



No Defence

A Report on the Status of Lawyers and the Bar Associations in Iran

Challenges and Recommendations

November 2025 **Special Report**

The Centre for Supporters of Human Rights

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Endorsements

This report is formally endorsed by the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), Lawyers for Lawyers, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the

International Observatory for Lawyer at Risk (OIAD), and the Ordre des Avocats de Genève.



Preface

This important report details how, in the face of threats, harassment, criminal sanctions and even imprisonment, lawyers in Iran continue to practice law, seeking to represent their clients fairly and independently. The report explains that Government repression is systematic for lawyers who take on human rights cases or represent protesters or opposition figures. The report describes how numerous lawyers face charges, await detention, or serve sentences for their legal work or for speaking out against judicial corruption.

The resilience of Iran's lawyers—notably including women lawyers, who face intense gender discrimination and assaults on their dignity—has been a source of inspiration and admiration for legal professionals around the world. It is therefore an honor to have the opportunity to write this brief preface. I applaud the two organizations that authored this report, the Centre for Supporters of Human Rights and the International

Bar Association's Human Rights Institute. Most importantly, I commend those Iranian lawyers who insist on their independence, work to protect the right to a fair trial, and do not shrink from representing individuals who seek their assistance.

Through my mandate, I have spoken out against the systematic targeting by State authorities of independent lawyers in Iran. I have called on the State to cease the escalating threats, acts of intimidation and disciplinary measures taken against Iranian human rights lawyers in recent years. And I have emphasized the right of all lawyers in Iran to enjoy freedom of expression, association, and the ability to work without interference or reprisal. My eyes will not stray from this imperative. I will continue to work, in solidarity and with admiration, to support the right of lawyers in Iran to work free of fear or threats. This important report is a crucial resource for all of us undertaking such work.

Margaret Satterthwaite
UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

Executive Summary

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the legal, institutional, and systemic barriers that restrict lawyers in Iran from freely practicing their profession. It examines how a combination of restrictive laws, politically motivated prosecutions, security interference, and gender-based discrimination have increasingly undermined the ability of lawyers to carry out their duties without fear of retaliation. These pressures have not only compromised the independence of the legal profession but have also contributed to the broader erosion of the rule of law. By documenting specific cases and patterns, the report highlights the growing risks faced by Iranian lawyers and the shrinking space for legal advocacy and human rights defence in the country.

The first objective of this report is to investigate and analyse, and to compile a single, authoritative narrative of how successive state policies have eroded the role of the Iranian bar. The second objective is to advocate based on the findings, by providing UN special procedures, treaty bodies, and relevant international actors, including bar associations, with verified and reliable material for use in calls, appeals, country reviews, and thematic reports. The third objective is to raise public awareness, both inside and outside Iran, by equipping civil society actors, journalists, and academics with accessible analysis, galvanizing support for lawyers under attack, and underscoring what is at stake for the people of Iran.

A central theme is the gap between Iran's ordinary courts, which are bound by the Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure, including certain fair trial safeguards, and the Revolutionary Courts, which since 1979 have tried political and national security cases, in closed hearings, with curtailed evidence rules, and under the restrictive Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. This provision requires defendants in national security and political cases to choose their

lawyers from a list pre-approved by the judiciary, effectively denying them the right to independent counsel. The report dedicates separate sections to Revolutionary Court practices, including the arrest of defence counsel and the rapid confirmation of death sentences, as well as to subtler forms of interference in the ordinary judiciary, such as licensing restrictions and disciplinary measures imposed by the Supreme Disciplinary Court.

By clarifying key terms, “legal profession” (lawyers, judges, prosecutors), “lawyer” (individual counsel), and “Bar Association” (provincial bars), the report illustrates institutional capture can coexist with individual resilience. In doing so, it provides a precise and actionable portrait of a profession besieged by arbitrary power.

The report concludes that the legal profession in Iran faces profound challenges, including state interference, security-related repression, and gender-based barriers. These pressures undermine fair trial guarantees, the independence of bar associations, and the rule of law. Despite this, Iranian lawyers continue to demonstrate resilience and a commitment to justice. Addressing the systematic suppression of the profession requires coordinated action by Iranian lawyers, civil society, and sustained international engagement to restore independence and safeguard fundamental rights.

Based on these findings, the report puts forward practical recommendations. Strengthening the legal profession in Iran requires both short- and long-term measures. In the short term, lawyers and bar associations should prioritize solidarity, make effective use of existing legal tools, and raise public awareness through media outreach. In the longer term, efforts must focus on structural reforms, including building international support networks, drafting laws to safeguard bar independence and lawyers' rights, and reinforcing the role and credibility of lawyers within society.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Lawyers play a vital role in upholding justice, the rule of law, and fair trials, combating impunity and ensuring accountability. The independence of lawyers and the legal profession is crucial to maintaining these principles and defending human rights. In Iran, this independence is significantly affected by numerous challenges rooted in history, legal frameworks, and state policies.

One of the most significant challenges, which has existed for decades and intensified after the Islamic Revolution, is the judiciary's interference in the activities of bar associations. This interference has been so extensive that, for example, from 1981 to 1997, bar association elections were controlled by the judiciary, effectively placing the practice of law under its supervision. In recent years, this interference has increased, with a notable example being the annulment of the Central Bar Association elections by the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges.

Another major challenge to the independence of bar associations was the establishment of a parallel organization under the title of the "Judiciary Advisors Centre," created under Article 187 of the Third Development Plan Law. This centre was designed to provide legal advisory services through individuals outside the bar association and under the direct supervision of the judiciary. However, it has effectively served as a substitute for independent lawyers, weakening the role of bar associations in Iran's legal system. According to this law, the judiciary was granted the authority to establish a structure with specific powers, indirectly or even directly assuming the role of lawyers in judicial cases. This move has undermined the independence of the legal practice, allowing the judiciary not only to interfere in the selection of lawyers but also to use this par-

allel institution as a tool to control and oversee legal proceedings, contrary to fundamental principles of legal independence and the autonomy of lawyers.

Furthermore, Article 48 of the 2015 Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that only lawyers approved by the head of the judiciary may represent clients in political and security-related cases. This poses a serious and direct threat to the independence of lawyers. A similar danger arises from the 2021 Executive Bylaw on the Independence of Bar Associations, which introduced new rules on training, elections, and discipline that place bar associations under tighter judicial control. In addition, the 2021 Law on Facilitating the Issuance of Business Licenses has reshaped the practice of law, flooding the market with minimally trained entrants and straining bar-association oversight.

Additionally, gender-based discrimination and gender-specific challenges faced by female lawyers in Iran significantly affect the work of legal practitioners. Female lawyers, in addition to the difficulties encountered by all lawyers, face further obstacles arising from social, cultural, and legal restrictions that undermine their professional performance and independence. One of the most critical issues is the mandatory hijab, which not only governs their presence in public spaces but also, in some cases, creates professional pressures. Furthermore, gender-based discrimination often restricts women's access to managerial positions in bar associations, while negative perceptions of their professional capabilities remain widespread. Together, these challenges create significant barriers for female lawyers, preventing them from advancing in their careers and fully contributing to the pursuit of justice, despite their legal and professional qualifications.

Chapter 2

History of the Legal Profession in Iran and Key Laws

The legal profession in Iran began evolving after the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which replaced clerical adjudication with a modern judiciary. In 1911, the First Charter of Attorneyship was adopted. However, attorneys had no formal association until 11 November 1930, when Justice Minister, Ali Akbar Daavar, initiated the first bar association. On 14 February 1937, the *Law of Attorneyship* granted the bar legal personality and financial independence (Article 18), but the Ministry of Justice still appointed its Board (Article 21). True institutional independence was achieved 15 years later.

In 1953, Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq signed the *Law of Independence of the Iranian Bar Association*. On 26 February 1953, the law was formally communicated to Chairperson Seyed Hashem Vakil, marking the bar's independence—this date is celebrated as the Day of the Bar's Independence. The 1955 reaffirmation of the Law, after Mosaddeq's overthrow, allowed the bar to function independently until the 1979 Revolution.

