

Report

Gunning Them Down

State Violence against Protesters in Iran



Center for
**HUMAN
RIGHTS**
in Iran

Gunning Them Down

State Violence against Protesters in Iran

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About us

The **Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI)** is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in Iran. CHRI investigates and documents rights violations occurring throughout Iran, relying on first-hand accounts to expose abuses that would otherwise go unreported. We bring these violations to the attention of the international community through news articles, briefings, in-depth reports and videos, and work to build support for human rights inside Iran as well. CHRI engages in intensive outreach and international advocacy aimed at defending the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Iranian people and holding the Iranian government accountable to its human rights obligations.

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Introduction

In November 2019, mass street [protests](#) broke out in hundreds of cities and towns across Iran.¹ Initially triggered by a state-imposed gasoline [price hike](#) that month, the unrest was more broadly a reflection of long-building societal frustrations over worsening economic conditions, governmental mismanagement, corruption and political repression in the country.²

The violence of the state's response—indiscriminate firing of live ammunition into crowds of civilians which resulted in at least [304 deaths](#)³ (with many documented shots to the head, neck and chest, indicating lethal intent), untold injuries from gunshots, tear gas and beatings, and more than [7000 arrests](#)⁴ in the span of roughly a week—represented a level of state violence not seen in Iran since the 1980s.⁵ In addition, a state-imposed [shutdown](#) of the internet in Iran for approximately one week and a news blackout allowed this violence to be carried out away from public scrutiny.⁶

Protests flared again less than two months later, in [January 2020](#).⁷ This unrest was fueled by outrage over the Revolutionary Guards' [shooting down](#) of an Ukrainian passenger flight on January 8, 2020, which killed all 176 people aboard—and the government's admission of the downing only after three days of public denial.⁸ Coming only days after 56 people died in a [stampede](#)⁹ at a badly managed funeral for Iranian General Qasem Soleimani on January 7, the protests reflected public fury at the government's incompetence and lack of transparency, even though many in the nation had briefly united against the [killing](#) of the General by the US days earlier.¹⁰

The January protests were also quickly [crushed](#) by the state by mass arrests and violence that included the firing of pellets and other unknown ammunition at protesters, the use of tear gas and water cannons, and beatings of protesters by security agents.¹¹

These protests were in essence a continuation of unrest that had begun in Iran in December 2017, which differed significantly from previous protest in Iran. Up until that point, protest had certainly been an enduring feature of the Islamic Republic's political landscape. Despite the government's intolerance of dissent and the ever-present risk of state violence, arrest and imprisonment, protest had persisted—by students, including major protests at universities across the country in 1999 and 2003; by massive numbers of citizens who demonstrated against the disputed presidential election results in 2009; by women (and men) against forced hijab; and by steel workers, teachers, heavy machinery workers, bus and truck drivers, railway workers, nurses, sugar mill workers, bazaar merchants, petrochemical workers, farmers and many others in continuous labor protests over the last few decades.

Yet the [unrest](#) that broke out across Iran in December 2017 was different; it was diffuse, unorganized, leaderless and less focused on specific grievances. These protests grew quickly in number and participants to encompass hundreds of cities and towns across the country, with protesters voicing a fundamental rejection of the country's political and economic system.¹² Expressing rage over economic hardships and inequities, these protests were prevalent in working class areas in the provinces that had previously been a strong base of support for the Islamic Republic, and included large numbers of young men who had left drought-stricken smaller towns for provincial cities where they were typically unemployed.

The unrest continued into January 2018, until the [state's crackdown](#), which included mass arrests and the widespread beating of protesters and detainees by security agents, as well as a brief (approximately 30 minutes) shut down of access to the global internet, seemed to somewhat quiet things down.¹³ Yet protests continued sporadically throughout 2018, for example by [farmers](#)¹⁴ over severe water shortages that summer in areas hit by drought and environmental mismanagement, by [workers](#)¹⁵ protesting unpaid wages and the imprisonment of their labor leaders, and by merchants of the [bazaar](#)¹⁶—until November 2019, when mass protest began again across the country.

In the following report, the [Center for Human Rights in Iran](#) (CHRI) has detailed and documented the state response to these latest two clusters of protest—November 2019 and January 2020—which were both characterized by extraordinary and lethal state violence, massive arrests and detentions, blatant due process violations, the muzzling of the press and prolonged internet shutdowns.

In addition, there have been widespread reports documented here through firsthand accounts obtained by CHRI, that officials refused to notify families of those detained, injured or killed, and refused to release the bodies of those killed to the families until either payment by the families was made and/or pledges made by the families not to speak to the press or hold mourning ceremonies, and to bury their dead quietly in ceremonies and cemeteries dictated by the state.¹⁷

Throughout there has been a complete lack of transparency, which has meant that there is still significant uncertainty regarding the number of deaths, lack of information on the number of injured (other than credible and consistent reports that hospitals were overflowing with the injured), and little information on the actual number of arrests, the number of people who remain in detention, their condition and the state of their cases. To date, the Iranian government has issued no official numbers on any of the above.

In addition, as of this writing there has been no accountability for the deaths or injuries that occurred during the protests. Even regarding instances in which credible [reports](#) indicate that unarmed civilians were chased by security forces, cornered, fired upon and killed, there has been no independent investigation or actions taken to determine and enforce accountability.¹⁸

CHRI has based this report on dozens of firsthand accounts and interviews with eyewitnesses, victims, their families and lawyers and verified photos and video obtained from eyewitnesses on the ground in Iran, during the period from November 15, 2019 through February 2020, and desk research that included extensive review of Iranian media, both traditional and social, review of Iranian government, parliamentary and judicial decisions and statements, UN assessments and statements, and reports by other reputable and trusted human rights organizations to corroborate and supplement our findings.



The lethal use of force by state security forces included the firing of live ammunition indiscriminately into crowds of unarmed civilians.

THE NOVEMBER 2019 PROTESTS

On November 15, 2019, the Iranian government [announced](#) a sharp increase in the price of gasoline; rationed gasoline would be increased by 50 percent to a minimum of 15,000 rials (\$0.13) per liter up to 60 liters, with each additional liter costing 30,000 rials.¹⁹

This price hike came in the context of steadily deteriorating economic conditions in Iran, due to the combined effects of the government's long-standing economic mismanagement of the country and sanctions reinstated by the United States after Washington's May 2018 [withdrawal](#) from the JCPOA (the multilateral nuclear deal with Iran).²⁰ With annual inflation at approximately 30 percent by November 2019, unemployment at roughly 12 percent (29 percent for youth aged 15-24), low and frequently unpaid wages requiring many people to work multiple jobs, and widespread reports of corruption and inequities, the gas price hike was a tipping point for societal anger.²¹

The following day, [protests](#) broke out in cities and towns across the country.²² While most of the protesters were nonviolent, rage at the government was evident; in multiple cities and towns [government offices](#), [police stations](#), [banks](#), and fuel [pumps](#) were set on fire, posters of Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader [Ali Khamenei](#) and [President Hassan Rouhani](#), were burned on the streets, and people chanted slogans such as "gasoline got more expensive, the poor got poorer," "clerics should go to hell," "shame on dictators," and "our enemy is here, not in the U.S."²³

Police and security forces responded immediately and with unrestrained violence, simultaneously shutting down access to the global internet in Iran and news coverage as it moved to [crush the unrest](#).²⁴

Eyewitness accounts of the state's response to the November 2019 protests, testimonies of victims and their families, and photos and videos obtained directly from Iran by CHRI and other organizations indicate numerous, severe and widespread abuses and violations of law and basic human rights, as detailed in the following sections.

Excessive and lethal use of state force resulting in deaths and injuries

The excessive and lethal use of force by state security forces was documented by CHRI and included the firing of live ammunition indiscriminately into crowds of unarmed civilians, hitting both protesters and bystanders who happened to be in the vicinity (and the large number of reports we received of shots to the head, neck and chest indicated lethal intent) as well as the use of tear gas against civilian crowds and the widespread beating of protesters by security forces and associated militias. (See eyewitness accounts below.)

Videos shared on Twitter, YouTube and the Telegram messaging app showed police and security forces firing [tear gas canisters](#)²⁵ and using [water cannons](#)²⁶ to disperse the protesters while [attacking](#)²⁷ them with batons. Several [video clips](#)²⁸ that slipped through the Internet blockade in Iran showed security forces firing directly at the protesters.²⁹

Amnesty International has put the number killed at “[at least 304](#)” (other estimates have been significantly higher) and stated that “thousands” were injured.³⁰ On January 2, 2020, the Iranian opposition news site, Kaleme, [estimated](#) that at least 631 people had been killed in connection with the November protests.³¹ On December 23, 2019, Reuters [reported](#) “About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest that started on November 15,” a number Reuters said was provided to them by three Iranian interior ministry officials, and was based on information gathered from security forces, morgues, hospitals and coroner’s offices, and included “at least 17 teenagers and about 400 women.”³²

In what appears to be one of the worst [incidents](#), which took place on November 18 and demonstrates the extreme and unlawful state violence used against protesters, corroborated reports indicate Iranian security forces used heavy machine guns against protesters in Jarahi Square in Mahshahr, including against people fleeing the area and hiding in nearby marshes, resulting in at least 23 people killed, possibly more. As well as protesters, it is reported that bystanders in the street and people watching from their homes were also hit with bullets during the Mahshahr incident.³³

Juveniles were among those killed by state security forces, as documented by firsthand accounts obtained by CHRI and excerpted below. In addition, Amnesty International has [reported](#) that at least 23 children, including 22 boys (ages 12 to 17) and a girl (between the age of 8 and 12) were killed by Iranian security forces (many by injuries to the head and torso, indicating intent to kill) in the provinces of Isfahan, Fars, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Tehran during the period from November 16 to November 18, 2019.³⁴

There have been no official numbers released by the Iranian government for those injured, but there were [reports](#) that hospitals in Tehran were overwhelmed with the injured.³⁵ Similarly, there have been no numbers released by the Iranian government regarding those killed or reported missing.

