



Iran: Human Rights

United States Department of State

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The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic republic established after the 1979 adoption of a constitution by popular referendum. The constitution, amended in 1989, created a political system based on the concept in Shia Islam of velayat-e faqih (“guardianship of the jurist” or “rule by the jurisprudent”). Shia clergy, most notably the “supreme jurisprudent” (or supreme leader), and political leaders vetted by the clergy-dominated key power structures. While mechanisms for popular election exist within the structure of the state, the supreme leader directly controlled the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government as well as the armed forces. The supreme leader also indirectly controlled internal security forces and other key institutions. Since 1989 the supreme leader has been Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Despite high popular participation in the country’s June 14 presidential election, candidate vetting conducted by unelected bodies based on arbitrary criteria, as well as limitations on civil society, print and electronic media, and election monitoring by credible nongovernmental observers, continued to undermine the freedom and fairness of the electoral system. Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Security forces frequently committed human rights abuses. The most egregious human rights problems were the government’s manipulation of the electoral process, which severely limited citizens’ right to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; restrictions on civil liberties, including the freedoms of assembly, speech, and press; and disregard for the physical integrity of persons whom it arbitrarily and unlawfully detained, tortured, or killed. Other reported human rights problems included: disappearances; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including judicially sanctioned amputation and flogging; politically motivated violence and repression, such as beatings and rape; harsh and life-threatening conditions in detention and prison facilities, with instances of deaths in custody; arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detention, sometimes incommunicado; continued impunity of security forces; denial of fair public trials, sometimes resulting in executions without due process; the lack of an independent judiciary; political prisoners and detainees; ineffective implementation of civil judicial procedures and remedies; arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, and correspondence; severe restrictions on freedoms of speech (including via the internet) and press; harassment of journalists; censorship and media content restrictions; severe restrictions on academic freedom; severe restrictions on the freedoms of assembly, association, and religion; some restrictions on freedom of movement; official corruption and lack of government transparency; constraints on investigations by international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) into alleged violations of human rights; legal and societal discrimination and violence against women, children, ethnic and religious minorities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons based on perceived sexual orientation and gender identity; incitement to anti-Semitism; trafficking in persons; and severe restrictions on the exercise of labor rights.

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