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Iran: Crackdown on Independent Lawyers



 **IRAN HRM**
Human Rights Monitor

Arrests, Prosecution, Professional Sanctions and Restrictions on Legal Representation (2024–2026)

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report examines the repression of independent lawyers in Iran between January 2024 and June 2026. It documents patterns of arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, professional sanctions, restrictions on legal practice, and limitations on access to independent legal representation in political and security-related cases.

The report is based on documented cases involving lawyers, judicial proceedings, public statements, legal documents, reports issued by United Nations human rights mechanisms, and information gathered from publicly available sources concerning the legal profession in Iran.

Attention is devoted to the impact of the nationwide protests of 2025 on access to legal counsel, the implementation of Article 48 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure, increasing pressure on Bar Associations, and the broader consequences of restrictions on the right to defense.

The report argues that the targeting of independent lawyers has evolved beyond isolated incidents and has become part of a broader mechanism aimed at controlling legal representation in political and security-related cases. The findings presented in this report are intended to contribute to international discussions concerning fair trial guarantees, the independence of the legal profession, access to justice, and the protection of fundamental rights in Iran.

Executive Summary

Between January 2024 and June 2026, independent lawyers across Iran faced a sustained pattern of arrests, prosecutions, imprisonment, professional sanctions, travel restrictions, and interference with their legal practice. The cases documented in this report indicate that these measures were not isolated incidents targeting individual lawyers but formed part of a broader effort to restrict independent legal representation in political and security-related cases.

The report documents actions against lawyers in multiple cities, including Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Rasht, Ahvaz, Tabriz, Yazd, Ilam, and Jiroft. Many of the affected lawyers represented political prisoners, protesters, journalists, women's rights advocates, labor activists, ethnic and religious minorities, justice-seeking families, and other individuals involved in cases considered politically sensitive by the authorities.

The report identifies three interconnected mechanisms through which restrictions on independent legal defense have expanded: the prosecution and professional exclusion of independent lawyers, increasing pressure on Bar Associations and legal institutions, and the implementation of Article 48 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure, which limits defendants' ability to choose legal counsel in security-related cases.

Attention is devoted to the consequences of the nationwide protests of 2025. As mass arrests increased, access to independent legal representation became increasingly restricted. Available information indicates that many detainees encountered barriers to legal counsel, while lawyers themselves faced obstacles in accessing clients, reviewing case files, and participating effectively in judicial proceedings.

The report further examines concerns raised by United Nations human rights mechanisms, the International Bar Association, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, Lawyers for Lawyers, and other professional legal organizations regarding the independence of the legal profession and the protection of fair trial rights in Iran.

The findings suggest that the restriction of independent legal representation has become an important component of a broader system of political repression. Rather than eliminating legal defense outright, existing mechanisms increasingly operate to restrict, direct, and control access to independent counsel, particularly in cases involving political dissent, public protest, and human rights advocacy.

This report concludes that the protection of lawyers and the independence of the legal profession remain essential safeguards for access to justice, fair trial guarantees, and the protection of fundamental rights in Iran.

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PART I

FROM ARRESTS TO HIGH-PROFILE CASES

*“When lawyers become targets of prosecution,
the right to defense itself comes under threat.”*

Iran: Independent Lawyers Under Pressure

Part 1

From Arrests to High-Profile Cases

In the months following the nationwide protests of 2025, a new wave of arrests, summonses, criminal prosecutions, and professional restrictions targeted lawyers across Iran. From Shiraz and Mashhad to Tehran, Rasht, Tabriz, Ahvaz, Ilam, Jiroft, and Yazd, attorneys representing protesters, political prisoners, civil society activists, justice-seeking families, and victims of human rights violations increasingly became the subjects of security-related cases themselves.

A review of documented cases between January 2024 and June 2026 indicates that the repression of independent lawyers has evolved beyond the prosecution of a small number of prominent attorneys. It has become a structural policy aimed at controlling the right to legal defense. This policy advances through three parallel mechanisms: the exclusion of independent lawyers from political and security-related cases, the weakening of the independence of the Bar Association, and restrictions on the right to choose legal counsel through Article 48 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure.

Independent estimates indicate that more than 50,000 individuals were detained during the nationwide protests of 2025. At the same time, United Nations human rights experts and mechanisms expressed concern regarding widespread arbitrary arrests, denial of access to legal counsel, prolonged detention in security facilities, and reports of enforced disappearances. In such circumstances, access to independent legal representation has become one of the most important safeguards for the protection of detainees' fundamental rights.

Through an examination of the cases of Mohammad Najafi, Taher Naghavi, Mohammadreza Faghihi, Khosrow Alikordi, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Shima Ghoosheh, Bahar Sahraeian, Elham Zeraatpisheh, and dozens of other lawyers, this report demonstrates that the repression of independent legal professionals has become an integral component of the broader architecture of political repression in Iran. The objective is not merely to punish individual lawyers. Rather, it is to restrict the possibility of independent legal defense in political and security-related cases and to leave society without effective legal protection at moments when citizens need it most.

Chapter One: Mapping the Repression

An examination of cases documented between January 2024 and June 2026 shows that pressure on lawyers in Iran is no longer confined to isolated incidents. Across multiple cities, a recurring pattern has emerged involving summonses, arrests, prosecutions, professional sanctions, and security-related pressure against lawyers engaged in political, civil, and human rights cases.

The geographical spread of these cases, extending from Mashhad and Shiraz to Rasht, Tehran, Ahvaz, Tabriz, Ilam, Yazd, and Jiroft, indicates that the legal profession has increasingly become a primary target of the country's security and judicial apparatus.

Mashhad: A Case Against the Legal Community

In Mashhad, at least 17 lawyers were targeted in a collective prosecution. Several received prison sentences and financial penalties. A significant portion of the allegations concerned social media

activity and public commentary regarding protest-related cases. This case represents one of the most extensive collective actions against lawyers in recent years.