Bodies withheld from families

Numerous, consistent, firsthand accounts collected by CHRI indicate that families were routinely not notified for lengthy periods that their loved ones had been killed. When the families were finally able to locate the bodies of the individuals they only knew to be missing, the bodies were routinely withheld from release to the families, either until payment was made by the families for the bodies and/or until the families pledged not to speak to the media about the deaths. (See accounts below.)

Funerals and burials dictated by state

Numerous, consistent, firsthand accounts collected by CHRI indicate that authorities also dictated funeral and burial terms to the families of those killed. Bodies were often not released until the families pledged to bury their loved ones quickly and quietly in small ceremonies and at state-designated cemeteries. (See accounts below.)

Arrests

While the Iranian authorities have not released any official figures regarding the number of people arrested, before a joint meeting between members of Parliament and security officials on November 25, 2019, Member of Parliament Hossein Naghavi Hosseini said about **7,000 people** had been arrested during the unrest.³⁶ CHRI has not verified this number and many arrests transpired after the date of his statement.

As of this writing, the government has also not released numbers regarding those who still remain in detention. On January 11, 2020, the head of the State Prisons Organization Ali Asghar Jahangir, **said** “a significant portion of the detainees have been released” and that the remainder would soon appear in court.³⁷ He did not provide further details.

Pressure and threats against families

CHRI has obtained numerous, consistent, firsthand accounts indicating that the Iranian authorities routinely threatened the families of detainees and those killed not to speak to the media.

Families were also pressured to give false information, for example to say that their loved ones were killed in an accident, or that they were bystanders shot by other protesters and that they should accept the designation of “martyr” and receive state compensation, thus absolving the state of any responsibility or accountability in the death. (See accounts below.)

Threats to journalists

The authorities in Iran also imposed a news blackout and issued directives dictating coverage of the unrest. Intelligence ministry officials **threatened** journalists that they would be charged with “crimes” if their reporting of the protests did not hew to the official narrative.³⁸

Moreover, contrary to the widespread view that the government was caught off guard by the protests, CHRI learned from an informed source who requested to remain unnamed due to security concerns that officials anticipated there would be unrest after the announcement of the gasoline price hikes. According to the source, state officials met with media publishers to instruct them on coverage of the expected unrest before the price hikes were announced to the public. CHRI confirmed this information with two other journalists who had detailed knowledge of the meetings. One of these journalists **told** CHRI:

“Before the fuel price hike was announced and the protests started, Supreme National Security Council officials briefed newspaper publishers on two occasions. The meetings were one-way affairs; no discussion was allowed. The officials spoke about the possibility of an increase in the price of gasoline and the potential for protests in some regions and they advised that the media should cover the issues within the framework of state policies.”³⁹

Another journalist who spoke to CHRI added that after the start of protests on November 15, at least eight journalists were summoned to Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence for questioning, and the Ministry of the Culture and Islamic Guidance contacted a number of journalists to warn them about the consequences of their articles and social media posts. The journalist **told** CHRI that some reporters were forced to sign a pledge that they would not report on the internet blackout, the people’s protests or the increase in the price of gasoline on social media and were warned that any negative reporting will be seen as “aiding the enemy” and would be considered “a crime.” The source stated that the media division of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry had been “constantly contacting newspapers about not writing provocative headlines and staying within the framework of the state.”⁴⁰

A third journalist in Tehran **told** CHRI:

“Our work has become very difficult because we often do not have access to the internet. We can only open the pages of [official news agencies] IRNA and ISNA. We can’t go to other sites for further information. We have been reduced to publishing our own commentaries on the current situation based on IRNA and ISNA reports within the recommended frameworks. There’s no room for reporting on what we see on the streets, such as the extensive presence of the security and police forces in the four corners of Revolution Square who are very careful about making sure nobody films them. There’s a big difference between what we see is happening and what we can report. The smallest thing can trigger calls from the intelligence or guidance ministries. We don’t have permission to write about people who have been killed, unless the officials themselves mention it in interviews, and even then, it’s mostly about the deaths of Basij militiamen, not protesters. We can’t ask questions and write about the detainees, except when the officials say something. We aren’t allowed to go to the hospitals and report on injured people...”⁴¹

Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA) reporter Maryam Vahidian [commented](#):

*"Whether you're a reporter or not, you have no idea how many have been killed in the nationwide protests. A hundred, two hundred, or more? You don't know how many working-class families have lost their breadwinners. Or maybe the people in the streets were the unemployed from the outskirts of the city...."*⁴²

Iranian authorities also [threatened](#) the families in Iran of Iranian journalists working abroad that the journalists must cease their work with foreign media.⁴³

Saman Rasoulpour, a senior editor at the London-based Iran International satellite TV station, [told](#) CHRI on November 26, 2019 about the threats several of his family members in Iran had received.

*"In Tehran and other cities, my relatives and associates, as well as those of my colleagues, including parents, sisters and brothers, have been summoned to the Intelligence Ministry. Some of them were taken from the street or at their work place to security offices. The security officials conveyed direct threats to the family members and demanded that we end our collaboration with Iran International immediately. They explicitly warned that if we continued our work, they had the ability to hurt us. They said they knew where we lived outside Iran. We consider these to be blatant threats by Iran's security agencies against journalists who are simply carrying out their professional duty to provide accurate and unbiased news.... These pressures didn't start with the recent protests. There have been similar pressures in the past but in the past 10 days they have intensified. The Islamic Republic is trying to disrupt the work of media outlets abroad just as it has imposed widespread censorship inside the country by cutting off the internet and detaining and jailing journalists."*⁴⁴

On November 22, 2019, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) [reported](#) that at least six Iranian reporters based abroad had received threats from the Islamic Republic.⁴⁵ Rasoulpour, however, said many more than six of his colleagues at Iran International had been threatened.

Pouya Azizi, an Iran International reporter [tweeted](#) on November 24, 2019:

*"The Islamic Republic's Intelligence Ministry summoned my father and made threats against me to stop my professional activities. This is not the first time they did it. They know it will only make us more determined to continue our work."*⁴⁶

Farnaz Ghazizadeh, a reporter for the BBC's Persian-language TV station, also revealed that her family in Iran had been subjected to intimidation. On November 23, 2019, she tweeted:

*"The Islamic Republic is continuing its attempts to intimidate and censor journalists beyond the borders of Iran by putting pressure on their families. They have summoned my 73-year-old father and warned him about me and my sister (Iran International reporter Sanaz Ghazizadeh). Our families have become hostages."*⁴⁷

Internet disruptions

The state also imposed severe [internet disruptions](#) during the protests⁴⁸, including a [near complete week-long shut down](#) of access to the global internet beginning on November 16, 2019.⁴⁹ On that day, the government blocked internet access in most of the country under an [order](#) issued by Iran's Supreme National Security Council.⁵⁰ The [NetBlocks](#) organization, which monitors internet access globally, reported: "Iran is now in the midst of a near-total national internet shutdown; real-time network data show connectivity at 7% of ordinary levels after twelve hours of progressive network disconnections as public protests continue."⁵¹

People in Iran were only allowed access to the state-controlled, heavily censored [national internet](#) during that time.⁵² As of November 22, 2019, access to the global internet in Iran was still at only 15 percent of normal levels, [according](#) to NetBlocks.⁵³

The internet shut down, together with a state-imposed news blackout and the intimidation of journalists, effectively removed the state's violence from the public eye—both domestic and international—preventing any transparency regarding state actions.



The [week-long] internet shut down, together with a state-imposed news blackout and the intimidation of journalists, removed the state's violence from the public eye.

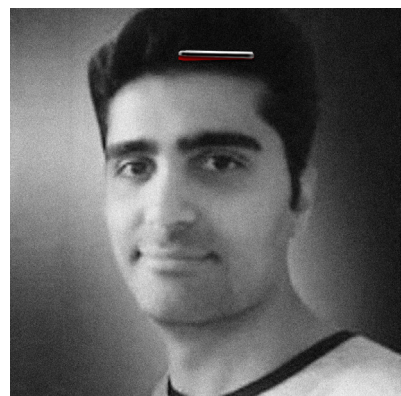
Excerpts from CHRI interviews with eyewitnesses, victims and their families

The following excerpts are from transcripts of interviews conducted by CHRI with victims' families and lawyers and with eyewitnesses to events surrounding the November 2019 protests.

Pouya Bakhtiari

Nahid Shirpisheh the mother of Pouya Bakhtiari, a 27-year-old man shot and killed by security forces in the Mehrshahr district of Karaj, west of the capital Tehran on November 16, 2019, [spoke](#) to CHRI on December 3, 2019.

