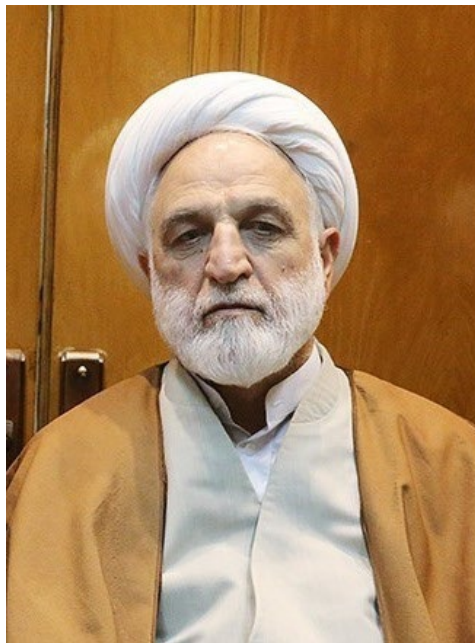


# Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei: The Head of Iran's Judiciary

April 2024



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## *Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei*

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 head of the Judiciary branch. He succeeded [Ebrahim Raisi](#) after the latter was elected President of Iran, and has since maintained his reputation, by [jailing](#) and [executing](#) those accused of political dissent.

### ***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's judicial system, who encouraged him to join the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran.

Throughout the 1980s, Mohseni-Ejei proved himself more than willing to eliminate opposition and dissent to the Islamic Republic, while strengthening his ties to future Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Some [accounts](#) list him as "interrogator, torture and judicial official" in the Islamic Revolutionary Court. Through his position within the court, he [helped](#) Asadollah Lajevardi, the former prison warden known as "[the Butcher of Evin Prison](#)," in his record of brutality and executions. Through this period, Mohseni-Ejei developed his own record of brutality, and is [associated](#) with the deaths of numerous prisoners. During his tenure in the court, 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. This developed his relationship with future President of the Islamic Republic [Ebrahim Raisi](#), who served as a lead official on that case.

While working within the court, Mohseni-Ejei also developed intelligence ties. In 1984, he [joined](#) the notorious Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) upon its [founding](#), operating as 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. From this position, Mohseni-Ejei also allegedly [had](#) an active role in the 1988 mass execution of more than 5,000 political prisoners. Additionally, Mohseni-Ejei was the prosecutor's representative in the trial of senior [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) official Mehdi Hashemi. Hashemi was related through marriage to Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, who was the designated successor of Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini for some time. Ultimately, Hashemi's conviction and execution on charges of treason and murder led to Montazeri's removal as Khomeini's successor, [among other factors documented by Ali Alfoneh](#).

### ***"The Biting Judge"***

Through his career, 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

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Special Court for the Clergy, which answers to the Supreme Leader and is charged with prosecuting dissenting clerics. Between 1995 and 1997, Mohseni-Ejei [acted](#) as a prosecutor for the court in Tehran, and then Prosecutor General of the court from 1998 to 2005. Notably, he [prosecuted](#) prominent Reformist clerics while holding these positions. In the 1990s and 2000s, Mohseni-Ejei also served as judge in several high-profile cases. These include the [Bank Saderat embezzlement case](#) and the [trial of former Tehran Mayor Qolamhossein Karbaschi](#) for corruption, which was motivated by Karbaschi's [support](#) of then-President Mohammad 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 sentence 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 this period, Mohseni-Ejei also served as a judicial “press supervisor,” during which time he shut down over 100 newspapers. As a result, [Human Rights Watch has labeled](#) “key figure” in suppressing press freedom in Iran. 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 law, 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 “Green Movement” protests. According to this designation, “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 also [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 Esfandiari Rahim-Mashai as first deputy despite an order from the Supreme Leader.

## *Senior Judiciary Posts*

In 2009, then-Judiciary chief [Sadeq Larijani appointed](#) Mohseni-Ejei to be Prosecutor General, a position he held for five years. Mohseni-Ejei was [tasked](#) alongside [Ebrahim Raisi](#) to oversee allegations put forward by

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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. Mohseni-Ejei also served as the Judiciary spokesman. While in these posts, Mohseni-Ejei 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 the Judiciary chief, 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."

## *Chief Justice*

In July of 2021, Mohseni-Ejei [was appointed](#) as Chief Justice of Iran by Ebrahim Raisi following his election as President. The appointment of Mohseni-Ejei as Chief Justice was in line with the Supreme Leader's "[Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution](#)" (*gaam-e dovom-e enghlab*) manifesto, which is geared towards "purifying" the system and installing members of Khamenei's cult of personality across the regime. [In his position](#) as Chief Justice, Mohseni-Ejei took a central role in the prosecution of protestors arrested following nationwide anti-regime protests that erupted after the [murder](#) of Mahsa Amini by the so-called "Morality Police" for wearing an "improper hijab." The number of Iranian protestors executed under the charge of "[Waging War on God](#)" (*mohareb*) has surged under Mohseni-Ejei's watch. Amnesty International and other human rights groups have [accused](#) Mohseni-Ejei of overseeing sham trials and unjust executions in response to the protests. Last year, executions in Iran hit an 8-year high with [853 people](#) hanged in 2023. Since Hamas's attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, Mohseni-Ejei has similarly [weaponized the judiciary](#) by seeking to "criminalize" what he describes as "[the Israeli war machine](#)." He has also used his post as Chief Justice to [allege](#) that the US is a "sponsor" of ISIS, among other baseless claims.

## *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 long as he remains head of the Judiciary he will continue this record, particularly as crackdowns on [political dissent mount](#) and anti-regime sentiment in Iran increases.