Rasht: The Securitization of Professional Activity

In Gilan Province, at least six lawyers were prosecuted on charges including “propaganda against the state,” “assembly and collusion against national security,” and “spreading false information.” Reports indicate that even private communications on social media platforms were used as evidence in criminal proceedings.

Shiraz: A Wave of Coordinated Arrests

In Shiraz, the arrests of Mohammad Hadi Jafarpour, Mehdi Ansari, Jafar Keshavarz, Jafar Zarei, Sepideh Taheri, and several other lawyers and trainee attorneys constituted one of the largest waves of lawyer arrests recorded in a single city. Some were released only after posting substantial bail, while their cases remain open.

Yazd: Mass Summonses

In Yazd, at least 20 lawyers were summoned by judicial and security authorities. The scale of these summonses demonstrated that the pressure was no longer directed solely at specific individuals but increasingly targeted the legal profession.

Tehran, Tabriz, Ahvaz, Jiroft, and Ilam

In Tehran, Shima Ghoosheh was arrested and transferred to Ward 209 of Evin Prison. In Tabriz, Abolfazl Ranjbari faced security-related charges. In Ahvaz, Ebrahim Parsamehr and Alireza Farzaneh Jajarmi were arrested. In Jiroft, Teymour Salari remained in detention. In Ilam, Hossein Shokri was subjected to judicial prosecution.

Viewed individually, each of these cases may appear to be an isolated event. Considered collectively, however, they reveal a different picture: a nationwide policy in which independent lawyers, particularly those involved in political, human rights, and protest-related cases, have themselves become targets of the security and judicial authorities.

These developments raise a fundamental question: why has pressure on independent lawyers intensified at the same time as political and security-related arrests have increased? The answer lies in the years preceding this latest wave, when actions against a limited number of prominent lawyers gradually evolved into a structural model for controlling the right to defense.

Chapter Two: From Individual Cases to Networked Repression

The wave of arrests targeting lawyers in 2025 and 2026 did not emerge in isolation. Before the collective cases in Mashhad, Rasht, Shiraz, and Yazd, the contours of this policy were already visible in actions against lawyers representing political prisoners, protesters, civil society activists, and justice-seeking families.

Before examining the most significant cases, a fundamental question must be addressed: what types of lawyers have been disproportionately subjected to prosecution and pressure?

A review of documented cases demonstrates that most targeted lawyers worked in fields the authorities considered politically sensitive or security related. These included representation of

political prisoners, protesters, justice-seeking families, journalists, women's rights activists, labor activists, ethnic and religious minorities, and victims of human rights violations.

This pattern indicates that the pressure has not been randomly distributed. The target is not merely a group of well-known attorneys. Rather, it is a particular model of legal practice; one that seeks to create a balance between citizens and political power through independent representation.

Arak: The Lawyer Who Investigated a Death in Custody

Mohammad Najafi, one of Iran's best-known defenders of political prisoners, faced a series of judicial and security cases after pursuing accountability in the death-in-custody case of Vahid Heydari. Years of imprisonment, additional sentences imposed while incarcerated, and ultimately the permanent revocation of his law license transformed his case into one of the clearest examples of the repression of independent lawyers in Iran.

Tehran: A Lawyer Defending Political Prisoners

Taher Naghavi, a lawyer representing political prisoners and advocating for the rights of ethnic minorities, was arrested in February 2024. He was later sentenced to six years' imprisonment, deprivation of social rights, and a travel ban. Multiple reports also documented denial of medical treatment and concerns regarding his prison conditions.

Mashhad: Counsel for Justice-Seeking Families

Khosrow Alikordi, lawyer for the family of Abolfazl Adinehzadeh and several political prisoners, faced imprisonment, internal exile, professional restrictions, travel bans, and limitations on his online activities. His case was among the earliest examples combining criminal punishment with professional exclusion.

Tehran: Suspension and Professional Exclusion

Mohammadreza Faghihi, a board member of the Association for the Defense of Prisoners' Rights, was sentenced to five years in prison and a two-year suspension of his law license. In this case as well, the punishment extended beyond imprisonment and directly targeted his ability to continue practicing law.

At first glance, these cases appeared unrelated. They occurred in different cities, involved different charges, and were initiated at different times.

Yet a closer examination reveals a common pattern.

Nearly all of these lawyers were involved in cases that the authorities regarded as "security-related," including cases involving political prisoners, protesters, justice-seeking families, civil society activists, women's rights defenders, and ethnic and religious minorities.












In other words, what came under attack was not merely an individual lawyer. Rather, it was a particular form of legal advocacy. Lawyers were tolerated only so long as their work remained within boundaries acceptable to the authorities. Once legal representation became a means of documenting human rights violations, challenging unfair proceedings, or defending victims of repression, the lawyers themselves became targets of prosecution. At this stage, repression remained largely individualized. However, these cases laid the groundwork for the next phase, in which pressure was









no longer directed solely at a handful of prominent lawyers but increasingly targeted legal networks across multiple cities simultaneously.





As protests expanded and the number of detainees increased, the authorities' interest in controlling the defense process also grew. It was at this point that the repression of independent lawyers became intertwined with legal and institutional mechanisms, giving rise to a process that can be described as the “engineering of the right to defense.”