Under this Law:

- Attorneys elected their Board, which appointed the Chairperson (The last pre-Revolution Board election was on 10 June 1978).
- The bar had full authority over licensing, discipline, and qualification of candidates.
- The bar remained financially self-sufficient.
- Article 17 protected attorneys from suspension without a final ruling by the Disciplinary Court.

Post-Revolution: Closure and Control

After the 1979 Revolution, the bar association was shut down, its leaders jailed, and licenses revoked under the guise of “purging.” On 10 June 1980, a planned election was cancelled by the Revolution Council, which passed the *Law on Purging the Bar Association*. Although the law was never implemented, the Revolutionary Courts took over.

In 1983, 141 licenses were revoked without due process. Many directors, including Abdolhamid Ardalan and Mohammad Taghi Damghani, were arrested. The bar was evicted from the Palace of Justice. On 7 May 1984, instead of holding an election, the Judiciary appointed Goudarz Eftekhar Jahromi as Supervisor—despite his ineligibility under the 1953 Law. He remained in power for 14 years, marking the start of judiciary control over the bar. During this period, the

right to counsel was undermined. Revolutionary Courts often barred attorneys, claiming they impeded justice.

1991 Revival, 1997 Restriction

In 1991, the Expediency Council passed the *Law on Appointment of Attorney by Parties to a Lawsuit*, restoring attorneys' role in court. The bar planned elections for 9 October 1991, but a “Double-Urgent” bill stopped it. The *Law of Correction of the Bar Associations* led to another purge: 133 more licenses revoked.

Following President Khatami's 1997 election and international pressure, the first post-Revolution election was allowed. However, the *Law on Conditions for Obtaining the Attorney's License* (passed 6 April 1997) gave the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges the power to vet candidates, undermining bar independence. On 14 January 1998, the 20th election was held, but many human rights attorneys were disqualified. This legal interference formalized judiciary control.

In recent years, additional proposals have surfaced to restrict the bar association still further—even to fold it into the state apparatus—raising deep concern among lawyers and human-rights advocates.^{1,2,3} Today, the independence of the bar association, a key principle in Iranian legal frameworks,⁴ faces serious threats. Although the bar association is formally recognized as an independent entity, extensive state oversight and interference, particularly from the judiciary and security institutions, has severely limited its autonomy and affected its activities. Policies regulating the bar association and lawyers' affairs, especially those concerning the issuance of licenses, are often driven by state and security interests rather than professional or legal considerations. Prospective lawyers must not only pass rigorous examinations but also survive multiple layers of political and security scrutiny. Newly licensed practitioners frequently face systematic pressures that compromise their independence from the outset.

These conditions and related challenges illustrate a steady erosion of the independence of lawyers in Iran. Stringent oversight policies, particularly those targeting representation in political and human rights cases, undermine the work of advocates and the integrity of the justice system, posing a serious threat to the rule of law itself.

Chapter 3

Key Challenges in the Practice of Law and for the Legal Profession in Iran

This section examines the various challenges faced by lawyers in Iran. These challenges not only threaten their professional independence but also significantly impact the quality of legal services and the administration of justice in the country.

3.1 Structural Barriers to the Independence of the Legal Profession

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, lawyers have confronted fundamental legal and legislative challenges. These challenges stem from policies aimed at weakening or restricting the independence of lawyers and their professional bodies—the bar associations. In practice, the authority of the Supreme Leader has ensured continuity across successive governments, with state and judicial bodies systematically introducing measures that undermine the independence of lawyers and their professional associations, both *de jure* and *de facto*. In recent years, the pace and intensity of these policies have increased, posing an ever-growing threat to the very nature and function of the legal practice as an independent professional body within civil society.

After a prolonged period of severe suppression, often referred to as the “interregnum period” (from January 30, 1982, to April 6, 1997), bar associations and lawyers in Iran faced extensive restrictions. During this time, bar associations were effectively shut down, board elections were suspended, and the judiciary assumed control over the administration of lawyers. This period marked the first major reforms of the legal framework affecting the independence of lawyers and bar associations, curtailing individual lawyers’ privileges through the enactment of the 1997 *Law on the Qualifications for Obtaining a Lawyer’s License*.

In practice, the State, having gained authority and influence over bar associations, sought to replace the “rule of law” with “rule by law.” For example, Article 2 of 1997 *Law on the Qualifications for Obtaining a Lawyer’s License* imposed vague and ambiguous conditions, restricting the issuance of a lawyer’s license to individuals who demonstrated belief in, and practical commitment to, Islamic principles and rulings. Although Note 4 of the article exempted officially recognized religious minorities from this requirement, many citizens whose faiths are not recognized in the Constitution were effectively deprived of the right to obtain a lawyer’s license.

Additional restrictions included mandatory loyalty to the Islamic Republic and the concept of the Supreme Leader, absence of prior membership or activity in certain groups, and no affiliation with the former governmental system. These provisions led to the exclusion of many individuals from the legal profession, depriving them of their right to practice law. Furthermore, the authority to verify these conditions was assigned to security agencies through background checks, as stipulated in the Note to Article 2 of the 1997 *Law on the Qualifications for Obtaining a Lawyer’s License*. This effectively integrated state security entities into the operations of bar associations, transforming what had traditionally been an internal responsibility, oversight of apprenticeship licenses, into a mechanism for exerting state pressure and control.

Additionally, Note 1 of Article 4 of the 1997 *Law on the Qualifications for Obtaining a Lawyer’s License* granted the High Disciplinary Court of Judges the authority to review the qualifications of candidates for bar association board elections. This opened the door for judicial intervention in the independence of the legal practice, enabling the extensive disqualification of candidates and direct interference in the election process of bar association boards. As a result, this measure posed a serious threat to the autonomy of bar associations in Iran and further eroded the independence of lawyers and legal institutions.

As a further step in undermining the independence of the lawyers, the State established the *Centre of Attorneys, Official Experts, and Legal Advisors of the Judiciary* (*Markaz-e Vokalā, Kārshenāsān-e Rasmi va Moshāverān-e Qoveyeh Qazā’ieh*),⁵ a parallel institution with functions similar to bar associations but operating under the direct supervision of the judiciary. This development posed a serious legal and regulatory challenge to the autonomy of lawyers and bar associations. The legal basis for the creation of this body—designed specifically to counter the independence of bar associations—was Article 187 of the *Third Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan Act (2000)*. Under this article, the judiciary was authorized to issue licenses for the establishment of legal consulting institutions, allowing law graduates to represent clients in legal cases without being members of the bar association.

The formation of this judiciary-affiliated parallel entity, which operates in a similar capacity to bar associa-

tions, and its continued expansion in recent years reflect a deliberate and systematic effort to weaken bar associations as the primary independent legal institutions in Iran. These actions highlight the State's consistent failure to comply with international standards on the independence of bar associations, instead reinforcing State control over the practice of law. The persistent implementation of this political strategy along with efforts to replace bar associations with the judiciary-controlled institution and to marginalise them within the justice system, has raised serious concerns about the future of legal practice in Iran.

Given past experiences with parallel institutions in other governance structures in Iran, there is a real risk that bar associations could face a similar fate—eventually leading to their complete dissolution. This would not only remove a key pillar of legal independence but also compromise the lawyers' role in upholding justice and protecting individual rights in Iran.

The 2015 Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure introduced a further legal barrier for lawyers and defendants' rights, particularly the right to a defence. It restricts an accused person's ability to choose their own counsel by stipulating that, during the preliminary investigation stage, only lawyers from a list approved by the head of the judiciary may be retained. This restriction directly conflicts with the right to counsel of one's own choosing, as guaranteed under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 35 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Note to Article 48 significantly limits this right in certain cases, particularly those involving crimes against national and international security, which frequently encompass human rights cases. In practice, especially during the protests known as "Woman, Life, Freedom," this restriction was not confined to the preliminary investigation stage but was extended to court proceedings as well.

This amendment not only infringes upon the legal rights of the accused but also directly undermines lawyers' independence by making their eligibility contingent upon the approval of the head of the judiciary. Such a requirement compromises the professional autonomy of attorneys, effectively transforming legal practice into a state-controlled mechanism rather than an independent body dedicated to protecting the rights of individuals.