*"They aimed at my son's head and deliberately killed him. If they had a problem with the protests and wanted to disperse the crowds, they could have used tear gas or fired bullets into the air. They could have at least shot him in the leg. Why did they shoot at my son's head? [My son] told me there was a disturbance outside...Pouya asked me to go outside with him. When they fired tear gas at us, my eyes started to burn and we got separated in the chaos...I was a little bit behind Pouya and all I could do was chant slogans. Some 50 to 100 meters ahead of me, my son, as a free man, had closed the freeway and forced the security forces to back off. The people were marching ahead with empty hands but I did see some who were throwing rocks at the security forces and trying to push back the armed special units...Ten minutes later I saw my son being carried by the people. We took him to the hospital and he died right there.... I thought the bullets were not real and therefore if any of us got injured, it wouldn't be a problem. But to my surprise, the bullets were real and they shot my son in the head, which means they deliberately aimed [to kill]. There cannot be any other reason. They were given orders from above to fire bullets but they had no right to do so...."*⁵⁴



After the above account, there were further developments in this case. Tahereh Shirpisheh, the grandmother of Pouya Bakhtiari, [told](#) CHRI that the family's home in Karaj, west of Tehran, was surrounded by security forces to prevent them from visiting his grave on December 26, 2019, after calling for the date to be a national day of mourning. His grandmother said state agents violently detained people at the gravesite and that she had no information about the location or condition of relatives including both of Bakhtiari's parents, who were detained on December 23, 2019. Following are excerpts from her interview with CHRI.

*"They took away my daughter [Nahid Shirpisheh] and my son-in-law [Manouchehr Bakhtiari]. They took away my son, my grandson and my son-in-law's brothers as well as my son-in-law's 11-year-old nephew. They freed the 11-year-old child but not his father. They took them blindfolded and put them in prison, but we don't know where. We can't ask questions. Family members are too afraid to make inquiries. Everyone is being harassed."*⁵⁵



“They could have at least shot him in the leg. Why did they shoot at my son’s head?”

Interview with Nahid Shirpisheh, mother of Pouya Bakhtiari who was killed by security forces on November 16, 2019

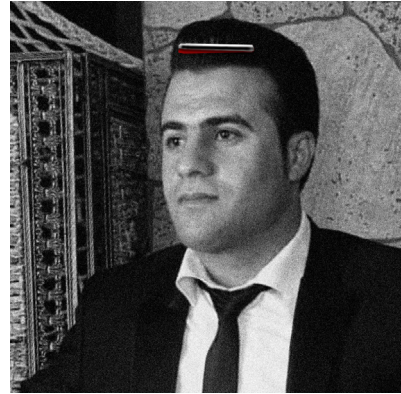
On December 24, 2019, the Iranian Mehr News Agency [reported](#) that Bakhtiari’s parents had been taken into custody “to prevent plotters from continuing to cause more deaths with the repeat of armed action against the people.”⁵⁶ A week earlier, Bakhtiari’s father, Manouchehr Bakhtiari, had posted a [photo](#) of himself with his late son on Instagram encouraging people to honor the memory of November’s victims of state violence on December 26.⁵⁷ Hours before his arrest, Manouchehr Bakhtiari told CHRI that during the span of one week he had twice been summoned to the Intelligence Ministry’s office in Karaj and to the prosecutor’s office on two other occasions where local authorities pressured him to call off a December 26th memorial service at Beheshte Sakineh Cemetery, where his son is buried. On December 26, 2019, security forces stationed at the cemetery blocked family members from visiting Pouya Bakhtiari’s grave. [Video clips](#) posted on social media networks show people at the cemetery chanting “death to the dictator,” “our pain is the people’s pain, join us,” “long live Iran” and “people didn’t die for the [supreme] leader to be praised.”⁵⁸ Tahereh Shirpisheh [continued](#):

“They didn’t let us go to his grave...I told them I’m Pouya’s grandmother. They said they can’t let me go because it would lead to trouble. They had closed off all the paths to Plot 26 [where Pouya is buried]. They beat up the people who were there and took away some of them.... My relatives who had gone to Beheshte Sakineh were all beaten with batons. The women, too. A helicopter [flew](#) over the cemetery.”⁵⁹ The security forces were everywhere like an army of ants. For every ordinary person, there were 10 security guards. Three plainclothes security agents beat a skinny boy. A woman bled from being struck in the eye. She was put into a car and taken away. They filled two buses with people. They really harassed us. When we went back to our house, we noticed that two blocks away my daughter’s house had been surrounded by security forces and several black cars and police vehicles had been parked on the road leading to their house....”⁶⁰

Mohammad Hashamdar

Mohammad Hashamdar, a 33-year-old married man who was the caregiver for his elderly mother and disabled brother who has Down syndrome, was killed by a bullet in Behbahan, in Khuzestan Province, on November 16, 2019. The family stated that the cause of death was “injury to vital pathways.” His sister, Pouran Hashamdar, [spoke](#) with CHRI.

“We have filed a suit along with the families of other victims, including Farzad Ansarifard, Mohammad Hossein Ghanavati, Ehsan Abdollahnejad as well as Mehrdad and Mahmoud Dashti. We want the killer to be identified and punished. Mohammad went to work in the morning... My older brother phoned me and said there was a lot of commotion outside and he told me to tell Mohammad not to leave the house. But it was 10:30 in the morning and Mohammad had already left. I called him and he said ... he was going to go buy something and then return to the shop. I told him not to be out and come home. Our last contact was at 11:54. ... After being shot, my brother was put on a motorcycle and taken to the hospital. The motorcycle driver then went to my mother's house in a bloody shirt. It was Mohammad's blood. He took my mother to the hospital. When I got to the hospital 20 minutes later, my brother had already been taken to the cold room. We had no problem taking delivery of his body. They had sent his body to Ahvaz but he was returned to Behbahan and we took him. We weren't asked to pay anything or sign any pledge..... We had no problem holding memorial services for him. Maybe it was because we didn't bury him in Behbahan and instead laid him to rest next to his sister, Mansourieh, in the outskirts of the city.”⁶¹



Ebrahim Ketabdar

A 30-year-old father of two children, Ebrahim Ketabdar, who was not involved in the November 2019 protests, was shot in the heart and killed by security forces in the Mehdiabad district of Karaj, west of Tehran, on November 16, 2019, when he stepped into the street, his mother, Sakineh Ahmadi, [told](#) CHRI. Following are excerpts from her interview with CHRI.

“Ebrahim had gone to his shop. ... But they shot a bullet through his heart as soon as he stepped out of his shop with his hands in his pockets. He wasn't in the protests and had nothing to do with them and yet he was shot....When they told me he had been shot, I ran into the street bare footed. God will not forgive this injustice. I saw there was an uproar in the street. They were firing bullets and beating up the people. Beating women. Beating everything around them. Ebrahim had been taken to Shariati Hospital. When I got there, I saw his lifeless body on the



ceramic tiled floor. No one paid any attention. I threw myself on his body but they pulled me off and took him to the cold room. They handed over his body two days later. At first, they wouldn't. We got it after a lot of begging and crying and praying. They had taken him to Behesht-e Sakineh Cemetery. I told them, 'Now that you have killed my son, at least give me his body.' Eventually they did and they didn't take any money from us. But they did make Ebrahim's father sign a pledge [of silence]. He's old. They scared him. They said they would hand over the body on condition of silence. They said we should be thankful that they gave us his body. ... I held memorial services for him every Thursday. But on the 40th day of his death, plain-clothed agents surrounded us at his grave in Behesht-e Sakineh Cemetery... I started to scream over his grave but the people didn't respond. They were too scared. There were masked agents everywhere. I was incensed. People were too scared to show solidarity. I thought that on the 40th day of his death I would chant over his grave, 'The people are with us!' but the people have been intimidated. [Asked about the authorities' decision to call bystanders who were killed during the state's violent crushing of the street protests "martyrs," Ahmadi said,] "Why are they calling my son a martyr? They killed my innocent son in front of his shop. I don't want any blood money. I want his killer. ...A few days after Ebrahim was killed a few officials came to our house and talked with his father. My kids got upset. No one showed up after that but they threatened to beat up and arrest my kids...."⁶²

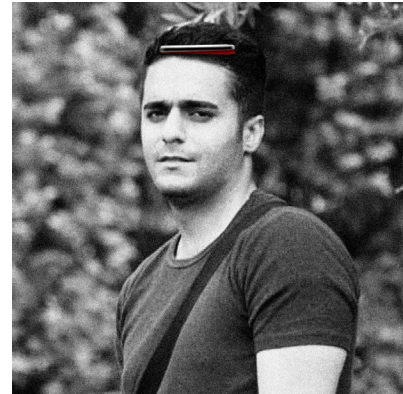


"I saw there was an uproar in the street. They were firing bullets and beating up the people. Beating women. Beating everything around them...."

Interview with Sakineh Ahmadi, mother of Ebrahim Ketabdar who was killed by security forces on November 16, 2019

Borhan Mansournia

The family of Borhan Mansournia say a bullet struck the 28-year-old veterinarian in the back, pierced his stomach and exited the front of his body, while he was standing far away from protesters in Kermanshah, western Iran, on November 16, 2019. He died in a hospital 48 hours later, according to the relative who asked to be unnamed, but his death certificate stated that he died from internal bleeding without any mention of being hit by a bullet. Following are excerpts from Mansournia's relative's [statements](#) to CHRI.