Table 1. Independent Lawyers Subjected to Arrest, Prosecution, or Professional Sanctions in Iran (2024–2026)

Photo	Lawyer
	Ebrahim Parsamehr
	Abolfazl Ranjbari
	Estareh Ansari
	Amir Bahadorifar
	Elham Zeraatpisheh
	Bahar Sahrayian
	Behnam Nezhadi

	Teymour Salari
	Jafar Zarei
	Jafar Keshavarz
	Javad Alikordi
	Hossein Shokri
	Dariush Ganjehpour
	Zohreh Javani
	Sepideh Taheri
	Mohammadreza Faghihi
	Mehdi Razavifard
	Mehdi Karimi

	Shohreh Haddadian
	Sima Ghousheh
	Taher Naqavi
	Alireza Farzaneh Jajarmi
	Enayatollah Keramati
	Fatemeh Rohandeh
	Mohammad Tarighat Esfanjani
	Mohammad Najafi
	Mohammad Hadi Jafarpour
	Mahmoud Taravat-Roy
	Mohsen Darginnejad

	Masoud Ahmadian
	Masoud Shirmardi Shahghasemi
	Nazanin Salari
	Nasrin Sotoudeh

From Individual Cases to a Structural Pattern

The list of lawyers arrested, summoned, prosecuted, or professionally restricted is more than a collection of names. It demonstrates that pressure on Iran's legal community has not been limited to a few cities, a handful of cases, or several prominent figures.

A review of these cases reveals a consistent pattern: a substantial proportion of the targeted lawyers represented political prisoners, protesters, justice-seeking families, civil society activists, women's rights defenders, and victims of human rights violations. For this reason, these cases cannot be understood merely as a series of unrelated judicial proceedings.

The central question is what connects these seemingly separate cases. Are they isolated incidents, or do they reflect a structural policy aimed at controlling the right to defense and restricting citizens' access to independent legal representation?

The second part of this report examines the legal and institutional mechanisms underpinning this process, including Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, restrictions on the right to choose counsel, and what many legal scholars describe as the systematic “engineering of the right to defense.”

PART II

FROM ARTICLE 48 TO THE ENGINEERING OF THE RIGHT TO DEFENSE

*“The right to choose one’s lawyer is not a procedural privilege;
it is a cornerstone of a fair trial.”*

Iran: Independent Lawyers Under Pressure

Part 2

From Article 48 to the Engineering of the Right to Defense

In the first part of this report, the cases of dozens of lawyers who were arrested, summoned, prosecuted, or deprived of their professional rights were examined. These cases demonstrated that pressure on Iran's legal community has evolved beyond isolated incidents and has become a nationwide pattern.

Yet a fundamental question remains: What connects these seemingly disparate cases? Are they merely a collection of separate security-related actions, or do they form part of a broader mechanism designed to control the right to defense in political and security-related cases?

This second part examines the role of Article 48 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure, restrictions on the right to choose legal counsel, and what many legal experts have described as the "engineering of the right to defense."

Chapter Three: Engineering the Right to Defense in Iran

A review of cases involving Iranian lawyers in recent years demonstrates that their arrests, summonses, and professional sanctions cannot be understood simply as a series of unrelated incidents. What has emerged across cities including Mashhad, Rasht, Shiraz, Tehran, Tabriz, and Ahvaz points to the development of a broader mechanism aimed at controlling legal defense in political and security-related cases.

Mai Sato, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, has repeatedly warned in her reports and communications about increasing pressure on independent lawyers and the denial of detainees' access to counsel of their own choosing. She has emphasized that lawyers who sought to defend protesters or document violations of their rights have faced summonses, arrests, threats, and judicial prosecution.

These concerns extend beyond the situation of a handful of lawyers. What has taken shape in Iran is a multi-layered mechanism for controlling the right to defense; one in which the arrest of lawyers, professional restrictions, Article 48, interference in the independence of the Bar Association, and limitations on access to case files all function as components of a single policy.

In an independent judicial system, lawyers play a vital role in maintaining a balance between state power and the rights of the accused. In many political and security-related cases in Iran, however, independent lawyers are viewed as obstacles to the security apparatus because they can document allegations of torture, challenge coerced confessions, record procedural violations during interrogations, and subject judicial proceedings to public scrutiny.

For this reason, pressure on lawyers cannot be analyzed separately from pressure on defendants. As the political climate becomes increasingly securitized and the number of detainees grows, efforts to control the defense process intensify as well. The objective is not merely to punish a number of lawyers; it is to limit society's capacity to access independent legal representation.

This trend is reflected most clearly in Article 48 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure; a provision that has become one of the principal tools for restricting political and security-related defendants' access to independent lawyers in recent years.

3.1. Article 48: Legalizing Restrictions on the Right to Defense

In many political and security-related cases, the denial of independent legal representation begins not in detention centers or courtrooms but within the legal structure of the case itself. The primary instrument enabling this process is Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Under this provision, individuals accused of offenses related to national security or certain other specified crimes may, during the preliminary investigation stage, choose legal counsel only from a list approved by the Head of the Judiciary. In practice, this restriction constitutes one of the most significant exceptions to the right to freely choose legal representation within Iran's legal system.

Over the past several years, Article 48 has become one of the most controversial legal provisions in Iran. Critics argue that it has effectively created two separate systems of defense: one for ordinary criminal cases and another for political and security-related cases. As a result, defendants are deprived of the right to freely choose their lawyer precisely in those cases where independent legal representation is most essential.

The significance of this issue became even more pronounced following the nationwide protests of 2025. As the number of detainees increased and large numbers of security-related cases were opened, access to legal counsel emerged as one of the central areas of concern. During this period, numerous reports documented the denial of access to lawyers of choice, delays in lawyer-client meetings, and restrictions on lawyers' access to case files.

The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission also noted in its reports that defendants in security-related cases have access only to lawyers approved by the judiciary during the investigative phase, and that this situation continues to affect judicial proceedings. United Nations Special Rapporteurs have likewise expressed concern regarding the compatibility of Article 48 with international fair trial standards.

The issue, however, extends beyond restrictions on choosing legal counsel. Many independent lawyers and international legal organizations argue that this mechanism has gradually replaced independent defense with controlled defense. In other words, while independent lawyers face arrest, suspension of their licenses, professional exclusion, or security-related pressure, the role of judiciary-approved lawyers in sensitive cases continues to expand.