However, restrictions on lawyers handling political and human rights cases extend beyond this provision. Certain court branches, particularly within the Revolutionary Courts, have adopted the unwritten and unlawful practice of denying lawyers access to case files and prohibiting them from reviewing evidence. In

some instances, lawyers are compelled to defend their clients without access to the charges or supporting documents, relying solely on the defendants' own statements.

Additionally, in numerous cases, lawyers' right to meet with their clients has also been violated. As a result, lawyers are often compelled to appear in court and present a defence without prior consultation or coordination with their clients, severely compromising the right to defence and to a fair trial.

One of the most significant challenges facing the legal practice in Iran, particularly concerning the erosion of lawyers' independence, is the approval of the *Executive Bylaw of the Legal Bill on the Independence of the Bar Association* by the head of the judiciary. For years, lawyers and legal activists have protested and campaigned against this bylaw, arguing that the head of the judiciary lacks the legal authority to issue it and that its approval fundamentally undermines the independence of lawyers and bar associations. Nevertheless, despite persistent opposition, the bylaw was ultimately enacted.

The adoption of this bylaw has significantly expanded judicial interference in the affairs of bar associations and further restricted their independence. As a result, the bar associations' ability to regulate and oversee their own affairs and activities has been severely weakened, transferring greater control to judicial authorities. A major flaw in the approval process was that the judiciary altered the original draft prepared by representatives of the bar associations, incorporating provisions that enabled deeper interference in their operations. This occurred despite the fact that, under the law, neither the judiciary nor its head holds authority to amend or impose regulations on an independent professional body.

The enactment of this bylaw constitutes another serious encroachment on the independence of lawyers and bar associations in Iran, reinforcing concerns that these institutions are being systematically stripped of their autonomy and reduced to entities under judicial control. The investigation into the performance of bar associations also formed part of the State's broader political strategy to exert pressure on these institutions, an initiative approved in 2021 by the Eleventh Parliament (Islamic Consultative Assembly).

According to the 1955 *Legal Bill on the Independence of the Bar Association*, this institution is the sole legal authority governing lawyers and the legal practice, operating independently on the basis of self-regulation. Any interference in its affairs that disregards this principle contradicts its legal and professional character and threatens the autonomy of lawyers and bar associations. Furthermore, the Bar Association does not

receive any state funding and functions as an independent legal entity. Therefore, it does not fall within the category of “executive bodies” subject to parliamentary oversight and investigation.

For these reasons, the investigation into the Bar Association’s affairs lacked legal justification and was primarily a political manoeuvre aimed at interfering in its operations, undermining its independence, and exerting political pressure on the lawyers. This action reinforced concerns about state overreach into the legal sphere, further threatening the principles of legal autonomy and professional self-governance in Iran.

The *Law on Facilitating the Issuance of Business Licenses*, approved in 2022 (1401), has dealt a significant blow to the foundations of the legal practice as part of a broader strategy to exert maximum pressure on this institution. Although less than three years have passed since its enactment, its detrimental effects have already become evident, prompting members of Parliament to call for reforms. However, no practical steps have yet been taken to address these issues.

One of the most concerning consequences of this law is that it enables individuals without adequate academic or professional qualifications to enter the legal practice, leading to a serious decline in professional standards and the quality of legal services. The sharp increase in the number of lawyers, without consideration of the actual needs of the country, has created unhealthy competition and reduced income for practitioners. Furthermore, this oversaturation of the profession has contributed to growing unemployment among lawyers.

This situation has also placed additional strain on the judicial system, as the proliferation of unfounded lawsuits has increased the workload of the courts and further diminished judicial efficiency.

Additionally, the limited capacity of bar associations to provide adequate educational services has significantly weakened the quality of training and internship programmes, posing serious challenges to the development of competent lawyers.

From a justice perspective, this law presents a serious threat. The admission of inexperienced lawyers into sensitive legal cases has resulted in unequal access to qualified legal representation and increased the risk of professional errors, potentially causing irreparable harm to clients. Collectively, these issues have eroded public trust in bar associations and diminished the social standing of lawyers.

The commercialization of the legal practice—where quantitative measures, such as expanding the number of lawyers, are prioritized over qualitative standards—

has further eroded ethical and professional values, rendering lawyering an unstable precarious profession. The absence of adequate infrastructure coupled with weak supervisory and regulatory mechanisms, has exacerbated these challenges, posing serious risks to judicial integrity and the administration of justice in the country.

The adoption of laws that conflict with the independence of bar associations, such as the *Law on the Quality of Obtaining a Law License and the Executive Regulation on the Legal Independence of Bar Associations*, along with its subsequent amendments, has paved the way for judicial intervention in the affairs of bar associations. This interference, exercised through the Supreme Judicial Disciplinary Court, which is responsible for addressing judicial misconduct, has created one of the principal challenges facing the legal profession in Iran.

In past bar association board election cycles across various provinces, the Supreme Judicial Disciplinary Court, recognized as the authority responsible for reviewing candidates’ qualifications, consistently intervened, disqualifying candidates on political grounds. This practice enabled the judiciary to influence the management of bar associations, further eroding their autonomy and self-regulatory capacity.

On 9 November 2024 (19 Aban 1403), the Supreme Judicial Disciplinary Court, in an unlawful act lacking legitimate legal justification, annulled the elections of the 33rd Board of Directors of the Central Bar Association. The court based its decision on certain articles of the *Executive Regulation on the Legal Independence of Bar Associations*, including Articles 25, 161, and 154, provisions that themselves contravene the principle of independence.

Actions such as the annulment of elections, the widespread disqualification of candidates for non-legal reasons, and the use of regulations that inherently contradict the principles of independence and self-governance significantly weaken the democratic structure and transparency of bar association management. These judicial interventions not only erode public trust in bar associations but also undermine judicial integrity and create serious obstacles to citizens’ right to independent and fair legal representation.

3.2 Security Challenges

The personal and professional security of lawyers constitutes a fundamental pillar for safeguarding justice and protecting human rights within any judicial system. However, in recent years, lawyers in Iran have faced increasing and multifaceted security threats. These include a rise in violence against lawyers, targeted arrests, and heightened political and judicial

pressures—all of which have not only undermined the independence of the legal profession but also directly affected citizens' right to legal defence.

Such threats, including legal harassment, have created a pervasive climate of fear and intimidation, significantly weakening the role of lawyers in society and discouraging them from taking on politically sensitive or human rights-related cases. The failure to guarantee the personal and professional security of lawyers stands in direct violation of international legal standards, including Article 16 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which requires states to "... ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference ..." and to provide adequate safeguards when their security is "threatened as a result of discharging their functions."

Despite these obligations, Iranian lawyers continue to face systematic threats and unlawful interference, severely undermining the rule of law and access to justice.

In this section, two major security-related challenges confronting lawyers in Iran are examined:

- 1 Rising violence and targeted killings of lawyers
- 2 The arrest, prosecution, and persecution of human rights defence lawyers

In recent years, lawyers in Iran have faced a deeply troubling escalation in physical violence, threats, and even assassination attempts. According to Jaafar Kousha, President of the Iranian Bar Association, there have been approximately 20 murders and over 60 serious assassination attempts targeting lawyers over the past decade, highlighting a critical breakdown in the professional security and safety of lawyers in Iran.

A university study and survey conducted among 1,413 lawyers, including 957 members of bar associations and 456 lawyers affiliated with the judiciary-controlled Centre for Lawyers, revealed alarming findings. 8.4% of respondents reported experiencing physical vio-

lence in the past year due to their professional duties. By comparison, the corresponding figures are 4% in the Netherlands and Norway, and 6.4% in the United States. Moreover, 55% of respondents reported being threatened between one to three times in the past year, compared to 18-18.5% in Norway, the Netherlands, and the United States. These stark disparities demonstrate that lawyers in Iran operate under significantly more dangerous and hostile conditions than their counterparts in many other countries.

Over the past three years, there has been a notable surge in murders and assassination attempts against lawyers in Iran, particularly targeting female lawyers during the nationwide protest movement known as "Woman, Life, Freedom." Among those suspiciously killed were Maryam Arvin, Mohabbat Mozafari, and Nargess Khorrami Fard. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not accepted responsibility for these deaths. Maryam Arvin, an active defender of women's and children's rights, voluntarily represented individuals arrested for protesting the mandatory hijab. She was violently arrested on 26 November 2022 at the Sirjan court and released on 12 December 2022. Shortly thereafter, she died under suspicious circumstances. While the local prosecutor declared her death a suicide, her mother revealed on social media that Maryam died as a result of drug injections administered while in detention.