"On November 16, at about 4 p.m., Borhan left his brother's home in Kermanshah's Dowlatabad neighborhood and ...he joined the protesters. As the crowd approached a police station, they were riddled with bullets by a shooter on the roof of the police station. Five people were killed instantly. Borhan was in front of the station but far away from the crowd. When the shooting began, the crowd ran in Borhan's direction and he, too, started to run and was hit in the back by a bullet. One of the people took him to his home and used his phone to inform his family that he had been shot. The family took Borhan to the Farabi Hospital but officials there refused to admit him. Then he was taken to Taleghani Hospital. Borhan was in the operating room from 8 p.m. until 2:30 a.m. The bullet had struck his stomach and damaged his liver, intestines and kidneys. After the operation, instead of being taken to the intensive care unit, he was in the hospital's hallway for eight hours along with 17 other people who had also been shot. When a bed became available, he was transferred to intensive care but ...[he] passed away at 9 p.m. The family was told to come the next day to take his body. But by that time all the relatives and acquaintances had heard the news and a large crowd from Marivan and other Kurdish cities gathered in front of the hospital. When the police and security agents saw the crowd, they handed over the body. The family had to pay 5.6 million tomans (\$1,328 USD) to cover the hospital bill because the police said they would not give a letter for insurance coverage for those who had been shot. Borhan's parents also had to sign a pledge saying that they would not give interviews or talk to anyone about how their son had been shot. The family took delivery of the body at 9 p.m. on November 19 and arrived in Marivan at 1:30 a.m.... Borhan's father ... [was told] that if he did not bury his son that same night, his body would be confiscated. ...The death certificate says nothing about him being struck by a bullet. The family hired a lawyer and went to a police station in Kermanshah to put together a case and began the process of filing a judicial complaint. When the family held a memorial service for Borhan at a mosque in Marivan, his father was contacted by security agents and summoned to the Intelligence Ministry's office. But the father resisted and said, 'If anyone wants to talk to me, he has to come to the mosque and face me among the people.' The security agents called two or three more times but Borhan's father refused to go. Several days later Borhan's father got a call from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' intelligence organization. They didn't make any threats. They said he should come to the office to declare Borhan a martyr and receive blood money. Of course, he had gotten the same offer several times, especially since he was a former FMVA employee... The offers are extremely disgraceful and Borhan's family would never take money for his blood."⁶³



“The family had to pay 5.6 million tomans (\$1,328 USD) to cover the hospital bill... [and] sign a pledge saying they would not give interviews or talk to anyone about how their son had been shot.”

Interview with a family member of Borhan Mansournia who was killed by state security forces on November 16, 2019

In a subsequent interview, a member of the Mansournia family **told** CHRI that Iranian authorities were continuing to pressure the family to accept their offer to declare Mansournia a “martyr.” The family member, who asked to remain unnamed, said Mansournia told his family what happened before he died:

“Borhan was one of the few people who lived to tell his story. He lived for a day after he was shot and during that time he was able to describe everything to his family. In the beginning, there was pressure on the family not to say anything to the media about Borhan. Now the pressures have increased very much and the authorities—everyone from the Friday prayer leader of Marivan to the governor and the representative of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ intelligence organization—want to come and visit the family. But so far, they have refused. The authorities want to come with cameras and reporters to create propaganda and declare Borhan a martyr. They say they have done all the paperwork for his designation as a martyr. But what they haven’t said is why they killed Borhan. They haven’t named the killer or killers. The family of another person who was killed in the Marivan protests were in dire need of financial help because they had lost their breadwinner. They wanted him to be declared a martyr, but the authorities haven’t responded to their request. This seems to show that the authorities are only focusing on those victims whose deaths have been reported in the media. They want to claim them as state martyrs. On the other hand, Borhan was a soldier doing his compulsory military service. Declaring him a martyr would be an important propaganda coup for the state. That’s why his family is under so much pressure.”⁶⁴

Ershad Rahmanian

The family of 25-year-old Ershad Rahmanian, whose body was found in the Garan Dam near the city of Marivan, Kurdistan Province, believes he died under torture sometime in mid-December 2019 after being arrested for allegedly participating in street protests a month earlier. Rahmanian's cousin, Kamyar Ahmadi, [spoke](#) with CHRI.

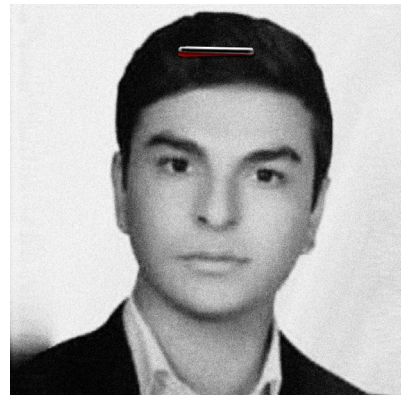
*"We are sure he died in detention under torture. Our proof was his body, which we buried with a shattered skull and broken limbs marked with bruises. Plus, he went missing on Sunday, November 17 at the peak of the protests in Marivan."*⁶⁵



Alireza Anjavi

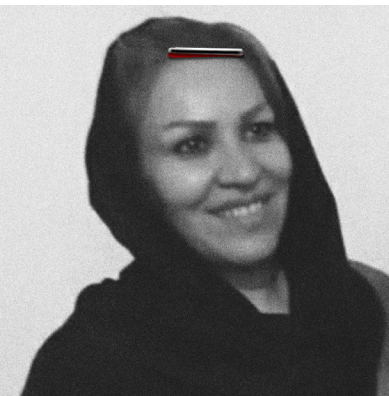
Alireza Anjavi died after being shot in the forehead on November 16, 2019, during the state's suppression of the protests in the city of Shiraz, Fars Province. Following are excerpts of CHRI's [interview](#) with Noushin Mahmoudi, his mother.

*"My son had [a store] in front of the Islamic Azad University on Sadra St. On November 16 ...when he got to his store, he called us and said he's coming back home. Our house is on Mowlana St. and along the way there were some protests. We could hear bullet sounds and machine gun fire from our house. We could also see smoke and fire. I called Alireza ...he didn't answer his phone...I looked for him for a week...On November 25 we got a call [from the Medical Examiner's Office] telling us to come and take his body. When I got there, I saw he had been shot in the forehead. We wanted to bury him in the Darolrahmeh Cemetery in Shiraz, where his father and brothers were laid to rest. But the authorities didn't allow it and said we had to bury him in the outskirts of the city in the Golzar Deynakan or Qasre Qomshah cemeteries. We had no choice other than to accept the order and buried him in Golzar Deynakan. They delivered the body and told us to bury him the same day without making any trouble. They didn't ask for any money but insisted that we shouldn't make a lot of noise at the funeral and not to bring too many people. The agents carried out all the procedures and dug the grave and didn't let anyone see the body... When we went to pick up my son's body, they told us to say he had died in an accident after leaving the house. But the death certificate said he had died from being struck by a bullet."*⁶⁶



“I looked for him for a week.... On November 25, we got a call telling us to come and take his body. When I got there, I saw he had been shot in the forehead...they told us to say he had died in an accident....”

Azar Mirzapour Zahabi



Azar Mirzapour Zahabi, a 48-year-old nurse and mother of four who was not involved in the protests, was killed by a bullet to the heart near the scene of a protest in the Golshahr district of Karaj on November 16, 2019. Her sister [told](#) CHRI:

“Around 5:00 p.m., my sister was going home from work when she saw cars in the middle of the street with their engines shut off. She started walking towards home and called and told her son that she would get there in two minutes. She said it was very turbulent outside. We never heard from her again.... we got the body and buried my sister in our hometown in Khorramabad [in Lorestan Province] without any restrictions.”⁶⁷

Golnar Samsami



Golnar Samsami, a 34-year-old mother, was on her way home after work when she was struck in the head by a bullet on Vali Asr St. in the city of Shahriar, Tehran Province, on November 17, 2019, a family member told CHRI. According to the source who asked to be unnamed, a [video](#) of Samsami's lifeless body is viewable on social media networks.⁶⁸ The clip shows people gathering around a woman lying on a sidewalk as a man shouts, “She has a hole in her head. She's dead.” The source [told](#) CHRI on December 15, 2019, that she was waiting for a taxi to go home and was not involved in the protests.

“The person who shot her was on top of a building ...The authorities could easily identify Golnar's killer—if they wanted to, from the bullet that remained in her skull, they could tell what weapon was used and who used it.... Golnar's coworker called the family and told them what had happened. The family went to the [local Sajjad] hospital and were told that she had died from a brain injury but were not allowed to take her body. They were told to go to the Medical Examiner's Office and the officials there would not deliver the body without a letter from the prosecutor's office... Finally, on November 21 the prosecutor's office gave them a letter and the body was released for burial. There were security agents at the funeral, but they didn't bother anyone.”⁶⁹

Bahman Jafari

Iranian authorities pressured the family of Bahman Jafari, 28, who died from a bullet wound to his heart on November 17, 2019, during the state's violent suppression of protest in the city of Shiraz, to lie about his cause of death, Jafari's cousin Dina Jafari, told CHRI. Members of the Jafari family were also told to sign pledges of silence, and the authorities banned the family from holding a traditional funeral ceremony. Following are excerpts from her [statements](#) to CHRI on December 12, 2019.

