communication about the demonstrations, but videos that showed security forces firing directly at protesters still emerged. Rallies were organized in support of the regime later in November, and they received live coverage from state media. Authorities reportedly harassed the families of some of those killed, partly to prevent them from sparking new protests at memorial gatherings.

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 closed, with several of its members in jail. Even groups that focus on more apolitical issues like the environment are subject to crackdowns. In November 2019, six environmental activists who had been detained in a larger wave of arrests in 2018 received sentences of between six and 10 years in prison based on dubious charges of collaboration with the United States.

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. Several detained labor activists received heavy prison terms of 14 years or more during 2019. They included prominent figures like Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholian, who were sentenced in September and released on bail the following month.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1/4
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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; Ebrahim Raisi was named to the post in March 2019. 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?	1/4
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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. 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 March 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 June 2018.

Dual nationals and those with connections abroad have also faced arbitrary detention, trumped-up charges, and denial of due process rights in recent years. Several such individuals remained behind bars at the end of 2019.

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. Prisons are overcrowded, and prisoners often complain of poor detention conditions, including denial of medical care. Hunger strikes by political prisoners to protest mistreatment in custody remained common in 2019.

Iran has generally been second only to China in the number of executions it carries out 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. Nevertheless, the state reportedly executed close to 300 people over the course of 2019, including at least two juvenile offenders who were put to death in April.

The country faces a long-term threat from terrorist and insurgent groups that recruit from disadvantaged Kurdish, Arab, and Sunni Muslim minority populations. In February 2019, a suicide bombing in southeastern Iran killed 27 members of the IRGC. A Sunni militant group with links to the terrorist network Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack.

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.

Ethnic minorities complain of various forms of discrimination, including restrictions on the use of their languages. Some provinces with large minority populations remain underdeveloped. Activists campaigning for the rights of ethnic minorities and greater autonomy for minority regions have come under pressure from the authorities, and some have been jailed.

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.

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 obtain a passport to travel abroad only with the permission of their fathers or husbands.

In October 2019, under pressure from the world's soccer governing body, the authorities allowed women to enter a stadium to attend a male soccer match in Tehran. The pressure to ease the decades-old ban had intensified after a woman set herself on fire and died in September; she had been threatened with prison for trying to attend a soccer match in March.

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
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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, 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
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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. In 2019, several women were sentenced to heavy prison terms for challenging the requirement that they wear headscarves in public.

Police conduct raids on private gatherings that breach rules against drinking alcohol and mixing with unrelated members of the opposite sex. 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 October 2019, the Guardian Council approved a legal amendment that would enable Iranian women married to foreign men to request Iranian citizenship for their children.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	1/4
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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 fuel-price hike that triggered the November 2019 protests was the latest sign of an economic crisis driven by a combination of US-led trade sanctions and mismanagement by the regime. The crisis has caused serious hardships for ordinary Iranians, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation.



On Iran

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

17/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

15/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

2019

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