Violence against lawyers in Iran is not limited to political, security, or human rights cases. Many have been attacked or killed by disgruntled parties involved in civil, family, or economic disputes, demonstrating the broad vulnerability lawyers face in the course of their work. Among those murdered or seriously injured are Mohsen Barahmand, Soheila Me'mari, Milan Barzegar, Rahim Saeedi, Parivash Zafari, Mehran Rahimi, Mahmoud-Reza Jafar-Aghaee, Naseer Farokhnejad, Mehdi 'Ammarloui, and Ali Soleimani. Furthermore, Asgar Sadegh, Majid Sheibani, Siamak Shamsi, Mehran Sadeqhi Seraji, Abolfazl Raouf, Aminollah Safai, Nasrin Keyqobadi, Hamed Mir-Abolqhasemi, Ehsan Ravan-gardi, Hassan Safari, and Afshin Ghasemi are among the lawyers who were targeted and severely injured.

Notable Cases of Violence and Judicial Action Against Lawyers (2021-2025):

- 2 February 2021 (14 Bahman 1399) – **Parivash Zafari**, a legal intern, and her client were shot and killed in her Kermanshah office by the client's husband in a dowry-related dispute. The incident left three people dead (the lawyer, the client, and a witness) and one person injured.
- 13 March 2022 (22 Esfand 1400) – **Abolfazl Raouf**, a lawyer and member of the Central Bar Association, was stabbed 17 times by two assailants but survived due to emergency medical care.
- 8 August 2022 (17 Mordad 1401) – **Mahmoud-Reza Jafar-Aghaee**, a lawyer and member of the Central Bar Association, was brutally murdered in front of his wife and five-year-old child in Shahroud. He and another lawyer were representing a client in an economic dispute case.
- 3 April 2023 (14 Farvardin 1402) – **Mehdi Ammarloui** was shot and killed in his office in Nishapur by a client after refusing to pursue an unlawful child-custody case. According to a close acquaintance, Ammarloui's client, who had a criminal background, expected him to use any means necessary, including illegal actions, to regain custody of his children. Ammarloui refused, returned the legal fees, and advised the client to find another lawyer. The client later entered Ammarloui's office armed with a firearm and shot him in the face, killing him instantly.
- 26 September 2023 (4 Mehr 1402) – **Rahim Saeedi**, a member of the Central Bar Association, was brutally murdered at his summer home near Dowlatabad village in Marand County. The Central Bar Association did not respond or follow up on the case.
- 14 January 2024 (24 Dey 1402) – **Ehsan Ravangardi**, of the Bushehr Bar Association, was attacked by five unidentified assailants armed with cold weapons while taking his young daughter to kindergarten in Yasuj.
- 27 May 2024 (7 Khordad 1403) – **Afshin Ghasemi**, of the Central Bar Association, was assaulted by three unidentified armed attackers on Saadat Abad Street in Tehran.
- 8 September 2024 (18 Shahrivar 1403) – **Hassan Safari**, of the Central Bar Association of Markazi Province, was shot while working on a dowry case in Nazm Abad, Arak. The assailant, his client's ex-wife, also killed her own spouse during the incident.
- 19 October 2024 (28 Mehr 1403) – **Ali Soleimani**, of the Fars Bar Association, was shot eight times and killed in front of the Dispute Resolution Council in Joym County following a property-dispute hearing. His murder sparked protests among lawyers on social media; however, as with other incidents of violence against lawyers, there has been no meaningful response from the judiciary or legal institutions. No effective measures have been taken to address or prevent the continuing pattern of violence, leaving the profession increasingly vulnerable and unsupported.
- More than ten lawyers in Gilan Province, particularly in Rasht, have been subjected to judicial actions, including arrests and summons, since early September 2025. Those targeted include **Tahereh Pour-Esmaeili**, **Masoumeh Pour-Shahrani**, **Mohammad-Reza Taak**, **Shadi Falahati**, **Shahrzad Sharbiani**, and **Hesam Pour-Ahmadi**. The charges brought against them primarily involve "propaganda against the state," "insulting officials," and "collusion and conspiracy against national security."

According to published reports, several of these arrests stemmed from discussions in a WhatsApp group where members exchanged views on current social issues. Following their summons and arrests, authorities confiscated their electronic devices and used private messages as evidence to press unfounded charges.

Some of the detained lawyers, including Tahereh Pour-Esmaeili and Masoumeh Pour-Shahrani, were released after several days on extremely heavy bail—reportedly up to several billion tomans—while others, such as Shadi Falahati and Hesam Pour-Ahmadi, remain in detention, with their families unaware of their whereabouts or health conditions.

In Iran, lawyers who take on human rights or politically sensitive cases, including the representation of civil society activists, protesters, political detainees, or clients challenging state policies, face systematic threats such as arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and severe professional and social restrictions. This ongoing repression stands in direct violation of international human rights principles and standards on the independence of the legal profession, which affirm that lawyers must be free to defend their clients without fear of state retaliation, particularly in politically sensitive or human rights-related cases.

The persecution of lawyers intensified dramatically following the September 2022 protests over the death

of Mahsa Amini in police custody. During this period, lawyers who either participated in the protests or defended detained demonstrators became prime targets of the security apparatus. Although state restrictions on information and pressure on bar associations make it difficult to obtain precise figures, more than 66 lawyers were arrested and over 100 were summoned or had cases opened against them in less than a year. In parallel, security agencies pressured bar associations, including the East Azerbaijan Bar Association, to initiate disciplinary proceedings against protesting lawyers. In one instance, this pressure resulted in the resignation of the association's disciplinary prosecutor.

Notable Cases of Lawyers Targeted During or After the 2022 Protest Period:

- 25 September 2022 (3 Mehr 1401) – **Babak Paaknia**, a member of the Central Bar Association, was arrested on charges of “conspiracy against national security” and “propaganda against the regime.” He was denied the right to independent legal representation under Article 48 of the Criminal Procedure Code and was released on bail on 2 November 2022 (11 Aban 1401).
- 15 October 2022 (23 Mehr 1401) – **Sina Yousefi**, a member of the East Azerbaijan Bar Association, was arrested in Tabriz and transferred to the temporary detention section of Tabriz Prison. His arrest followed the announcement of a committee within the Bar Association's Human Rights Commission to defend individuals detained during the protests. At the time, Yousefi was serving as Vice-Chair of the Commission. He was released on bail on 27 October 2022 (5 Aban 1401) but was later tried without access to legal representation and sentenced to six months' imprisonment on the charge of “propaganda against the regime.”
- 7 November 2022 (16 Aban 1401) – **Mostafa Nili**, a member of the Central Bar Association with prior arrests in 2009 and 2020, was detained at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran by Revolutionary Guards Intelligence agents while travelling to Zahedan to represent families of prisoners and victims of the “Bloody Friday” massacre. He was temporarily released from detention on 11 April 2023 (22 Farvardin 1402).
- 3 December 2022 (12 Azar 1401) – **Saideh Mir-Ghorbani**, a lawyer from Babolsar, was arrested after being summoned by local security police. She was temporarily released on bail on 22 January 2023 (2 Bahman 1401).
- 15 December 2022 (24 Azar 1401) – **Mohammad-Ali Kamfrouzi**, who represented numerous journalists, civil activists, students, and protest detainees, was arrested at the Evin Prosecutor's Office while following up on his clients' cases. Security forces blindfolded and handcuffed him, searched his belongings, and transferred him to an undisclosed location. He was released on bail on 9 January 2023 (19 Dey 1401).
- 3 January 2023 (13 Dey 1401) – **Elham Zera'atpisheh**, a member of the Fars Bar Association, was arrested at the Marvdasht County Court. She was released on 7 February 2023 (18 Bahman 1401) after a non-prosecution order was issued in her case.
- 22 January 2023 (2 Bahman 1401) – **Amir-Afshar Najafi**, a member of the Qazvin Bar Association, was sentenced by the Revolutionary Court of Qazvin and the criminal court to a total of 17 months' imprisonment, a two-year ban on practising law, a two-year travel ban, and the confiscation of his mobile phone and SIM card. The charges against him were “spreading falsehoods with intent to disrupt public opinion” and “propaganda against the regime,” stemming from his support for the nationwide protests.