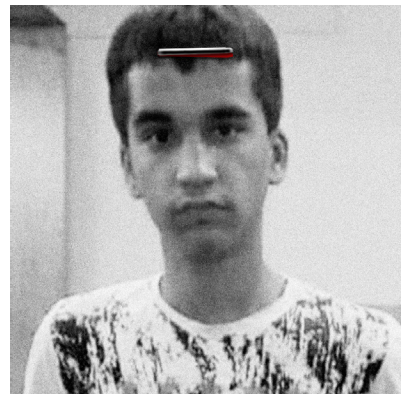
*"Bahman was shot at the crossroads by the Adelabad Prison, near his family's home. An acquaintance saw what happened and informed his family. He was alive when he was put in an ambulance, but he didn't make it to the hospital. Before releasing the body [five days after his death], the authorities demanded lots of pledges and signatures to prevent the family from speaking to the media... They put a lot of pressure on them to make them say he had not been shot by the police or the military. They wanted them to say he had died in an accident or something like that. The authorities also refused to allow the family to hold a funeral ceremony for him...only direct relatives were present at the burial.... They killed our boy with a bullet on our own street."*⁷⁰



Mohammad Dadsetankhah (age 15)

Fifteen-year-old Mohammad Dadsetankhah (also spelled Dastankhah) was walking home from high school in the city of Shiraz, Fars Province when he was shot and killed by a bullet while local authorities were suppressing street protests in his city. His sister Ghazal Dadsetankhah said the authorities had offered to pay his parents blood money, but were vague about his cause of death to avoid responsibility. His sister [told](#) CHRI:

"On Saturday, November 16 at about three in the afternoon, I left home to go to the university without knowing there were protests. I took a taxi up to some point and the driver said he could not go any further. He told me to go back home. I started walking back home when I saw people protesting. It was a confrontation. It was on Mowlana Street. As I continued to walk, I saw the medical emergency unit had arrived. Three people had been shot with bullets. An emergency worker came to help one of them, but the wounded man said 'I'm okay. Go help the people. They killed people.' I saw three people who had been shot with bullets. I myself saw bullets being fired directly [at people]. They threw tear gas and we all ran away. Nobody stopped. As we were running, they fired bullets at us. At that moment, a helicopter came, and everyone was thinking about escaping. I ran away. I don't know why the helicopter had come. I was forced to go inside a hair salon and stayed there for a couple of hours. I called my mother and told her I was okay, and she shouldn't worry. They had thrown tear



gas and I couldn't go out. The smell of tear gas subsided a bit when the people made bonfires in the street and I was able to come out. At about four in the afternoon, one of our acquaintances had called my mother and told her that school had been canceled. My mother called Mohammad's school and asked [the principal] Mr. Khodadadi if the students had been dismissed. He said yes and Mohammad had been sent home at 2:30. We started looking for Mohammad from four until nine at night, but we didn't find him. Then we were told that the wounded had been taken to the Abu-Ali Sina Hospital and we should look for him there. Then we realized that my brother had been shot with a bullet at the same place where I had seen bullets being fired on Mowlana St. At first, they wouldn't let us inside the hospital. There were a lot of agents there. My mother said she wanted to know if Mohammad was there. He was wearing a school uniform. One of the nurses told my mother '... your son was brought here and I myself put him in the cold room. He had a uniform and a school bag.' That's when we realized Mohammad was not alive. The bullet had penetrated his side and gone through his heart, lungs and spleen and tore them apart. The death certificate said he had been struck by a penetrating ballistic object, but it did not specify what kind of gun or bullet was used. We had no problem transporting my brother's body, maybe because we buried him outside Shiraz. We wanted to bury him next to our grandfather's grave in the village of Kouhe Sabz near Marvdasht. On Monday, November 18, we were told not to come to the hospital for a couple of days because they were very busy. Then they told us the body had been sent for an autopsy. On Wednesday, November 20, they gave us the body. We didn't distribute any flyers or inform anyone. We washed my brother's body on Thursday, November 21, and buried him on Friday. We held a funeral ceremony for him without any problem.... They told us Mohammad was going to be declared a martyr and they were going to pay us blood money. Why should we care about blood money when our brother has been killed? Let them declare my brother a god or a martyr. Is that going to bring him back to life? My brother was only 15 years old. He was in his first year of high school. He was a kid. He wasn't participating in the protests. Why did they shoot him? We want to know who killed my brother. We want to ask them how could they shoot at a kid? Blood money is not going to take away our pain."⁷¹



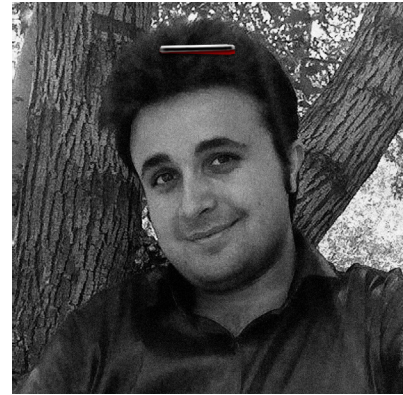
"They told us Mohammad was going to be declared a martyr and they were going to pay us blood money. Is that going to bring him back to life? My brother was only 15 years old...how could they shoot at a kid?"

“He was not in the protests...he was standing there with his hands in his pockets....”

Amirhossein Kabiri

Amirhossein Kabiri, 33, was killed by a bullet, even though he was not a participant in a nearby protest, on November 19, 2019, in the Golshahr district of Karaj, west of Tehran, his sister, Kamelia Kabiri, [said](#) in an interview with CHRI on December 9, 2019.

“After not hearing from [my brother], I was told that he had been shot in the neck and taken to the Alborz Hospital. Before I found my brother, I went to the same area where he had been and saw there was shooting going on. It was so bad that I couldn’t go straight to look for him. I had to go through alleyways. There is a police station there on the corner of 45-Meter St. in Golshahr. I went there and knocked on the door but they didn’t let me in. A soldier told me I should go to the intelligence office in the Mahestan district and give them information about my brother with photos to do an investigation. He said the matter was not their concern. But I had seen with my own eyes bullets being fired from there. He said, ‘we’re not allowed to fire bullets [at people]. Bullets were fired into the air.’ Then I went to the Alborz Hospital. My brother’s neck had been dislocated from his spine. He was in a coma at the time. On the first day, the authorities at the hospital were very strict and we didn’t know anyone who could let us inside. On the second day, nobody stopped us but I could see the families of people who had been shot, coming and going with security agents next to them. [Referring to a video clip on social media showing a man on the pavement with both hands in his jacket pockets, Kamelia said] ...that video is of my brother.⁷² He was not in the protests...He was standing there with his hands in his pockets... The authorities didn’t ask for any money to deliver his body but they made my father sign a pledge not to say a word, print flyers or hold a ceremony for him at the mosque. My father obliged because he wanted to take the body. We buried my brother in silence and solitude in the Beheshte Sakineh Cemetery in Karaj and held a memorial for him at our house. In the death certificate that was given to us it says the cause of death was the ‘firing of a weapon of war in a non-war situation’ and it explained that he had been struck with a ‘war bullet.’ ...I read in the news that they want to pay blood money to comfort the families but the truth is that paying blood money and declaring martyrdom do not matter. We want them to tell us who killed my brother.”⁷³



Hamid Taheri



Hospital authorities in the city of Islamshahr, Tehran Province, transferred the body of Hamid Taheri to state security forces without his family's permission after he died from a bullet wound on November 16, 2019, his father-in-law, Rahim Ajari, [said](#).

*"On Saturday [November 16], Hamid had gone to buy powdered milk for his child when he was shot by a bullet on his way home on Farsian Street. We knew there was unrest outside and could hear gunfire, but we thought the shots were being fired into the air. We never imagined they would shoot directly at people until we got a call that Hamid had been shot and was taken to the 24-hour clinic in the Chahardangeh neighborhood... They took his body and told us to go to the Medical Examiner's Office in Islamshahr. But they delivered the body to the security forces. They wouldn't release him to his family. His father and brother had to run around for three days before... they were told that he had to be buried in the Daroleslam Cemetery in Islamshahr... We wanted to bury Hamid in the cemetery in our own neighborhood, but they wouldn't let us... The authorities didn't ask for money to deliver the body, but Hamid's father and brother had to sign a pledge [of silence]."*⁷⁴

Mohammad Javad Abedi (age 16)



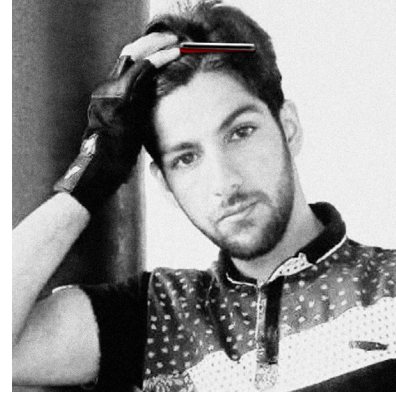
The body of 16-year-old Mohammad Javad Abedi was delivered to his family wrapped in a shroud and ready for burial several days after he was killed in Isfahan during the protests. Mohammad Javad's father, Asghar Abedi, [told](#) CHRI:

*"He would have been 17 years old in two months. He was a construction worker... On Sunday [November 17] he went to work and never came back... We looked for him for two days but couldn't find him. Then we got a call from the police detectives that my bank card had been found in Mohammad Javad's pocket. We went to the station and found out he had been killed. They haven't really told us anything. We didn't see Mohammad Javad's corpse so we don't know where the bullet struck him. They didn't give us a death certificate. They just said they would contact us later and explain how he was killed. So far we haven't been contacted."*⁷⁵

Farzad Ansarifar

Farzad Ansarifar, a 27-year-old construction worker and bystander not involved in the protests, was killed on November 16, 2019, in the city of Behbahan in Khuzestan Province, struck by a bullet behind his head. His father, Amin Ansarifar, [told](#) CHRI:

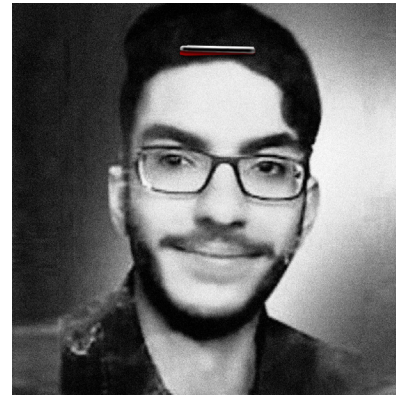
*"Farzad...wasn't part of the protests. The people in the front, who were destroying property and setting them on fire, were not shot but they shot my son who was only looking on or just passing by. He was way in the back, behind where all the trouble was taking place. They didn't give us a certificate of death. The bullet hit my son in the back of his head and came out above his eyebrow. When we made inquiries, they only said that the bullet was from a Kalashnikov machine gun."*⁷⁶



Arsham Ebrahimi

Arsham Ebrahimi, age 21 and a bystander uninvolved in the protests, died of a bullet wound in his back in the city of Isfahan, central Iran, on November 16, 2019, [according](#) to Arsham's uncle, Navid Ebrahimi, and had to be buried at night in the presence of security forces.