This parallel development is not coincidental. The arrest of independent lawyers on the one hand and restrictions on the right to choose counsel on the other represent two dimensions of the same policy. The ultimate objective is to reduce the presence of independent legal observers during the most critical stages of political and security-related proceedings.

Under such circumstances, defendants face not only security agencies, investigators, and prosecutors but also restrictions on choosing their own legal representatives from the very beginning of the judicial process. For this reason, many international legal bodies view Article 48 not merely as a legal provision but as part of a broader mechanism for restricting the right to defense in Iran.

3.2. From Independent Lawyers to Article 48 Lawyers: Replacing Independent Defense with Controlled Defense

The arrest of independent lawyers, restrictions on the right to choose counsel, and the implementation of Article 48 may appear to be separate issues. In practice, however, they form components of a single mechanism that increases state control over legal defense in political and security-related cases.

In recent years, dozens of lawyers have faced arrest, imprisonment, suspension of their licenses, professional bans, or other restrictions because they represented political prisoners, protesters, journalists, women's rights activists, labor activists, ethnic and religious minorities, and justice-seeking families. At the same time, defendants in security-related cases have encountered growing restrictions on their ability to choose legal counsel.

As the number of independent lawyers active in political cases declines, defendants become increasingly dependent on the limited pool of lawyers approved by the judiciary. In this way, the repression of independent lawyers and restrictions on the choice of counsel reinforce one another.

One of the principal instruments of this process is the system commonly known as "Article 48 lawyers." Under this framework, defendants in security-related cases may select legal counsel during the investigative stage only from a list approved by the judiciary. Consequently, the right to freely choose a lawyer, a fundamental component of a fair trial, is restricted in the most sensitive categories of cases.

Critics have warned for years that this mechanism was designed not to safeguard the right to defense but to control it. When defendants lose the ability to choose an independent and trusted lawyer, the balance between the citizen and the security apparatus is fundamentally altered.

These criticisms have not come solely from human rights advocates. Some lawyers themselves have publicly criticized the conduct of Article 48 lawyers. In one instance, a lawyer wrote in reference to the conduct of an Article 48 lawyer: "You accepted the disgrace of being an Article 48 lawyer; at the very least, be honorable enough not to lie."

Critics further argue that some Article 48 lawyers, because of structural ties to judicial and security institutions, lack the professional independence necessary to effectively represent political defendants. According to these critics, in certain cases the role of such lawyers has resembled the legitimization of judicial proceedings more than the effective defense of defendants' rights.

Concerns regarding this mechanism intensified following the nationwide protests of 2025. Multiple reports indicate that, in some cases, even Article 48 lawyers were denied full access to case files and supporting documentation. In Mashhad, some of these lawyers encountered restrictions on accepting representation and accessing case materials. Similar reports emerged from Tehran concerning limitations on access to evidence.

These developments demonstrate that the issue extends beyond restrictions on the choice of counsel. In certain political and security-related cases, limitations have expanded from the selection of lawyers to the defense process itself.

Accordingly, the arrest of independent lawyers, Article 48, and restrictions on access to case files should not be viewed as separate issues. Together, they form a mechanism whose ultimate effect is the restriction of independent legal defense in political and security-related cases.

It is at this point that the concept of the “engineering of the right to defense” acquires practical meaning. Under this model, defense is not eliminated; it is controlled. The appearance of judicial process is maintained, while the capacity for independent legal representation is gradually constrained and managed. As a result, defendants may formally have access to legal counsel while being deprived, in practice, of genuinely independent and effective representation.

The mechanism for restricting the right to defense, however, does not end with Article 48 or limitations on the choice of counsel. In recent years, increasing pressure on the Bar Association and heightened restrictions in cases related to the nationwide protests of 2025 have demonstrated that this process has expanded further. The third part of this report examines the role of the Bar Association, protest-related prosecutions, and the responses of international legal and human rights organizations.

PART III

FROM THE 2025 NATIONWIDE PROTESTS TO THE EROSION OF THE RIGHT TO DEFENSE

*“Periods of mass detention are the moments when independent
legal representation becomes most essential.”*

Iran: Independent Lawyers Under Pressure

Part 3

From the 2025 Nationwide Protests to the Erosion of the Right to Defense

In the first part of this report, the pattern of repression targeting independent lawyers and the most significant cases involving prosecuted attorneys were examined. The second part analyzed the role of Article 48 and other mechanisms used to restrict the right to defense.

The consequences of these policies became most visible in cases related to the nationwide protests of 2025. As the number of detainees increased, restrictions imposed on lawyers intensified. The exclusion of independent lawyers from security-related cases, limitations on access to clients and case files, pressure on the Bar Association, and growing international concern collectively provided a clear picture of how the mechanism for controlling legal defense operates in Iran.

This third part examines that critical stage; the point at which the “engineering of the right to defense” moved beyond a legal and institutional framework and revealed its practical consequences in the cases of thousands of detainees.

Chapter Four: The Bar Association; From an Independent Institution to the Last Bastion of Legal Independence

Alongside the arrest and prosecution of independent lawyers, one of the most significant dimensions of pressure on Iran’s legal community has been the gradual erosion of the independence of Bar Associations. This process has not targeted only individual lawyers or isolated cases; it has increasingly affected the institutional foundations of the legal profession itself.

Under the 1954 Law on the Independence of the Bar Association, Bar Associations are recognized as independent institutions, and lawyers are expected to carry out their professional duties free from government interference. In recent years, however, a series of legal, administrative, and security-related measures has significantly restricted that independence.

Among the most significant developments has been the growing role of the judiciary in overseeing the issuance and renewal of law licenses, as well as the expansion of parallel legal service structures. According to many legal experts, these developments have weakened the independence of the legal profession and increased its dependence on judicial authorities.

