

Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei: The New Head of Iran's Judiciary

July 2021



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IRAN

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On July 1, 2021, Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#) [appointed](#) Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, who has made a name for himself as a ruthless enforcer of the Islamic Republic with no regard for human rights, as the new head of the Judiciary branch. He succeeded [Ebrahim Raisi](#) after the latter was elected President of Iran.

Early Life and Occupations

The son of a farmer, Mohseni-Ejei, was born in the rural town of Ezhiyeh in Iran's central Isfahan province in 1956. He ultimately [studied in the Haqqani seminary](#) in the Shiite holy city of Qom, many students of which [joined](#) security and judiciary posts following the 1979 Revolution. While in the Haqqani seminary, he connected with Ali Qodusi, the founder of the Islamic Republic judicial system, who encouraged him to join the Islamic Revolution Court in Tehran.

Mohseni-Ejei proved himself more than willing to eliminate opposition and dissent to the Islamic Republic, as well as to Ali Khamenei, president in the 1980s and future Supreme Leader. Some [accounts](#) list him as "interrogator, torture and judicial official" in the Islamic Revolution Court. In his post in the court, he [helped](#) Asadollah Lajevardi, the former prison warden known as "[the Butcher of Evin Prison](#)," commit crimes and executions. One of the cases Mohseni-Ejei investigated was the 1981 bombing in the Office of the Prime Minister, in which a series of top officials were assassinated. [Ebrahim Raisi](#), the future President of the Islamic Republic, was the lead official on that case. During the course of the trial Taghi Mohammadi, a defendant whom Mohseni-Ejei interrogated, was found dead in his cell. Officials declared Mohammadi's death a suicide. Mohseni-Ejei [joined](#) the notorious Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) upon its [founding](#) in 1984, and it has been reported that he operated as an MOIS interrogator. He is also believed to have [directed](#) the MOIS selection committee from 1984 to 1986, and served as the Judiciary's Representative to MOIS from 1986 to 1988 or early 1989 in addition to [directing](#) the Prosecutor's Office of Economic Affairs from 1988 or early 1989 to 1990. Mohseni-Ejei also allegedly [had](#) an active role in the 1988 mass execution of more than 5,000 political prisoners. Mohseni-Ejei was the prosecutor's representative in the trial of senior [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) official Mehdi Hashemi, who was related through marriage to Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, who was the designated successor of Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini for some time. Hashemi's conviction and execution on charges of treason and murder led to the ultimate removal of Montazeri as Khomeini's successor. As scholar Ali Alfoneh has [documented](#) in his book "Political Succession in the Islamic Republic," the networks of then-President and future Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, then-Parliament Speaker Akbar Rafsanjani, and Hassan Khomeini, the founder's son, were behind Montazeri's removal.

"The Biting Judge"

Mohseni-Ejei proved to be a valuable enforcer for [Khamenei](#), upon his ascension to Supreme Leader in 1989. Mohseni-Ejei returned as the Judiciary's representative to the Intelligence Ministry in 1990, serving until 1994. Khamenei then entrusted Mohseni-Ejei with top positions in the Special Court for the Clergy, which answers to the Supreme Leader and is charged with

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prosecuting dissenting clerics. Between 1995 and 1997, Mohseni-Ejei [acted](#) as court prosecutor's branch in Tehran and then Prosecutor General of the court from 1998 to 2005. In those positions, he [prosecuted](#) prominent Reformist clerics.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Mohseni-Ejei also served as judge in a number of high-profile cases, including the Bank Saderat embezzlement case, and the trial of former Tehran Mayor Qolamhossein Karbaschi on corruption charges in 1998. The latter charges are suspected to have resulted in response to Karbaschi's [support](#) of then-President Mohammad and Khatami.