*"Arsham had no part in the protests...On the way back from work, his father asked him to buy some carrots. When he didn't show up on time, his father called him and Arsham said he was stuck in traffic because people had set tires on fire on the street. My brother (Arsham's father) told him to leave the car and come home. Arsham said he was afraid his car would be set on fire. His father told him the hell with car; come home. But after 7:30 pm he stopped answering his phone. My brother went out and found the car but Arsham was not there. He asked around and he was told that shots had been fired in the area. My brother went to Gharazi Hospital, where Arsham had been admitted, but the staff did not tell him that. We didn't know if he was dead or alive at the time. We looked for the body for several days... until we were told by someone we knew inside the government that he had been hit by a bullet. The authorities were not being cooperative. Eventually, the city's governor, Hossein Sistani, got involved. Mr. Sistani is a good man...He helped us a little and we were able to get the body. But we were told we had to bury him that same night. We did it in the presence of four agents under the rain. We wanted to bury him in our family plot... where our parents and martyrs had been laid to rest. But the authorities wouldn't agree. A representative from the Intelligence Ministry was there and he told us to pursue the case through the prosecutor's office. He said he would do some investigations and let us know of anything he found but we haven't been given any information."*⁷⁷





Erfan Faeghi

Iran's security officials warned the family of Erfan Faeghi, a 21-year-old who died from a bullet wound to the heart on November 17, 2019, in south Tehran when he unintentionally drove near a street protest, that if they spoke to the media, his body would be exhumed and moved to another location. A relative of Faeghi [spoke](#) to CHRI on condition of remaining unnamed:

"Erfan was...coming back from work. He wasn't part of the protests. He was in a car with his brother and friends. When they got to the Chahardangeh neighborhood, they noticed there were disturbances. It was 8:45 at night. They stepped out of the car to see what's going on and at that moment a bullet went through Erfan's heart.... His friends quickly put him inside the car and took him to a hospital. But they are very sorry they did that because the hospital turned the body over to the security forces. [We] eventually succeeded in getting his body from the Medical Examiner's Office on November 21. We were told that he has to be buried in Beheshte Zahra Cemetery and no one should attend the funeral. His mother was very anxious and finally, through some influential friends, the body was handed over and the burial took place at Imamzadeh Zayd Cemetery in west Tehran, near the family residence. He was buried under intense security with lots of special guards all around us. There were even some female police officers. Only close relatives were allowed to be there. They didn't allow us to take pictures or video tape the ceremony. Erfan's friends had filmed the moment he was hit by a bullet but they were forced to delete it under pressure. At first the authorities demanded 50 million tomans (\$11,860 USD) to deliver the body. In the end, they didn't take any money from us but we had to sign a pledge not to inform the public. We were told that if we spoke to the media, they would dig up his body and take it away. This really scared the family."⁷⁸

Interview with a family member of Erfan Faeghi, who was killed by state security forces on November 17, 2019

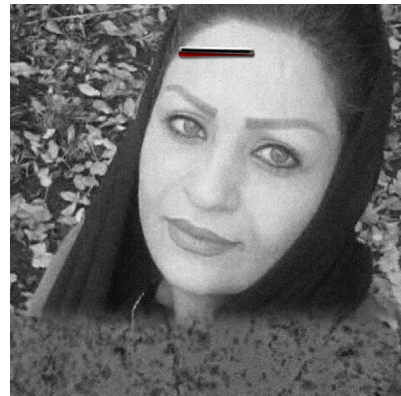
"We were told if we spoke to the media they would dig up his body and take it away."

“Ameneh was attending to the man’s wound when she was hit by a bullet from behind.... The family had to pay 4.5 million tomans (\$1,046 USD) in order to take [her] body.”

Ameneh Shahbazi

A mother of three young children, Ameneh Shahbazi was killed by a bullet as she was trying to help a person shot in the leg during a protest, her brother, Mohammad Shahbazi, [told](#) CHRI.

“My sister had gone to buy some medicine. On her way back, there was a commotion on Iranzamin Street and someone had been shot in the leg. Ameneh was attending to the man’s wound when she was hit by a bullet from behind. It happened at 9:00 pm. I was informed the following day. The morgue supervisor came and [said] Ameneh’s body was there but an order had been given not to deliver the bodies of people who had been shot. He said he had to return the bodies to the authorities and they would make burial arrangements at some cemetery and then inform us a week later. We begged and pleaded and finally we were told to go and see Beheshte Zahra’s director. He told us we can’t take her body. We begged and cried and then he said, ‘How much can you pay?’ I said I have a fixed salary and don’t have a lot of money and Ameneh’s husband is a motorcycle messenger. He told us to wait there. The family had to pay 4.5 million tomans (\$1,046 USD) in order to take Ameneh’s body. We were told not to talk to anyone during the funeral and to report anyone suspicious. They made me sign a pledge that there would not be a big crowd at the funeral. When we went to the assigned burial plot, there were a lot of agents, about 20.”⁷⁹



Hamid Rasouli

Hamid Rasouli, a 32-year-old man who died in the Golshahr district of Karaj, west of Tehran, on November 17, 2019, during the protests, was struck by bullets fired by security forces, one of his relatives [told](#) CHRI, and buried under tight security in a cemetery in Qazvin on November 29.

“A large crowd had gathered in the Golshahr district of Karaj. When [security] agents attacked, Hamid and others dispersed into side alleys. That’s where he was hit by two bullets. One in his back and another went through his heart. He immediately died right there. He never made it to the hospital.”⁸⁰



Nasser Rezaei



Iranian agents pressured at least one family member of Nasser Rezaei, 35, a protester who died after being shot as state forces suppressed the street demonstration in the city of Karaj on November 17, 2019, to make statements that would absolve the government of responsibility, Rezaei's brother, Mansour, [told](#) CHRI. According to Mansour, Iranian authorities pressured Mansour to state publicly and on state TV that Nasser was shot by "rebels" rather than state forces; pressured Mansour to falsely claim Nasser was a "passerby" and not a protester; blocked the Rezaei family from obtaining a death certificate and from holding a public funeral; confiscated Mansour's phone for two weeks; and removed Nasser's cause of death from his gravestone. The following is an excerpt from Mansour's statements to CHRI:

"On the day he was killed, I spoke to him on the phone around 5:45 p.m. I called him 15 minutes later because there were protests going on and I was worried. But someone else answered his phone and said Nasser had been shot. We live [227 miles away] in Sanandaj [city in Kurdistan Province] and by the time we got to Karaj, it was midnight and we couldn't go to the Ghaemi Hospital where my brother had been admitted. The street had been blocked off. Around 7:00 in the morning we went to the hospital and were told that Nasser's body had been taken to Behesht-e Sakineh Cemetery. When we got there, they told us to sign a pledge saying that [we agreed] he would be buried quickly the same day without a funeral. We weren't asked to pay anything when we took delivery of the body at 6:00 p.m. that day. We then went to Sanandaj and buried him that night in the Ghorveh district. There was no ceremony, no funeral. There were just members of the family and a few acquaintances who had heard the news. We held a memorial service for him at a mosque in the presence of security agents who wanted to interview me [for the local state television station]. They wanted me to memorize and say things they had written on pieces of paper; things like Nasser was a passerby and had been shot by rebels. They wanted to hide their responsibility and blame the shootings on the people. I refused to do it. They also asked us to file a complaint over his death, but we haven't done it. They said they would declare him a martyr and pay blood money. But we didn't accept anything. My brother wasn't a passerby. He was a protester who had taken part in the demonstration. When I spoke to him that day, he told me, 'We have to take back our rights.' He was not a member of any [political] organization. A lot of people have asked about who he had gone with to the protest. He didn't go with anyone. He went on his own to protest the increase in the price of gasoline. He went and they answered him with a bullet—a bullet to his right eye. ... They didn't let us put an epitaph on Nasser's gravestone... We wanted to engrave a poem by Ahmad Shamlou. They told us not to, but we did it anyway. It was one of Nasser's favorite poems [about fighting injustice] that he used to recite. Under the poem, we wrote he was killed by a bullet. The agents went and removed that part, but the poem stayed. The authorities told us to go and file a complaint. They said they would declare Nasser a martyr and pay blood money... But who are we going to sue? They run the courts. They aren't going to investigate anything..."⁸¹

“They wanted me to memorize and say things they had written on pieces of paper; things like Nasser was a passerby and had been shot by rebels.”