To provide a clear overview of the scope and impact of these challenges, the following section is divided into three concise profiles: “Lawyers with ongoing

(open) cases or on verge of serving their sentences,” “Lawyers Released After Serving Sentences (or Under Conditional Release),” and “Lawyers Currently Imprisoned.”

oned.” Covering the period from 2021 to the date of this report, each subsection presents individual mini-profiles detailing the lawyer’s name, bar affiliation, key charges, sentence length, and a brief note on their current status or advocacy work. By juxtaposing the ex-

periences of those who have regained their freedom with those awaiting imprisonment or still behind bars, this section aims to illustrate both the human impact of state repression and the continuing risks faced by Iran’s legal defenders.

Lawyers with Ongoing (Open) Cases or on Verge of Serving Their Sentences

- **Seyed Mehdi Karimi Farsi**, a first-class attorney and member of the Central Bar Association, was sentenced to one year in prison by Branch 29 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court on charges of “propaganda against the regime.” The verdict was upheld by Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals, and on 1 January 2025 (11 Dey 1403) he received an official summons from the First Branch of the Sentence Enforcement Unit of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office (District 33, Evin Prison) to begin serving his one-year term.

He is therefore on the verge of imprisonment, pending the enforcement of his sentence. Karimi Farsi is widely known for his defence of bar-association independence; in July 2023, he led a march through Tehran protesting judicial interference, an act that drew broad solidarity among Iran’s legal community.

- **Behnam Nezadi**, a lawyer and member of the Central Bar Association, is known for his public legal education work aimed at empowering citizens to hold corrupt judges accountable. He manages an Instagram page titled “Judicial Misconduct of Judges,” where he teaches users how to file disciplinary complaints and seek justice.

Because of these entirely lawful activities, he was tried by the Revolutionary Court of Arak on charges of “propaganda against the regime” and sentenced to one year in prison and two years’ disqualification from practicing law. On appeal, Branch 9 of the Markazi Province Court of Appeals reduced the sentence to four months’ imprisonment and a one-year professional ban.

He began serving his sentence on 1 March 2025 (11 Esfand 1403) and was temporarily released on 14 April 2025 (26 Farvardin 1404) after the Supreme Court accepted his petition for a retrial and bail was posted. Despite the Supreme Court’s decision, a parallel trial branch later reaffirmed the conviction, and the 7th Branch of the Sentence Enforcement Unit of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office in Arak has since summoned him and issued an arrest warrant to enforce the remaining term.

In a separate case before Branch 106 of the Criminal Court Two of Arak, Nezadi was convicted of “disclosing confidential information” and “spreading falsehoods with intent to disturb public opinion,” receiving 13 months and 16 days’ imprisonment for the former charge and 113 days for the latter.

- **Mohammad Seyfzadeh**, is a veteran human rights lawyer and a founding member of the Human Rights Defenders Association. He has a long record of imprisonment, court summons, and repeated convictions due to his human rights advocacy. His most recent case concerns a letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General, in which he protested the wave of executions and the repression of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement.

For this action, Branch 29 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced him on 15 May 2023 (25 Ordibehesht 1402) to one year in prison for “propaganda against the regime.” The verdict was upheld by Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals and referred to the First Branch of the Evin Prosecutor’s Office for enforcement.

Mr. Seyfzadeh was initially granted time to obtain a medical certificate of unfitness for imprisonment from the Legal Medicine Organization, which reportedly confirmed his ineligibility for incarceration due to recent surgery and advanced age. However, he has recently been summoned again by the Sentence Enforcement Unit, raising concerns that the authorities may seek to reimpose the sentence despite his health condition.

Lawyers Released After Serving Sentences (or Under Conditional Release)

- **Arash Keykhosravi**, a member of the Central Bar Association, is a prominent human rights lawyer who has been arrested and imprisoned multiple times for his advocacy work. His most recent case is linked to the 2022 nationwide protests, during which he was arrested by security forces in Tehran on 8 November 2022. He was charged with “propaganda against the regime” and was temporarily released on bail on 6 March 2023. Subsequently, Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced him to one year in prison. After he refused to sign a pledge of repentance prepared by the Execution of Sentences Office, he was transferred to Evin Prison on 25 September 2023, to serve his sentence. Upon completing his term, Keykhosravi was released on 23 July 2024.

- **Amir-Salar Davoudi**, a human rights lawyer and manager of the Telegram channel *Without Retouch*, was arrested on 20 November 2018, after publicly criticizing judicial corruption in a media interview. He was charged with multiple national security offenses, including “forming a virtual group,” “propaganda against the regime,” “insulting the leadership,” and “espionage.” Following an interview with Voice of America, he was additionally accused of “collaboration with a hostile government,” though he was later acquitted of that charge.

In 2019, Tehran’s Revolutionary Court sentenced Davoudi to 15 years’ imprisonment for forming a group in cyberspace, in addition to further sentences totalling over 25 years, 111 lashes, and a monetary fine. Although Davoudi did not personally appeal the verdict, his lawyer obtained a Supreme Court retrial on the basis that several charges arose from a single act: managing the *Without Retouch* channel. He was released on bail in mid-2021 after serving approximately two and a half years but was re-incarcerated in July 2021 when the lower court rejected the Supreme Court’s interpretation.

After nearly five years in Evin Prison, a second retrial request was accepted by Branch 39 of the Supreme Court, which overturned the previous ruling. Davoudi was temporarily released on 14 September 2024, pending a new verdict.

- **Khosrow Alikordi**, a member of the Khorasan Bar Association, served as the lawyer for the family of Abolfazl Adinehzadeh, a teenager killed by state forces during the 2022 protests. On 1 August 2023, he was arrested after appearing at the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office in Mashhad and was transferred to Vakilabad Prison in the same city. He was temporarily released on bail on 5 August 2023. In December 2023, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced Alikordi to one year in prison for “propaganda against the regime.” As a supplementary punishment, he was also sentenced to two years of exile to Nehbandan County, a two-year travel ban, a two-year prohibition from practicing law, and a two-year ban on social media activity. The ruling was upheld in January 2024 by Branch 35 of the Court of Appeals in Razavi Khorasan Province. In addition to judicial verdict, Alikordi faced disciplinary proceedings by the Disciplinary Court of the Khorasan Bar Association. He announced on social media:

According to the ruling of Branch 4 of the Disciplinary Court of the Khorasan Bar Association, I was sentenced to two years’ prohibition from practicing law for publishing news about the cases of my clients – Fatemeh Sepehri, the family of Abolfazl Adinehzadeh, and other political prisoners.

Alikordi was transferred to Vakilabad Prison on 17 February 2024, to serve his sentence and was released after approximately eight months under a semi-open regime.

- **Javad Alikordi**, a lawyer and university professor, was originally sentenced in early 2021 by the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad to eight years and seven months in prison for creating and managing a Telegram group. The charges included “forming and administering a group to overthrow the government,” “propaganda against the regime,” and “insulting the Supreme Leader.” He also received a two-year ban on teaching, joining political or social groups, and leaving the country.

On appeal, his sentence was reduced to four years and one month, with two years enforceable under Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, and he was transferred to Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad on 14 July 2022 to begin serving his term. After serving part of his sentence, Alikordi was granted conditional release, and the remainder of his prison term was suspended for three years.

However, on 11 December 2024, Branch 37 of the Razavi Khorasan Court of Appeals convicted him once again of “propaganda against the regime,” imposing a fine of 200 million rials, a travel ban, and a prohibition on online activity. Following this ruling, the court revoked the suspension of his previous sentence, converting it into an enforceable term of imprisonment.

On 1 March 2025, Alikordi was re-arrested by Mashhad Intelligence agents and returned to Vakilabad Prison. He remained there until 10 August 2025, when he was released under electronic monitoring with an ankle bracelet.