Pressure has not been limited to legislation and regulations. In recent years, members of Bar Association boards, prominent lawyers, and professional advocates have also faced summonses, judicial prosecution, and security-related pressure. In some cases, even defending the independence of the Bar Association has been treated as a security issue.

The significance of this trend extends far beyond the legal profession itself. The independence of lawyers and Bar Associations constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for a fair trial. The more this independence is restricted, the less access citizens have to effective legal representation.

For this reason, many legal scholars view pressure on Bar Associations and pressure on independent lawyers as two dimensions of a single policy; one aimed at limiting the capacity for independent legal defense against security and judicial institutions.

Under these circumstances, the Bar Association has become one of the last independent legal institutions in Iran; an institution whose future is directly linked to citizens' ability to access independent legal counsel and enjoy fair trial guarantees.

Chapter Five: The 2025 Nationwide Protests; Where the Engineering of the Right to Defense Became Visible

If the arrest of independent lawyers, Article 48, and pressure on the Bar Association can be understood as separate indicators of a broader policy, then the cases arising from the nationwide protests of 2025 represent the point at which all of these elements converge and reveal how that policy operates in practice.

The nationwide protests of 2025 were accompanied by a wave of mass arrests. Under such circumstances, the families of detainees needed independent legal representation more than ever. Yet information gathered from cases arising during this period indicates that unprecedented restrictions were imposed on lawyers precisely when demand for legal defense was at its highest.

5.1. Lawyers Who Were Never Allowed to Enter the Case

According to information received from multiple cities, no independent lawyers have thus far been able to formally represent individuals accused in so-called security-related cases connected to the nationwide protests and arrests that followed.

This issue is significant for several reasons.

In many previous political cases, authorities sought to restrict the choice of legal counsel but did not entirely deny the presence of lawyers. In cases linked to the 2025 protests, reports indicate that in numerous instances even the initial entry of independent lawyers into proceedings was prevented.

In other words, the issue extended beyond the selection of counsel; access to independent legal representation itself became obstructed.

Some lawyers reported that when attempting to accept representation or inquire about their clients' status, they encountered degrading treatment, insults, threats, or pressure from prosecutors' offices and Revolutionary Courts. In certain cases, lawyers were effectively excluded from proceedings before they could begin providing legal defense.

5.2. The 2025 Protests and Intensified Restrictions on Access to Counsel

The nationwide protests of 2025 not only increased the number of detainees but also intensified existing restrictions on access to legal representation. Reports from protest-related cases indicate that many detainees were denied prompt and effective access to lawyers of their choosing, while judicial proceedings unfolded in an intensely securitized environment.

Independent estimates place the number of individuals detained during the nationwide protests at more than 50,000. At the same time, United Nations experts and human rights mechanisms expressed concern regarding widespread arbitrary arrests, denial of access to legal counsel, prolonged detention in security facilities, and reports of enforced disappearances. They warned that, in many cases, families remained unaware of detainees' whereabouts and that effective access to lawyers or independent oversight of detention and interrogation procedures was absent.

Under such circumstances, the issue of independent lawyers was not merely a professional or occupational concern. In cases involving tens of thousands of detainees, allegations of torture, forced confessions, arbitrary detention, and possible enforced disappearances, access to independent legal counsel became one of the most important safeguards for the protection of fundamental rights. It was precisely during this period that pressure on lawyers, restrictions on access to case files, and the exclusion of independent counsel from judicial proceedings intensified.

A review of cases from this period demonstrates that restrictions stemming from Article 48, pressure on independent lawyers, and barriers to accessing case files operated simultaneously and reinforced one another. As a result, many families found themselves confronting Revolutionary Courts and security institutions while deprived of meaningful access to independent legal defense.

From a human rights perspective, this situation is particularly significant. Allegations of torture, forced confessions, prolonged detention, and violations of defendants' rights often arise precisely during periods when access to legal counsel is most critical. Yet available evidence indicates that restrictions on lawyers have intensified at exactly this stage.

For this reason, the repression of lawyers and restrictions on access to counsel cannot be viewed merely as a byproduct of the protests. Rather, they formed part of a broader mechanism that reduced independent oversight of detention, interrogation, and judicial proceedings.

In practice, the protests of 2025 became the point at which all components of the legal-defense control mechanism were simultaneously visible; from the exclusion of independent lawyers and the application of Article 48 to restrictions on case files and the conduct of trials within a security-dominated environment.

Mashhad: Even Article 48 Lawyers Faced Restrictions

One of the most significant findings concerning protest-related cases emerged from Mashhad.

According to available information, even some lawyers approved under Article 48 encountered serious obstacles in accessing case files and accepting representation.

This finding is significant because Article 48 was originally designed to restrict defendants' choice of counsel and replace independent lawyers with a judiciary-approved list. Yet in some protest-related cases, restrictions extended even beyond that framework.

If even approved lawyers are unable to effectively participate in proceedings, an important question arises:

What is the true purpose of these restrictions?

Is the issue merely the selection of counsel, or is the presence of any meaningful legal defense in sensitive security-related cases being restricted?

Tehran: A Lawyer Exists, but the Case File Is Not Accessible

Similar information emerged from Tehran.

According to available reports, some Article 48 lawyers involved in protest-related cases were denied full access to all documents and evidence contained in case files.

This represents one of the least discussed dimensions of the violation of defense rights in Iran.

Many legal debates focus on the right to choose counsel. Yet access to case files is an inseparable component of effective legal defense. A lawyer who lacks access to the full contents of a file, investigative reports, evidence supporting the charges, and related documentation is effectively deprived of the ability to provide comprehensive representation.