Eyewitnesses requesting to remain unnamed

An eyewitness in Karaj, west of Tehran, who asked not to be identified **told** CHRI on November 18, 2019:

“We haven’t been able to post films of the protests and the violent response from the police and security forces, but...we have seen with our own eyes people being killed... they have been firing at people and beating them with batons for peaceful protests...The people don’t have weapons. These agents were armed.”⁸²

Also on November 18, an eyewitness at a hospital in Shahriar, Tehran Province, **told** CHRI:

“There are more than 70 or 80 people who have been hospitalized here with bullet injuries. Several others have been admitted because of the effects from tear gas.”⁸³

A journalist **told** CHRI on that same day:

“In the Sadeghiyeh district of Tehran I witnessed protesters being arrested. They were attacked with batons and dragged away. I saw about 10 to 15 people being arrested in a 10-minute period, which tells me the number of arrests has been very high. What’s causing concern is that nothing is known about the identity of the detainees or where they’re being held.”⁸⁴

The authorities did not only go after protesters in the streets; they also went into the universities. On November 18, a group of students at the University of Tehran were **arrested** and taken to an unnamed prison, according to an independent news channel belonging to the Iranian Students Trade Union Council on the Telegram messaging app.⁸⁵ The channel **reported** on November 20, 2019:

*"Students at the University of Tehran held a gathering on Monday, November 18, 2019, to protest against the threefold increase in the price of gasoline, the catastrophic living conditions and severe repression. The gathering began in the early evening and lasted until 8:00 pm. As darkness approached, several ambulances carrying plain-clothed forces entered the university, arrested a number of students and put them inside the ambulances. To exit the university, they opened the gates leading to 16th of Azar St., expelled the remaining students and arrested some of them outside the university. Based on information received, some of these students have been transferred to the Fasfoyeh Prison (Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary) and some to Evin Prison. The number of detainees at the University of Tehran on Monday evening was estimated at 40 to 50, including five students from Allameh Tabataba'i University, but there is no precise information on their identity. In addition, five other Allameh students were detained outside the gathering. Also, according to our information, over the past three days the security agencies have made threatening contacts with many students and their families who were told they would be arrested if they were seen on campus. Additionally, agents have gone to the homes of a number of students to arrest them."*⁸⁶



"We have seen with our own eyes people being killed...they have been firing at people and beating them with batons for peaceful protests.... The people don't have weapons. These agents were armed."

Interview with an eyewitness in Karaj, west of Tehran, on November 18, 2019

Beatings in detention, information withheld from families and forced “confessions”

CHRI obtained numerous firsthand accounts indicating that detainees—including juvenile detainees—were beaten while in detention, forced to make self-incriminating statements and “confessions,” and held in inhumane facilities and under inhumane conditions. In addition, information on detainees’ whereabouts was withheld from their families.

A source with detailed knowledge of the situation of the detained protesters, who requested to remain unnamed due to security concerns, told CHRI that prison authorities had to relocate existing prisoners to make room for the large influx of new detainees. He [stated](#): “Many prisoners held in cells under the control of the Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have suddenly been moved to public wards in order to make room for the new detainees.”⁸⁷

Moreover, families had to struggle to locate loved ones who were detained. Many families were turned away by the authorities from police stations and detention centers when they tried to find their missing relatives, while detainees were denied phone access and thus the ability to notify their families. An informed source in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province, [told](#) CHRI on November 21, 2019, that family members of detained protesters held in the city’s local detention center run by the Intelligence Ministry were told that information would be given by judicial officials “when necessary.”⁸⁸

In Shiraz, Fars Province, detained protesters were held in the quarantine section at Adelabad Prison, [according](#) to another informed source, who added that none had been allowed to contact their families.⁸⁹ On November 22, 2019, the Evin Public Prosecutor’s Office [announced](#) that relatives should not come to Evin Prison looking for anyone for at least two more weeks.⁹⁰

CHRI [learned](#) that most of those taken into custody in connection with the protests were held in the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary (GTCP) and the Gharchak Prison for women, both south of the capital. As of late February 2020, the number of those detainees in GTCP was believed to be more than 300. The men were being held at the recently constructed Ward 5, which lacks basic facilities. The women were in an enclosed area that used to be a basketball court, where they slept on the floor with insufficient ventilation and toilet/hygiene facilities.⁹¹

An attorney in Tehran who asked not to be identified [told](#) CHRI on February 5, 2020:

“There are three groups of detainees. The first group are people arrested on the streets during the protests. Some of them have been released on light bail because the detention centers don’t have enough capacity. Another group are people who were arrested during or after the protests by security agents who identified them on video footage from closed-circuit cameras. My colleague and I are representing some of them. There is one other

group of people who have been accused by the authorities of being leaders of the unrest but we have no information about them. The number of case files is so large that in addition to branches 15, 26 and 28 of the Revolutionary Court, which deal with political and security cases, branches 22, 24 and 29, which deal with drug cases, are also getting involved in prosecuting the November 2019 detainees.”⁹²

Another attorney representing several detained protesters told CHRI that his clients, who had been forced to make false “confessions,” had been charged with “assembly and collusion against national security” and “disturbing order and public peace” on the basis of Article 610 and 618 of the [Islamic Penal Code](#), in addition to charges of “propaganda against the state” and “insulting the sacred.”⁹³ The attorney [stated](#):

“The only basis for the prosecution of these cases is self-incriminating ‘confessions’ extracted by the authorities and the fact that the detainees were present at the protests. Also, after being arrested, their phones and computers were searched by security agents to find excuses to prosecute them for propaganda against the state. Meanwhile, everyone from religious leaders to legislators protested against the raising of the price of gasoline. None of them are being prosecuted but instead the authorities have imprisoned ordinary people who had nowhere to express themselves other than in the street. Not only was their protest ignored, but they were also suppressed. Giving them even a light sentence would be a violation of human rights. Unfortunately, the security establishment is prejudicial toward these people who are being prosecuted not on any legal foundations, but on the basis of political and security considerations.”⁹⁴

The Islamic Republic has a long and documented [history](#) of forced “confessions,” where interrogators extract (false) self-incriminating statements under torture and/or intense psychological pressure, which are then often broadcast by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on state TV to discredit the accused in the public eye, and then used in court to convict.⁹⁵

In addition to the many accounts of forced confessions relayed directly to CHRI, confessions were broadcast on state TV by IRIB. For example, on November 20, 2019, IRIB [aired](#) alleged “confessions” by a woman of Kurdish descent from the city of Boukan in northwest Iran, named by the broadcaster as Fatemeh Davand, calling her “one of the main instigators” of protests in the city.⁹⁶

On November 19, 2019, the IRIB’s local branch in the city of Isfahan [aired](#) alleged “confessions” by three “rioters” who the broadcaster claimed attacked people with machetes and destroyed public property.⁹⁷ Similar broadcasts were [aired](#) by the IRIB’s local branch in Shiraz on November 19, 2019.⁹⁸

Attorney Mohammad Hossein Aghasi [told](#) CHRI on February 5, 2020 that many detainees had the right to be released before trial but were deliberately kept in prison by exorbitant bail amounts.

“Many of these detainees should be freed as they have been in prison for long periods and gone through preliminary investigations. But the authorities have raised the bail amounts so high that these individuals cannot afford them. This shows the malicious intent of the officials working on these cases. For instance, the mother of one of the detainees came to me from



“The only basis for the prosecution of these cases is self-incriminating ‘confessions’ extracted by the authorities and the fact that the detainees were present at the protests.”

Interview with an attorney in Tehran representing several detained protesters on February 5, 2020

Robat Karim [in Tehran Province] and said the bail set for her son was 500 million tomans (\$107,321 USD). The poor guy has been charged with ‘disturbing order and public peace’ and he’s going to be tried in the Revolutionary Court. The authorities are being very harsh with these detainees. One of my clients is a housewife who parked her car in the middle of the highway, blocking traffic. She has been freed on bail and charged with ‘causing unrest’ and ‘assembly and collusion’ [against national security] because they found messages she had sent to several friends, telling them to join the protest. There is also the case against the son of [detained dissident] Mr. Mohammad Nourizad. He has been freed on 800 million tomans (\$171,714 USD) bail. They found a video he recorded on his phone and are accusing him of wanting to send it to foreign media outlets....”⁹⁹

Human rights activist Karim Deyhimi [told](#) CHRI on February 5, 2020 that [at that time] more than 400 people remain detained in connection with the November 2019 protests in Khuzestan Province. He said in the cities of Mahshahr, Ahvaz and Khorramshahr, there was no information on the fate of numerous detainees, including juvenile detainees, and that those who had shared news or videos of the protests were being treated more harshly, especially if they had any history of activism. Deyhimi told CHRI:

“In the first days of the protests we had a figure of more than 800 detainees [in Khuzestan Province]. Some of them were soon released without bail. They only had to sign a pledge [that they would refrain from further participation in protests]. A number of others were freed on bail set at 300 million to 500 million tomans (\$64,393 to \$107,321 USD). However, we unfortunately don’t know anything about the fate of some of the detainees who were engaged in sharing news, videos and photos. We don’t know where they are being held. Neither do their families have any information. All we know is that they are being held by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Organization. Some of them include individuals who were injured in Shadegan and taken to the Moarefizadeh Hospital where they were arrested and taken away. Their families are very worried that they may be among those who died. There are some detained in Sheiban Prison in Ahvaz and the central prisons in Abadan and Mahshahr. But the ones whose fate is unknown are being held in the detention centers of the IRGC Intelligence Organization. The activists who have a history of engagement or detention are under a lot more pressure. In Mahshahr it’s a different matter. Some of the families there don’t even know where their children are detained. They have gone to the Revolutionary Court and the Intelligence Ministry offices to inquire but they haven’t gotten answers. It’s not clear what has happened to them. The families are very scared and worried.”¹⁰⁰

