

Iran's War on LGBT Citizens

June 2021



UNITED
AGAINST
NUCLEAR
IRAN

UNITED AGAINST NUCLEAR IRAN

Iran's Islamist regime persecutes and discriminates against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens. Tehran criminalizes and harshly punishes same-sex intercourse, provides no legal protections for LGBT individuals, compels LGBT children to go through brutal "conversion therapy," and pressures gay and lesbian Iranians to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. Consequently, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Iranians are forced to hide their sexual orientation and conceal same-sex romantic relationships in order to avoid arrest, imprisonment, flogging, and even execution.

Islamic Revolution

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his government began systematically oppressing homosexuals upon seizing power in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The new regime quickly and publicly [executed thousands](#), including homosexuals. Khomeini, Iran's first "supreme leader," [justified](#) killing gays as necessary to "eliminate corruption," comparing them to gangrene and claiming the condemned people would otherwise "contaminate others and spread."

Criminalization and Punishment

The Islamic Republic's legal system, including its [Islamic penal code](#), is based on a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. Consensual sexual relations between two men or two women are forbidden. Penetrative intercourse between two men is generally punishable by death for the "passive" party. The "active" party receives capital punishment if he used coercion or is married, and 100 lashes if not. However, if the "active" party is not a Muslim and the "passive" one is, the "active" one receives the death penalty. Non-penetrative intercourse generally is penalized by dozens of lashes. Again, however, if the "active" party is not a Muslim and the "passive" one is, the former is subject to capital punishment. Intercourse between two women incurs a penalty of 100 lashes and is punishable by death upon the fourth offense.

In several instances, Iranian law [does not distinguish between consensual and non-consensual sexual intercourse](#), and therefore the authorities can prosecute both perpetrators and victims of sexual assault.

In June of 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif [defended](#) his government's execution of gay people, stating, "Our society has moral principles. And we live according to these principles. These are moral principles concerning the behavior of people in general. And that means that the law is respected and the law is obeyed."

According to the [U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020](#), Iranian security forces harassed and arrested individuals suspected of being LGBT, in some cases raiding their houses or monitoring their internet activity to gather information. Individuals charged with "sodomy" faced trials where [basic evidentiary standards were not upheld](#). Those persons were also reportedly forced to undergo [anal or "sodomy" examinations while in regime custody](#), which potentially constitutes torture, according to the United Nations and World Health Organization.

In a 2020 [survey](#) of LGBT Iranians conducted by the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network ([6Rang](#)), almost 20 percent of participants claimed to have been victims of violence by police officers, security forces, prosecutors, and/or judges. According to 6Rang, participants "consistently reported humiliating conduct or physical violence by the ordinary police, security forces, and patrol police (moral police) for reasons such as different gender expression, breaching binary dress-code norms, insufficient hijab (Islamic veil) or participating in house parties."

In January 2019, Iranian media [reported](#) that a 31-year-old man was publicly hanged in the southwestern city of Kazeroon based on criminal charges of kidnapping and same-sex rape charges. In 2017, Iran [hanged](#) a man who was 15 years old at the time of his 2012 arrest on charges of murder and same-sex rape. The executed man maintained that his confession was coerced under torture by regime security forces. In 2016, Iran [hanged](#) another man charged with same-sex rape who was 17 years old at the time of his arrest. LGBT activists in Iran have [raised concerns](#) that the regime has used the pretense of other crimes, such as sexual assault, to execute LGBT Iranians.

In December 2019, Rezvaneh Mohammadi, an activist for gender equality, [received a five-year prison sentence](#) for the unprecedented charge of “collusion against national security by seeking to normalize homosexual relations.” The verdict, imposed by then–Tehran Revolutionary Court Judge [Mohammad Moghiseh](#)—known as the “Hanging Judge”—came after the authorities threw Mohammadi into solitary confinement for weeks in the notoriously brutal [Evin Prison](#). Her captors tried to force her—including by [threatening her with sexual assault](#)—to confess to receiving funds to topple the regime.

Iranian law [classifies gay men and transgender women as mentally ill](#) and therefore excludes them from mandatory military service. Military identification cards identify the legal provisions that justify each card-bearer’s exemption. Therefore, the cards effectively “out” those individuals as gay or transgender and thereby leave them vulnerable to violence and discrimination.

Absence of Legal Protections

Iranian law [does not prohibit discrimination](#) based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The state does not recognize same-sex marriages, civil unions, or domestic partnerships.

Conversion Therapy

The [United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) has expressed concern about reports that LGBT children in Iran have been forced to undergo forced “therapy”—including administering electric shocks, hormones, and psychiatric medications—to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. According to 6Rang, the number of semi-governmental and private clinics using “corrective treatment” for LGBT Iranians continues to increase. Such treatment [reportedly](#) includes “electric shock therapy to the hands and genitals... prescription of psychoactive medication, hypnosis, and coercive masturbation to pictures of the opposite sex.”

Pressure for Surgery

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran’s first supreme leader, issued a fatwa (legal opinion) 30 years ago [permitting sex-reassignment surgery](#). Consequently, the Iranian regime permits and partially subsidizes such procedures. However, because Tehran criminalizes and harshly punishes same-sex intercourse and treats same-sex attraction as a disease, the regime’s transgender policy de facto results in the [authorities](#) and [mental-health professionals and families](#) pressuring gay and lesbian cisgender Iranians to undergo unwanted surgery in order to be able to enter into same-sex relationships without fear of arrest and punishment.

Censorship

UNITED
AGAINST
NUCLEAR
IRAN

The regime [censors](#) sources that deal with LGBT matters, including Wikipedia pages and other websites.