- **Mohsen Borhani**, a professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tehran and a practicing lawyer, is known for his outspoken criticism of the judiciary, particularly its issuance of death sentences against protesters. His public objections led to the opening of a case against him in the Special Clerical Court, a judicial body responsible for prosecuting clerics and religious figures. He was arrested on 7 July 2024 and transferred to Qom Prison to serve his sentence. The charges against him were filed following complaints by the Intelligence Protection of the Judiciary, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, the Protection Unit of the Law Enforcement Force, and a member of the Guardian Council. The accusations included “propaganda against the regime,” “publishing false information with the intent to disturb public opinion,” “actions contrary to the dignity of the clergy,” specifically through alleged insults to judges and martyrs. In the indictment, which Borhani later made public, it was stated:

Following the launch of the campaign against hijab violations, aimed at protecting hijab and chastity in Islamic society, Mr. Borhani has made provocative statements and published clearly un-Islamic and unfair content, which has disturbed public opinion and wounded the hearts of believers... Mr. Borhani has accused the regime of illegal and un-Islamic killings... [and] has disturbed public opinion by supporting the convicts of the incident known as the “Isfahan House,” who were recently executed due to security issues and sedition.

After serving 79 days in prison, Borhani was released in early October 2024 following the issuance of a pardon.

- **Mehdi Shakibafar**, a member of the Central Bar Association and an active human rights lawyer, represented several detainees from the November 2017 protests. He was tried in both the Revolutionary Court and the Criminal Court of Arak on charges of “propaganda against the regime,” “publishing false information,” and “insulting the Leader of the Islamic Republic.” Although the lower courts acquitted him of all charges, the Arak Prosecutor’s Office appealed the verdict, and the case was referred to Branch 9 of the Appeals Court in Markazi Province. The Appeals Court overturned the acquittal and sentenced Shakibafar to: Fifteen months and one day in prison for insulting the Leader, seven months and sixteen days for propaganda against the regime, one year in prison for publishing false information, eleven months of which were suspended for five years.

Additionally, he received twenty-one months of supplementary punishment, including a ban on practicing law. Shakibafar was transferred to Saveh Prison on 26 August 2024, to begin serving his sentence. Due to a heart condition, he was temporarily released in early December 2024 under electronic monitoring, with movement restricted to within 1,000 meters of his residence to allow for medical treatment.

Lawyers Currently Imprisoned

- **Mohammad Najafi**, is a prominent Iranian human rights lawyer known for his outspoken criticism of the authorities and defence of protesters. Since his first arrest in 2016 on charges of “propaganda against the regime,” which led to a six-month prison term, he has faced a succession of prosecutions on charges including “insulting the Supreme Leader,” “publishing false information,” and “cooperating with hostile governments.”

In 2018, after exposing the torture-related death of protester Vahid Heydari in Arak, Najafi was re-arrested and sentenced by the Criminal Court 2 of Shazand and the Revolutionary Court of Arak to multiple prison terms, amounting to over a decade in total, along with 74 lashes for offenses such as “public disorder” and “propaganda against the regime.” His health deteriorated under detention; he suffers from diabetes, heart disease, and vision problems, and previously undertook a 49-day hunger strike to obtain medical leave.

In 2024, he received additional sentences of two and one years for allegedly sending an audio message from prison in support of protests. Now held in Ward 4 of Evin Prison, he remains denied medical care despite repeated episodes of dizziness, vomiting, and suspected stroke-like symptoms. In November 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders urged Iranian authorities to end his mistreatment.

In April 2025, Najafi’s lawyer, Mostafa Nili, announced that the High Disciplinary Court of Judges had issued a permanent disbarment order, revoking his licence to practise law despite the case having previously been closed due to the statute of limitations. His continued imprisonment, deteriorating health, and disbarment exemplify the systematic repression of independent lawyers in Iran.

- **Taher Naqvi** a lawyer and human rights defender, has been detained in Evin Prison since 6 February 2024, on charges of “conspiracy to commit crimes against national security” and “propaganda against the regime.” Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, presided over by Judge Abolghasem Salavati, sentenced him to six years in prison, along with a two-year travel ban and two years’ deprivation of social and political rights. Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeal subsequently upheld the ruling in full.

Due to harassment by prison officials, Naqvi went on a hunger strike, which led to severe gastric bleeding. Front Line Defenders reported that his life was in danger due to the hunger strike and lack of access to medication. Despite the urgent medical recommendation of the prison clinic, authorities have repeatedly denied him hospital transfer because he refused to wear prison clothing and shackles, a requirement imposed for external medical visits.

On 12 March 2025, after nine months of delay, Naqvi was briefly transferred to a hospital, but the violent and threatening behaviour of Evin Prison security officers toward his wife and child led him to refuse treatment and return to prison. His health remains in a critical state.

In addition, prison and security authorities have denied him permission to take a doctoral entrance examination, despite granting this right to other inmates. Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, expressed serious concern over Naqvi’s ongoing medical deprivation and the inhumane conditions of his detention, including his placement in a cell with dangerous criminals.

- **Mohammad-Reza Faghihi**, a lawyer with the Central Bar Association and a seasoned human rights advocate, has faced repeated arrests for his professional activities. His most recent case stems from a peaceful protest on 12 October 2022, outside the Bar Association building on Argentina Street in Tehran, where security forces used tear gas to disperse demonstrators. Faghihi, together with fellow lawyers Hassan Sheikh and Mohammad Rezaei, was arrested during the crackdown.

While most cases against participating lawyers were later dropped under a general amnesty, Faghihi refused to sign a pledge of remorse and was consequently indicted before Branch 15 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Abolghasem Salavati. During his trial, he declared, “I have committed no crime for which I should express remorse.” In an unfair proceeding that disregarded his defence, the court sentenced him to five years in prison for “conspiracy to commit crimes against national security,” along with a two-year travel ban, two-year suspension of his law licence, and two-year prohibition from political party membership.

Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals upheld the verdict in full, and on 21 January 2025, Faghihi reported to Evin Prison to begin serving his five-year sentence. On 10 February 2025, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) addressed a letter to President Masoud Pezeshkian, expressing concern over his imprisonment and calling for his immediate and unconditional release and the dropping of all charges.

- **Abolfazl Ranjbari** a lawyer, human rights defender, and member of the East Azerbaijan Bar Association, has been arbitrarily detained since 3 May 2025 (14 Ordibehesht 1404) after being arrested by security forces outside his home in Tabriz. He remains in quarantine detention at Tabriz Central Prison without due process, legal counsel, or access to his family and essential medication.

Ranjbari, a university professor with over three decades of teaching experience, has taught public, administrative, and labour law at several Iranian universities and authored leading academic works, including *Public Finance and Financial Law* and *Labour Law*.

He is charged with espionage, and his case is currently under review by Branch 3 of the Tabriz Revolutionary Court. The accusation reportedly stems from his participation in an academic conference in Baku seven years earlier, where he presented a paper analysing Iran’s judicial system. Known for defending political and ethnic minority activists and for signing a 2022 open letter by 70 jurists calling for an investigation into protest-related abuses, his detention appears to be retaliation for his peaceful academic and human rights work.

Concerns about his case have grown in the wake of June 2025 amendments to Iran’s espionage law, which expanded the definition of espionage and introduced harsher penalties, including the death penalty for collaboration with hostile states and up to 15 years’ imprisonment for “propaganda” deemed harmful to national security.

- **Ebrahim Parsamehr** a lawyer based in Ahvaz, was violently arrested on 13 June 2025 (24 Khordad 1404) when IRGC Intelligence agents raided his private residence in Qaleh-Tol, searched his home, and transferred him to an undisclosed location. He was later moved to Sheiban Prison in Ahvaz, where he remains in detention without formal charges or legal justification.

According to reports, the main reason for his arrest was the publication of a social media post concerning the Iran–Israel conflict. Parsamehr is a prominent civil rights lawyer, known for defending Christian converts and citizens accused of political or religious offences, including “propaganda against the regime” and “actions against national security.”

He was previously assaulted in December 2022 by plainclothes agents after publicly offering free legal representation to protesters arrested during the nationwide demonstrations. His ongoing detention without charge exemplifies the arbitrary repression of human rights lawyers in Iran.