Under such circumstances, the presence of legal counsel risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

Trials Conducted in a Security-Dominated Environment

A review of causes related to the nationwide protests of 2025 indicates that many proceedings were conducted in a heavily securitized atmosphere. Families and lawyers reported a lack of transparency, difficulty obtaining information about cases, restrictions on communication with defendants, and uncertainty surrounding judicial procedures.

In such an environment, the right to defense, which should serve as one of the principal guarantees of a fair trial, is gradually weakened. A defendant who cannot freely choose a lawyer, a lawyer who cannot enter the case, and a lawyer who lacks access to the full case file are all components of the same chain.

From the Repression of Protesters to the Repression of Their Defenders

One defining characteristic of the 2025 nationwide protests was that pressure extended beyond detainees themselves. As arrests increased, pressure also intensified against those capable of defending them.

The arrest of independent lawyers, restrictions on access to clients, implementation of Article 48, and limitations on access to case files collectively formed a mechanism that reduced independent oversight of detention, interrogation, and judicial proceedings.

For this reason, the protests of 2025 can be viewed as the most significant test of the right to defense in recent years; a period in which every component of the legal-defense control mechanism, from the exclusion of independent lawyers to restrictions on access to case files, became simultaneously visible.

Chapter Six: Responses from the Legal Community and International Organizations

The repression of independent lawyers in Iran has not gone unnoticed internationally. In recent years, the United Nations, international legal organizations, and professional bar associations have repeatedly expressed concern regarding the arrests, prosecutions, and restrictions imposed on lawyers in Iran.

A common principle underlies these concerns: lawyers should not be prosecuted or punished for carrying out their professional duties, including the representation of political prisoners, protesters, journalists, civil society activists, or justice-seeking families.

This principle is reflected in international standards governing the independence of the legal profession and in the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

6.1. The United Nations: Warning About the Erosion of Defense Rights in Iran

Between 2024 and 2026, various United Nations mechanisms repeatedly expressed concern regarding the situation of independent lawyers and access to legal counsel in Iran.

Mai Sato, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, highlighted increasing restrictions imposed on lawyers, civil society activists, and political detainees. She warned that many detainees are denied effective access to lawyers of their choosing and expressed concern regarding growing pressure on human rights defenders and individuals documenting human rights violations.

The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission also identified recurring patterns of fair-trial violations, including restrictions on access to counsel, reliance on coerced confessions, denial of family contact, and judicial proceedings that fail to meet international standards.

Likewise, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other human rights mechanisms have repeatedly emphasized that prompt and unhindered access to independent legal counsel is a fundamental component of a fair trial and that depriving defendants of this right may undermine the legitimacy of the entire judicial process.

6.2. The International Legal Community: Defending the Independence of the Legal Profession

In addition to the United Nations, several respected legal and professional organizations have responded to the situation of lawyers in Iran.

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, Lawyers for Lawyers, International Bar Association, and International Commission of Jurists have repeatedly called for an end to the arrest and prosecution of independent lawyers in Iran.

These organizations have emphasized that lawyers should not face prosecution for carrying out their professional responsibilities, including representing political prisoners, protesters, journalists, civil society activists, and justice-seeking families.

A significant portion of these concerns relate to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and the restriction of the right to freely choose legal counsel. In the view of these organizations, both the independence of the legal profession and the right to choose a lawyer are fundamental components of a fair trial, and structural restrictions on these rights undermine the balance between citizens and the judicial system.

6.3. Conflict with International Standards

Pressure on independent lawyers in Iran is not merely a professional issue. It conflicts with a range of international human rights standards, including Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

Under these standards, lawyers must be able to perform their professional duties without threats, intimidation, pressure, or prosecution. Citizens must also enjoy the right to freely choose legal counsel and to have effective access to legal defense.

The cases examined in this report demonstrate a substantial gap between these international standards and the reality in Iran; a gap that became even more apparent following the nationwide protests of 2025.

Conclusion

Engineering the Right to Defense; From Excluding Lawyers to Controlling Judicial Proceedings

A review of documented cases between 2024 and 2026 demonstrates that pressure on independent lawyers in Iran cannot be understood as a collection of isolated incidents or ad hoc decisions.

The arrest of independent lawyers, security-related prosecutions, suspension or revocation of law licenses, restrictions on access to clients, the application of Article 48, limitations on access to case files, and pressure on Bar Associations all form components of a single pattern.

This pattern became particularly visible after the nationwide protests of 2025. At a time when thousands of individuals faced security-related charges and the need for independent legal defense was greater than ever, restrictions imposed on lawyers and defense rights also intensified.

The findings of this report indicate that the objective of these measures is not merely the punishment of a handful of prominent lawyers. Rather, what has occurred in practice is the restriction of society's capacity to access independent legal defense and to maintain legal oversight of security and judicial institutions.

For this reason, the repression of independent lawyers should be understood as part of the broader architecture of political repression in Iran; an architecture in which the control of defendants, the control of information, and the control of legal defense are pursued simultaneously.

The cases of Mohammad Najafi, Taher Naghavi, Khosrow Alikordi, Mohammadreza Faghihi, Shima Ghoosheh, and dozens of other lawyers represent only a portion of this broader pattern. Collective cases in Mashhad, Rasht, Shiraz, and Yazd, together with restrictions imposed in protest-related prosecutions, demonstrate that the repression of lawyers has evolved beyond the prosecution of individuals and has become a structural policy.

Ultimately, developments in Iran during recent years can be understood as an effort to engineer the right to defense; a process in which independent legal representation is not formally abolished but is progressively restricted, directed, and controlled. The consequences of such a process extend beyond lawyers themselves and affect every citizen who relies on independent legal counsel when confronting the judicial system.

IRAN: CRACKDOWN ON INDEPENDENT LAWYERS



Arrests, Professional Restrictions, and the Engineering of the Right to Defense
(2024–2026)

JUNE 2026



Table 2- Documented lawyers and adverse actions

The table below prioritizes cases for which reliable public information is available. Where the reviewed sources do not specify a city, clients, or a later status update, that is stated explicitly rather than inferred.