Former Intelligence Minister Ghorbanali Dori-Najafabadi has alleged that Mohseni-Ejei used a religious edict to declare journalist and activist Pirouz Davani an apostate and subsequently sentenced him to death. Davani was killed during the infamous "Serial Murders" of dozens of opposition intellectuals and activists that became public in the late 1990s. Reformist journalist and former [IRGC](#) commander Akbar Ganjani also mentioned Mohseni-Ejei as one of the figures (alongside Dori-Najafabadi) who issued edicts for assassinations during that period. Human Rights Watch has labeled Mohseni-Ejei, who served as the representative of the Judiciary on the Press Supervisory in the late 1990s and 2000s, a "key figure" in suppressing press freedoms and helping shut down more than 100 newspapers. In 2004, he [earned](#) a reputation as "the biting judge" when he bit the shoulder of a Reformist journalist during a meeting following a dispute.

Minister of Intelligence

After the election of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Mohseni-Ejei was appointed to the post of Intelligence Minister. By rule, the Minister is appointed by the President subject to Parliamentary approval, but in practice, the appointment is the result of negotiations between the Office of the Supreme Leader and the President. During his tenure, Mohseni-Ejei was [vocal](#) about the threat of "soft subversion" from foreign intelligence agencies, and the Intelligence Ministry [arrested](#) a series of academics and researchers like Haleh Esfandiari. The European Union designated Mohseni-Ejei for human rights violations [during](#) the 2009 post-election protests: "While he was Intelligence minister during the election, intelligence agents under his command were responsible for detention, torture, and extraction of false confessions under pressure from hundreds of activists, journalists, dissidents, and reformist politicians. In addition, political figures were coerced into making false confessions under unbearable interrogations, which included torture, abuse, blackmail, and the threatening of family members." In 2010, the US Treasury [designated](#) Mohseni-Ejei for his human rights abuses against protesters.

In July 2009, Ahmadinejad [removed](#) Mohseni-Ejei following a number of disputes, including Ahmadinejad's hesitation to remove controversial figure Esfandiar Rahim-Mashai as first deputy despite an order from the Supreme Leader.

Senior Judiciary Posts

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In 2009, then-Judiciary branch chief [Sadeq Larijani appointed](#) Mohseni-Ejei to be Prosecutor General, a position he held for five years. Mohseni-Ejei was [tasked](#) alongside [Raisi](#) to oversee allegations put forward by Green Movement leader Mehdi Karoubi that security forces engaged in acts of sexual assault and abuse against detainees held for participation in the protests.

In 2014, Larijani subsequently appointed Mohseni-Ejei as his first deputy, a position he held through 2019, when Ebrahim Raisi was appointed Judiciary Chief. Mohsen-Ejei also served as the Judiciary spokesman. Mohseni-Ejei also helped build [cases](#) against the family of former President Akbar Rafsanjani, who had turned a rival to Khamenei. In 2020, he [claimed](#) that he, Larijani, and other senior Judiciary officials were unable to confirm the corruption of former Judiciary First Deputy Akbar Tabari, whom Raisi prosecuted under corruption charges.

In his capacity as Judiciary Spokesman, Mohseni-Ejei defended and [justified](#) human rights violations, such as the 2014 raid on political prisoners at Evin Prison's Ward 350 that left many prisoners seriously injured. Mohseni-Ejei [claimed](#) the raid was justified because "some individuals tried to make alcoholic drinks with their fruit rations." As first deputy to Judiciary chiefs, Mohseni-Ejei was an active participant in the state's crackdown on the 2017-2018 protests and the November 2019 [protests](#), as the Judiciary prosecuted political prisoners and handed out [executions](#) of protesters. One prominent case was the execution of wrestler Navid Afkari, whose cause sparked a global outcry. Prominent human rights groups [called](#) Afkari's sentencing and execution a "travesty of justice."

What can we expect from Mohseni-Ejei?

In the past four decades, Mohseni-Ejei has proven himself a ruthless enforcer for Khamenei, showing little regard for basic human rights standards and no limits to prosecute the real and perceived enemies of the Islamic Republic. As director of the Judiciary branch, he will likely demonstrate the same record.