Collective Prosecutions of Lawyers

In addition to individual cases of arrest and imprisonment, entire groups of lawyers have faced coordinated judicial and security pressure for expressing opinions or supporting human rights causes. Two of

the most significant examples are the Mashhad Lawyers' Case and the Rasht Lawyers' Case, where numerous legal professionals were collectively charged and prosecuted on political grounds.

- **The Mashhad Lawyers' Case** is one of several instances in which lawyers have collectively faced pressure and prosecution for expressing opinions on social media about various issues.

The case began with the summons of 17 lawyers from the city of Mashhad: **Amirdokht Bahareh Bazrgar, Amin Shahla, Sajad Javadi, Saeed Javadi, Sahar Dashti Daghighi, Elham Arasteh, Mitra Izadifar, Seyed Jafar Saghravanian, Seyed Rouhollah Hosseini, Seyed Enayatollah Karamati, Seyyedeh Fa'ezeh Seyyedi, Seyyedeh Vajiheh Qureshi Yazdi, Ali-Asghar Dashti, Farzaneh Safari, Kazem Chazgi, Mohammad-Reza Yazdani, and Mehdi Mohammad-Hosseini**, who were charged with "propaganda against the regime" before the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office. Subsequently, Branch 5 of the Mashhad Revolutionary Court sentenced 12 of these lawyers to prison terms and monetary fines. The ruling remains subject to appeal and review at the appellate stage.

- **The Rasht Lawyers' Case** emerged in mid-September 2025, following a wave of judicial and security actions targeting a group of practicing lawyers in the city. In this context, security forces, citing charges such as "propaganda against the regime," assembly and collusion against national security," and insulting the Supreme Leader," arrested more than ten lawyers. Judicial cases were opened for all detainees, with heavy bail orders issued; however, most were later released on temporary bail. Among the prosecuted lawyers are **Shadi Falahati, Shahrzad Sharbiani, Masoumeh Pour-Shahrani, Tahereh Pour-Esmaeili, Mohammad-Reza Taak, and Hesam Pour-Ahmadi**, well-known figures in the defence of human rights cases, protesters, and victims of rights violations.

3.3 Intersectionality - Gender-Specific Challenges Faced by Female Lawyers in Iran

In addition to the challenges outlined above, female lawyers in Iran face a wide range of gender-specific obstacles, extending from legal and social restrictions to structural and institutional barriers. These difficulties are deeply rooted in traditional norms and discriminatory laws, reflecting persistent societal perceptions about women's roles and responsibilities. They also expose the ongoing prevalence of gender bias within the legal profession. Despite decades of women entering the legal field, entrenched stereotypes and male-dominated attitudes, along with a reluctance to entrust legal cases to female lawyers, continue to limit their professional status and opportunities.

The constitutional and legal framework further entrenches these barriers. Article 163 of the Iranian Constitution states that the qualifications of judges must be determined "in accordance with Islamic criteria," while the *Law on the Conditions of Selection of Judges (1982)* limits judgeship to men. As a result, women may serve only in restricted judicial capacities. Female judges are not permitted to issue rulings independently but may

serve in limited roles such as enforcement judges or members of appellate court panels, where decisions must be signed by the presiding (male) judge. These restrictions have raised growing concerns about women's rights and their access to the legal professions, including the practice of law itself. Such exclusions continue to impede the entry, retention, and advancement of women in the legal field and reinforce institutionalised gender inequality within Iran's justice system.

One of the most prominent structural and symbolic barriers facing women in the legal profession is the mandatory *hijab*, which directly affects their presence and participation in public and professional life. This legal obligation not only restricts personal freedom of dress but also subjects women to social scrutiny and legal repercussions, particularly in professions such as law, which require active courtroom participation and interaction with public institutions.

In an interview, a female lawyer described how mandatory *hijab* regulations and other appearance-based restrictions create significant stress for women in the legal profession, often affecting their ability to perform effectively in court. She recalled being barred from entering a courthouse simply because she was

wearing nail polish. Court security officers informed her that she would not be permitted entry unless she removed it immediately. With only little time before the hearing, she was forced to leave the courthouse and rush through nearby streets in search of nail polish remover. The experience was deeply stressful, navigating an unfamiliar area, racing against time, and facing the anxiety of potentially missing an important hearing. She ultimately returned just in time to remove the nail polish and attend the session.

Although she ultimately managed to carry out her duties, the lawyer emphasized the emotional toll such incidents take. “I’ve been a lawyer for over 20 years,” she said. “That experience gave me the confidence and resilience to manage the situation and still defend my client effectively. But imagine how a young, inexperienced lawyer would have coped in that moment—possibly missing their hearing, losing credibility, or breaking down under the pressure.” This example illustrates how gender-based dress codes not only undermine women lawyers’ dignity but also impose arbitrary obstacles that can interfere with their professional performance and access to justice.

The situation has further deteriorated with the issuance of new supervisory directives and the establishment of the General Directorate of Supervision over Lawyers within the Judiciary, which enforces mandatory *hijab* standards even in virtual spaces and social media platforms. These policies, which mandate ideological and appearance-based compliance, undermine the independence of the legal profession and subject female lawyers to heightened scrutiny, disproportionate enforcement, and discriminatory practices.

As a result, women in the legal field are systematically deprived of equal professional opportunities, facing a pervasive climate of institutional pressure, exclusion, and intimidation.

Furthermore, the Islamic Republic of Iran has introduced the so-called *Hijab and Chastity Law*,⁶ which—for the first time—formally regulates the dress code of female lawyers in legal terms, using phrases such as “appropriate covering” and “*Shari’a-compliant hijab*” as binding conditions for access to courtrooms. Although this law has been passed and finalized, it has not yet been enacted by the President. Reports suggest that it may instead be signed into law by the Speaker of Parliament, following the President’s refusal to enforce it. Under Article 30, Clause 6, the judiciary is instructed to prevent female lawyers who do not observe “appropriate *hijab*” from entering courtrooms.

In addition to state enforcement, certain bar associations have independently imposed dress code restrictions. For example, the Yazd Bar Association issued a notice warning female lawyers to comply with specific dress and appearance standards when entering judicial complexes. This development reveals the existence of internal institutional restrictions within the legal profession itself, further exacerbating the challenges faced by female lawyers.

UN human rights experts have publicly referred to these measures, particularly the *Hijab and Chastity Law*, as a form of “gender apartheid,”⁷ underscoring the severity of state and institutional policies aimed at diminishing women’s presence and participation in both the public and professional spheres.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The legal profession in Iran, as one of the fundamental pillars of justice and the rule of law, has faced a multitude of challenges in recent decades. These challenges range from structural limitations and state interference in the independence of bar associations to economic, security, and social pressures. A closer examination of these issues reveals that the independence of the legal profession is not only vital for lawyers themselves but also essential for protecting citizens' rights and maintaining balance within the criminal justice system.

Among the most serious threats is the security-related repression targeting lawyers, particularly those who defend citizens in political and security cases. Arrests, threats, disbarment, and other forms of intimidation highlight the grave obstacles to fair trial guarantees and effective legal representation. Female lawyers, in particular, face additional barriers stemming from mandatory dress codes and institutionalized gender bias, which further restrict their ability to work freely and safely. In parallel, state interference in the affairs of bar associations and the establishment of parallel institutions, such as the Judicial Centre for Advisors,

have severely eroded the institutional autonomy of the legal profession in Iran.

Despite these severe challenges, Iranian lawyers continue to demonstrate resilience, courage, and an unwavering commitment to defending human rights and justice. However, addressing the systematic suppression of the legal profession requires coordinated, sustained, and multilateral action. Such efforts must involve not only Iranian lawyers and bar associations, but also the international community, human rights organizations, United Nations human rights bodies, states, and global legal advocacy networks.

Sustained international oversight, documentation, and pressure, combined with solidarity among lawyers inside and outside Iran, constitute an effective strategy to help restore the independence and integrity of the legal profession. The preservation of this independence is not merely a professional concern — it is a critical necessity for the protection of fundamental rights, the enforcement of justice, and the promotion of the rule of law in Iranian society.