Lawyer	City	Date of arrest / prosecution / restriction	Charges or professional restrictions	Clients / cases / represented groups	Last publicly documented status
Gelaleh Watandoost	Sanandaj, Kurdistan	Sentenced by 7 Feb. 2024	“Propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic,” “formation or membership of groups aiming to disrupt national security,” and “affiliation with anti-Islamic Republic groups”; sentence of 6 years, 7 months, 20 days	Women’s rights advocate	Sentenced; later status not clarified in the reviewed sources
Fereshteh Tabanian	Not publicly specified in reviewed sources	Sentenced by 11 Mar. 2024	3 months’ imprisonment for “propaganda against the state”; separate case for “membership in groups opposed to the state” reportedly dropped	Defended a street protester facing a death sentence on moharebeh	Sentenced; later status not clarified in the reviewed sources
Mohsen Borhani	Tehran / Qom	Arrested 7 Jul. 2024	“Propaganda against the regime,” “publishing false information with intent to disturb public opinion,” and “actions contrary to the dignity of the clergy”	Targeted after publicly criticizing protest death sentences and the judiciary’s handling of	Served 79 days in prison; released early Oct. 2024 after pardon

Lawyer	City	Date of arrest / prosecution / restriction	Charges or professional restrictions	Clients / cases / represented groups	Last publicly documented status
				protest-related cases, including the “Isfahan House” executions	
Mohammad Seifzadeh	Tehran	Summoned for re-imprisonment in mid-Aug. 2024 ; CCBE letter 23 Aug. 2024	One-year prison sentence for “propaganda against the state” after signing a letter to the UN Secretary-General on executions and repression; repeated enforcement despite serious health concerns	Veteran human rights lawyer; founding member of the Defenders of Human Rights Association	Repeatedly re-summoned despite medical evidence of unfitness for imprisonment
Seyed Mehdi Karimi Farsi	Tehran	One-year sentence upheld; enforcement summons 1 Jan. 2025	“Propaganda against the regime”	Known for defending bar-association independence ; led a July 2023 march protesting judicial interference	Facing enforcement / on the verge of imprisonment in late 2025
Behnam Nezadi	Arak	Conviction and professional ban in 2024; began serving sentence 1 Mar. 2025	Initially one year in prison and two years’ disqualification; on appeal reduced to 4 months’ imprisonment and a 1-year ban on practising law ; separate case for “disclosing confidential information” and “spreading falsehoods”	Public legal educator on judicial misconduct and accountability	Temporarily released on bail 14 Apr. 2025 after retrial acceptance; later rearrest warrant and parallel reaffirmation of conviction
Mehdi Shakibafar	Arak / Saveh	Imprisoned 26 Aug. 2024	Convicted on charges including “propaganda against the regime,” “publishing false information,” and “insulting the Leader”; received an additional ban on practising law	Represented protest detainees; the CSHR/IBAH RI report specifies detainees from the “November 2017 protests”	Temporarily released in early Dec. 2024 under electronic monitoring for medical treatment
Mohammad Najafi	Arak / Evin Prison, Tehran	Additional prison terms imposed in 2024 ; permanent disbarment announced 15 Apr. 2025	Long-term imprisonment on multiple politically motivated charges; additional 2024 sentences linked to an audio message from prison; permanent disbarment by Branch 1 of the High Court of Judges	Represented political prisoners; investigated the death in custody of Vahid Heydari ;	Imprisoned in Evin, in poor health, and permanently disbarred ; sentence exposure reported as

Lawyer	City	Date of arrest / prosecution / restriction	Charges or professional restrictions	Clients / cases / represented groups	Last publicly documented status
				defended protesters and families seeking justice	potentially extending to 2033
Taher Naghavi	Tehran	Arrested 6 Feb. 2024 ; sentenced 20 Oct. 2024 ; appeal upheld by Jan. 2025	“Conspiracy / gathering and collusion against national security” and “propaganda against the State”; 6 years’ imprisonment , 2-year travel ban, deprivation of social and political rights	Represented political prisoners and defended ethnic minorities , especially Azerbaijani Turks	Detained in Evin Prison; serious medical deprivation documented through 2025
Khosrow Alikordi	Mashhad	Sentence upheld Jan. 2024 ; imprisoned 17 Feb. 2024	“Propaganda against the regime”; 1 year in prison, 2 years’ exile, 2-year ban on practising law, 2-year travel ban, 2-year social media ban ; separate 2-year professional prohibition by Bar disciplinary court	Lawyer for Abolfazl Adinezhadeh’s family, Fatemeh Sepehri , and other political prisoners	Released after about 8 months under a semi-open regime; later found dead in Dec. 2025 under suspicious circumstances
Javad Alikordi	Mashhad	Re-convicted 11 Dec. 2024 ; re-arrested 1 Mar. 2025	“Propaganda against the regime”; fine, travel ban, ban on online activity; reactivation of previously suspended prison term	Not publicly specified in the reviewed sources	Released under electronic monitoring on 10 Aug. 2025
Mohammad Reza Faghihi	Tehran	Conviction confirmed 7 Oct. 2024 ; imprisoned 21 Jan. 2025	“Gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against national security”; 5 years’ imprisonment, 2-year suspension of law licence, 2-year ban on political group membership, 2-year travel ban	Represented human rights defenders and political prisoners ; board member of the Prisoners’ Rights Defence Association	Serving a five-year prison sentence in Evin
Abolfazl Ranjbari	Tabriz	Arrested 3 May 2025	Espionage case before Branch 3 of the Tabriz Revolutionary Court; denial of legal counsel, family access, and medication	Defended political activists and ethnic minority activists ; signed a 2022 open letter by 70 jurists on protest abuses	Detained in Tabriz Central Prison according to last public reporting
Ebrahim Parsamehr	Ahvaz / Qaleh-Tol	Arrested 13 Jun. 2025	No formal charges publicly disclosed in last reviewed reports;	Defended Christian converts	Detained in Sheiban Prison without formal