Chapter 5

Recommendations

Given the current circumstances surrounding the legal profession and the situation of lawyers in Iran, a range of legal, structural, economic, and cultural reforms are urgently needed. Legal and structural reforms should prioritize abolishing or reforming laws and regulations that undermine the independence of lawyers and bar associations, including:

- The 1997 *Law on the Conditions of Selection of Judges (Qānun-e Sharāyet-e Entekhāb-e Quoazzāt)* – which formally restricts judgeship to men and institutionalizes gender-based exclusion.
- The 1997 *Law on the Qualifications for Obtaining a Lawyer's License (Qānun-e Sharāyet-e Akhz-e Parvāne-ye Vekālat)* – particularly Article 2 and its Notes, which subject candidates to political, religious, and ideological vetting by security agencies.
- Note 1 of Article 4 of the 1997 Law, which grants the High Disciplinary Court of Judges authority over bar association board elections, undermining self-governance.
- Article 187 of the Third Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan Act (2000) (*Qānun-e Barnāme-ye Sevvom-e Tose'e-ye Eqtesādī, Ejtemā'ī va Farhangī*) – which created the Centre for Legal Advisors of the Judiciary, a parallel “bar” institution under judicial control.
- The 2015 Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (*Qānun-e Āyīn-e Dādrāsī-ye Kayfārī*) – which limits defendants' right to counsel by restricting representation in political and security cases to lawyers pre-approved by the judiciary.
- The 2021 *Executive Bylaw of the Legal Bill on the Independence of the Bar Association (Āyīn-nāmehe-ye Ejra'i-ye Lāyehe-ye Esteqlāl-e Kānun-e Vokālā)* – which expanded judicial control over licensing, training, elections, and disciplinary measures.
- The 2023 *Bill on Supporting the Culture of Hijab and Chastity (Lāyehe-ye Hemāyat az Farhang-e 'Eḡāf va Hejāb)* – particularly Article 30(6), which prohibits female lawyers without “appropriate hijab” from entering courtrooms.

In parallel, new legislation must be introduced to safeguard the job security, professional integrity, and personal safety of lawyers, in accordance with Articles 14 and 16 of the UN *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*, which guarantee that lawyers are able to perform their functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment, or improper interference and that their

security is protected when threatened as a result of their professional duties.

Economically, fair and transparent mechanisms for calculating lawyers' income taxes are crucial, along with restructuring and strengthening of the Lawyers' Support Fund to ensure adequate protection during periods of illness, retirement, or financial hardship. Beyond financial reforms, raising public awareness, shifting societal narratives, and fostering cultural change around the role of lawyers are critical steps toward restoring public trust and reaffirming the importance of the legal profession in upholding justice and the rule of law.

However, it is important to recognize that many of the challenges confronting lawyers in Iran stem directly from the political structure, restrictive State policies, and the absence of meaningful reform initiatives. Given the lack of genuine political will among authorities to improve conditions, broad structural reforms may not be immediately practical under current circumstances. Therefore, while long-term change remains essential, the immediate focus must shift to feasible, short-term solutions that can be pursued within existing constraints. These include relying on practical tools, strengthening social and professional solidarity, and leveraging international attention and pressure to support lawyers' rights. The recommendations in the following section highlight these pragmatic strategies, reflecting the realities of Iran's current legal and political environment.

5.1 Short-term and Practical Measures within the Existing Framework

In light of the current political and institutional limitations in Iran, it is crucial to focus on short-term and practical measures that can realistically be implemented within the existing legal and structural framework. These measures aim to improve conditions for lawyers and bar associations without requiring systemic reforms that are, for now, unattainable.

A) Strengthening Solidarity among Lawyers and Bar Associations

A key priority is strengthening solidarity among lawyers and bar associations. This involves establishing domestic support networks to foster unity, reduce individual vulnerability, and enable collective responses to external pressures. Internal

mechanisms such as support committees or human rights commissions can be created within bar associations to document and follow up on violations of lawyers' rights and privileges. These bodies could play an essential role in monitoring, recording, and reporting abuses, while also raising awareness through both domestic and international media platforms to amplify accountability and visibility.

B) Utilizing Existing Capacities

Another essential strategy is to maximize the use of existing legal capacities. Lawyers should actively invoke constitutional principles and procedural laws to defend their rights before courts and supervisory bodies. At the same time, strengthening legal education and awareness among lawyers, particularly regarding their professional rights and responsibilities, is vital. This can be achieved through training programmes, workshops, and knowledge-sharing initiatives designed to build collective capacity and confidence in asserting their rights.

C) Promoting Cultural Changes and Media Outreach

Improving cultural perceptions and enhancing media outreach are essential for creating a positive public narrative and building broader support for lawyers and bar associations. This includes raising public awareness about the role and responsibilities of defence lawyers, particularly the importance of their independence, in upholding justice and protecting citizens' rights. Educational initiatives, media engagement, and awareness campaigns across both traditional and digital platforms can help counter negative narratives and highlight the crucial function of legal advocacy in advancing access to justice and accountability in Iran.

5.2 Long-term Structural and Systemic Measures for the Future

In addition to recommending concrete ways to address urgent challenges in the short-term, it is equally important to prepare for a future transitional period by taking foundational steps that will strengthen the legal profession in the long term. These measures should focus on building trust in resilient legal institutions, supporting structural reforms, and reinforcing the social and professional role of lawyers in a post-authoritarian context.

A) Institutional Development at the International Level

A key priority is to strengthen institutional development at the international level. This includes fostering collaboration with the United Nations, international organizations promoting access to justice, and global bar associations to establish supportive networks and oversight mechanisms for the protection of lawyers' rights in Iran. Exiled Iranian lawyers can also play a crucial role by building networks and creating specialized bodies to monitor and document the situation of lawyers inside the country. Such entities can provide essential support, advocate for international action, and serve as a bridge between global legal institutions and the Iranian legal community.

B) Reforming the Legal Framework

Another crucial step is the reform of Iran's legal framework in anticipation of a transition to democracy. These efforts should include preparing comprehensive analyses and proposals for legal reforms that guarantee the independence of bar associations and the legal profession more broadly, secure the right to free and unhindered access to legal representation, and ensure the security of tenure and protection of lawyers under the law. Such reforms will be central to restoring public trust, promoting accountability, and embedding justice and equality in Iran's future legal order.

C) Strengthening the Status of Lawyers in Society

Equally important is strengthening the public image and narrative surrounding the critical role of lawyers in Iranian society, both domestically and internationally. This can be achieved through media platforms that highlight and share success stories of lawyers who have played key roles in defending human rights, thereby helping to rebuild public trust in the legal profession. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on promoting professional ethics and transparency within the legal community to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of lawyers in the eyes of the public. These initiatives will not only elevate the standing of the legal profession but also lay the groundwork for a more just, and independent legal system in Iran's future.

Notes and References

- 1 <https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/09/iran-dispatch-putting-the-iranian-bar-association-under-the-supervision-of-the-ministry-of-economy-will-destroy-the-independence-of-lawyers/>
- 2 <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/more-than-12-000-lawyers-in-iran-reject-move-to-dismantle-bar-association/30590110.html>
- 3 Article 33 (English Translation of the *Judiciary Draft Bill on Attorneyship*): <https://iranhrdc.org/english-translation-of-the-judiciary-draft-bill-on-attorneyship/>
- 4 Article 1 of the 1955 *Law on the Independence of the Bar Association* (still in force) opens unequivocally: “The Bar Association is an independent body with legal personality ...”. This provision explicitly situates the Bar outside the executive and judicial branches and is the main textual basis for the claim that Iranian statutes, on paper, still proclaim professional independence.
- 5 The official website of the Centre (www.23055.ir), is not accessible from outside Iran. However, information about the Centre is available at <https://hadnegar.com/lawyers-center/>.
- 6 The law referred to here is the 2023 “*Bill to Support the Culture of Hijab and Chastity*” (Lāyehe-ye Hemāyat az Farhang-e ‘Efāf va Hejāb), a highly controversial piece of legislation criticized by human rights groups for codifying gender discrimination and expanding state surveillance and enforcement of compulsory hijab, including against female professionals such as lawyers.
- 7 On 1 September 2023, a group of UN human rights experts issued a press release stating that Iran’s proposed *Hijab and Chastity Law* “*could be described as a form of gender apartheid*, as authorities appear to be governing through systemic discrimination with the intention of suppressing women and girls into total submission...”.



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