Lawyer	City	Date of arrest / prosecution / restriction	Charges or professional restrictions	Clients / cases / represented groups	Last publicly documented status
			detention linked to a social-media post on the Iran-Israel conflict	and people accused of political or religious offences; had publicly offered free legal representation to protesters in 2022 and was assaulted for it	charges in last public reporting
Babak Eslami Farsani	Arak	Summoned 17 Jul. 2025	“Propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic”	Lawyer for the family of Mehrshad Shahidi , killed during the 2022 protests in Arak	Ongoing judicial case as of Dec. 2025
Saeed Sheikh	Tehran	Convicted in 2025	1 year 6 months’ imprisonment , fine, and 1-year ban from practising law ; authorities linked conviction to online comments and “expressing opinions in cyberspace”	Specific clients not identified in reviewed sources; also had an earlier protest-related case after his October 2022 arrest at a lawyers’ protest	Convicted; later custodial status not clarified in reviewed sources
Nasrin Sotoudeh	Tehran	Re-arrested night of 1–2 Apr. 2026	Charges not publicly clarified in the reviewed sources; arrest accompanied by confiscation of devices	Represented women opposing compulsory hijab, political prisoners, religious minorities, and minors facing the death penalty	Released on bail 13 May 2026
Nazanin Salari	Shiraz	Summoned / tried 6 Jan. 2026 ; sentenced in early Jun. 2026	Charged with “collaborating with hostile states,” “gathering and collusion against national security,” “propaganda against the state”; separate charges concerning “encouraging corruption and prostitution” and	Human rights lawyer; women’s and children’s rights advocate;	Sentenced in Shiraz; acquitted of “cooperating with a hostile state” according to June 2026 public reports

Lawyer	City	Date of arrest / prosecution / restriction	Charges or professional restrictions	Clients / cases / represented groups	Last publicly documented status
			appearing without religious veil; after criticizing anti-protester measures, a new case for “spreading falsehoods”; June 2026 sentence of 3 years’ imprisonment plus 2-year travel ban/passport invalidation	supported protest detainees; resigned from Fars Bar disciplinary court over failure to defend protesters’ rights	
Mahmoud Taravat-Rouy	Shiraz	Long-running case retried 6 Jan. 2026 ; sentenced in early Jun. 2026	June 2026 sentence of 3 years’ imprisonment and 2-year travel ban/passport invalidation ; acquitted of “cooperating with a hostile state”	Human rights lawyer; publicly associated with women’s and children’s rights work	Sentenced in Shiraz; appeal status not publicly clarified in reviewed sources
Masoud Ahmadian	Shiraz	Long-running case retried 6 Jan. 2026 ; sentenced in early Jun. 2026	June 2026 sentence of 3 years’ imprisonment and 2-year travel ban/passport invalidation ; acquitted of “cooperating with a hostile state”	Human rights lawyer; publicly associated with women’s and children’s rights work	Sentenced in Shiraz; appeal status not publicly clarified in reviewed sources

Table 3- A concise timeline underscores the continuity

Date	Development	Why it matters
7 Feb.-23 Aug. 2024	Watandoost sentenced; Tabanian sentenced; Borhani arrested; Seifzadeh re-summoned	Repression already targeted protest lawyers and outspoken legal critics before the late-2025 uprising.
7 Oct. 2024–29 Apr. 2025	Faghihi conviction confirmed; Najafi permanently disbarred; Taher Naghavi’s sentence upheld; Karimi Farsi and Nezadi face enforcement	Individual reprisals fused imprisonment with professional incapacitation.
Early Sept.–Dec. 2025	Collective prosecutions in Rasht/Gilan; Babak Eslami Farsani prosecuted; Khosrow Alikordi dies in suspicious circumstances	Representation of protest families and critical speech triggered group prosecutions and intimidation.
28 Dec. 2025 onward	New nationwide protests spread across all 31 provinces; tens of thousands detained	Access to legal defence became a central battleground.
Jan.–Feb. 2026	Lawyers arrested after stating they would defend detainees or criticizing protest abuses	Protest-related legal defence itself became grounds for arrest.

Date	Development	Why it matters
Apr.-Jun. 2026	Nasrin Sotoudeh re-arrested; Shiraz trio sentenced	The crackdown continued after the peak street mobilization and expanded to older women's-rights and protest-defence networks.

Methodology and Sources Consulted

This report is based on a review of documented cases involving Iranian lawyers between January 2024 and June 2026.

The research examined judicial proceedings, court decisions, public statements, legal documents, reports issued by United Nations human rights mechanisms, statements by international legal organizations, and publicly available information concerning lawyers subjected to arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, professional sanctions, travel restrictions, or other limitations related to their professional activities.

Attention was devoted to lawyers representing political prisoners, protesters, journalists, women's rights advocates, labor activists, ethnic and religious minorities, justice-seeking families, and victims of human rights violations.

Information included in this report was cross-checked against multiple publicly available sources whenever possible. In cases where complete information concerning charges, judicial outcomes, locations, or current status was unavailable, this has been indicated in the report rather than inferred.

The report also reviewed relevant international legal standards, including:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers
- United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary
- Relevant reports and communications issued by United Nations Special Rapporteurs, the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, and other United Nations human rights mechanisms
- Statements and reports issued by international legal organizations, including the International Bar Association (IBA), the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

The purpose of this report is to document patterns affecting the independence of the legal profession, access to justice, and the right to effective legal representation in Iran.

Contact

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