Juveniles detained, beaten and forced to “confess”

On December 24, 2019, the Ammar Cyber Headquarters, which has close ties with the IRGC, [reported](#) that 166 individuals between the ages of 15 and 18 had been arrested by the Intelligence Ministry during the protests throughout the country and taken to juvenile correctional facilities.¹⁰¹ One of the detainees released on bail told CHRI that in the first few weeks he had been interrogated and severely beaten by IRGC agents inside metal containers set up adjacent to Ward 5 at the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary (GTCP). He [stated](#):

“On the first day, when I was taken to be interrogated, as soon as I entered, someone punched me hard in the face, beat me and made vulgar insults. Then I was sent back to the ward without being interrogated. It was as if they wanted to let me know what I was in for. They behaved the same way with other detainees, too. As the interrogations progressed, they insisted that I should give a written statement that I had been acting on orders received from abroad and intended to send the videos and photos that I had taken with my phone to adversary groups outside the country. They had no evidence to back that up. I had not sent those images to anyone.”¹⁰²

A 17-year-old who had been freed on bail in Ahvaz [told](#) CHRI:

“When they were trying to get me to confess, they focused mostly on foreign contacts and told me to write the names of those who had ‘incited’ me to go to the streets. [I was] tortured with batons and [electric] shockers.”¹⁰³

The use of forced “confessions” not only to convict but also to justify draconian sentences for protesters is a concern, not only given the Islamic Republic’s [history](#) of this practice, but also due to statements that were issued during the state crackdown by influential media and officials.¹⁰⁴

The ultra-conservative Kayhan newspaper, for example, which presents itself as an unofficial mouthpiece for the supreme leader, wrote in a [commentary](#) on November 18, 2019, “Some reports indicate that judicial authorities are certain that the leaders of the recent riots will be punished by execution through hanging. Crimes committed by rioters amount to ‘rebellion’ and their punishment under the law and Sharia is execution.”¹⁰⁵ And a senior IRGC commander, General Ali Fadavi, was [quoted](#) in the judiciary’s Mizan news site in a November 24, 2019 report as stating: “We have caught all the mercenaries who confessed to acting on behalf of America and God Willing the judiciary will give them the maximum punishment.”¹⁰⁶

Interview with a juvenile detainee released on bail from the Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary (GTCP)

“As soon as I entered [the interrogation room], someone punched me hard in the face, beat me...then I was sent back to the ward without being interrogated.”

Convictions

There has been relatively little information regarding trials and convictions for those individuals arrested in connection with the protests. The semi-official Mehr News agency [reported](#) that at a February 18, 2020 press conference, Judiciary Spokesman Gholam-Hossein Esmaili said:

“The prosecution of (November 2019) rioters is on the judiciary’s agenda... Many cases have been investigated and verdicts have been issued. A number of the main saboteurs and those who destroyed the people’s property have been identified and they will be appropriately punished in accordance with their actions. Some of them have been tried and convicted in the cities of Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz as well as in Khuzestan Province.”¹⁰⁷

However, few convictions have been reported in the media. There are several cases in which draconian sentences have been issued, including the death sentence detailed below, and more may be yet to come, the majority of the arrested protesters appear to have been ultimately released on bail after their detentions.

Amnesty International [reported](#) on February 28, 2020 that three men, Amirhossein Moradi, Mohammad Rajabi and Saeed Tamjidi were at risk of execution after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted them of charges that included “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and sentenced them to death.¹⁰⁸ Iran’s judiciary spokesperson said in his weekly press conference on February 18, 2020, that they were “riot leaders” who had “set fire to banks and petrol stations and had filmed their criminal acts and sent the videos to foreign media.” Amnesty reported the men were “denied access to lawyers during the investigation phase” and that they had stated they were tortured. Amirhossein Moradi, age 25 (arrested on November 19, 2019), said he was interrogated without a lawyer present, subjected to beatings and electric shocks, and forced into giving a “confession” that was broadcast on state television and used as evidence to convict him. Mohammad Rajabi, 25, and Saeed Tamjidi, 27, (both arrested on December 28, 2019) also said they were subjected to beatings.¹⁰⁹

There have been a few instances of judicial pushback against convictions for the protesters. For example, on December 8, 2019, a court verdict was shared on [social media](#) showing that Judge Rasoul Ahmadzadeh of the Civil Court in the Chaharbagh District of the city of Karaj, west of Tehran, had acquitted two truck drivers in connection with the November protests, stating they had a right to protest the sudden increase in gasoline prices.¹¹⁰ In his decision, the judge wrote: “The defendants’ conduct did not violate the law since unarmed protest against undesirable governance is one of the basic elements of freedom of expression stipulated in Article 27 of our Constitution and obviously did not interfere with the foundations of Islam.” On December 11, 2019, the domestic news agency Tasnim published Judge Ahmadzadeh’s explanation for his verdict in which [he said](#): “My reason in issuing this verdict was to protect Article 27 of the Constitution regarding the freedom of peaceful protest. However, conduct against order and public security will not be tolerated in any way.”¹¹¹

Investigation and Accountability

To date there have been no moves toward establishing an independent investigation into the state's actions during the November 2019 protests, or of the killings of either protesters or bystanders. Moreover, senior state officials have focused on the alleged wrongdoings of the protesters, not the state security officials or associated militia forces.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has referred to the protesters as “thugs” and the protests as a product of a foreign “conspiracy.” In a [speech](#) on November 17, 2019, he said, “... some people are certainly worried or upset about this decision [gas price hike]...but setting fire to such and such a bank is not the action of the people, rather it is the action of thugs. It is done by thugs. They are done by hooligans and we should pay attention to this.”¹¹²

President Hassan Rouhani [stated](#) “Of course the people might be critical of some things or have certain expectations but they won’t let a group of opportunists take advantage of the circumstances and endanger the nation’s security,” during a visit to Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province, on November 27, 2019.¹¹³

On November 27, 2019, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli focused exclusively on acts by protesters, [claiming](#) that protesters in different cities had attacked “more than 50 military bases” and “attacked and set fire to 34 ambulances, 731 banks, 14 public buildings, nine religious centers, 70 gas stations, 307 private cars, 183 military vehicles and 1,076 private motorcycles.”¹¹⁴

Government Spokesman Ali Rabiei [said](#) at a press conference on November 18, 2019: “There has been some regrettable incidents during the past three days. The protests were not about the government’s decision or concerns over the cost of living but unfortunately they were an excuse to cause riots and set fire to banks and attack military and police stations....”¹¹⁵

Regarding the lack of transparency, Government Spokesman Ali Rabiei told reporters the reason the government had not announced the death toll of the recent unrest was a request to hold off by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). “The government, via coordination with the Judiciary and the Interior Ministry, will announce the death toll soon,” Rabiei said, as [reported](#) in the Tehran Times on December 9, 2019.¹¹⁶

However, there have been some Members of the Iranian Parliament (MP) that have called for an investigation or some measure of accountability.

Reformist MP Mahmoud Sadeqi (Sadeghi) [said](#) in an interview with the Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA) on December 2, 2019 that security forces had “preemptively” arrested students who had not taken part in the protests and that the arrests have been made illegally and the authorities should investigate and explain the measure.¹¹⁷

MP Mohammad Ali Vakili’s [said](#) in an Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA) report on December 2, 2019 that the Judiciary should offer explanations about the number of people killed by security forces during the protests.¹¹⁸

Mostaghel Newspaper, in a December 2, 2019 report, [quoted](#) Member of Parliament Parvaneh Salahshouri (reformist, leader of the women's faction in parliament) as follows:

*"Since the initial days of the protests and incidents, legislators have been thinking about finding a way to get to the truth. There is great discrepancy in the reports we have been receiving here and there. We have become aware of juveniles who lost their lives. It's very regrettable. Given these circumstances and incidents, we have been seeking the formation of a fact-finding commission. I got in touch with [the spokesman for Parliament's Article 90 Committee Bahram] Parsaei and he said that in accordance with regulations a special committee will be formed that could investigate the matter within the law... I believe that legislators will sign on to this proposal due to the fact that this is a sensitive issue in many constituencies and they want to tell the people what happened. There has been negligence in providing precise information [on those who were killed or detained]. I do not watch [state] television but I have heard that the news has been very one-sided, making people search for news from other sources — sources that may not be accurate. People are angry and disillusioned. They have been humiliated in these recent days. Economic pressures on the one hand, and disillusionment on the other, has made them feel ignored as human beings. Overlooking the people is very dangerous. Decision makers should be aware of the consequences. People may stay silent for a time but their hearts are filled with vengeance. We have to think of a solution."*¹¹⁹

Salahshouri was [reportedly](#) subsequently summoned to court and charged with "spreading lies to affect public opinion and propaganda against the system" afterwards, but freed after pledging to return if a subpoena is issued.¹²⁰

Prominent Member of Parliament Ali Motahhari, in a November 25, 2019, interview with the Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA), [said](#) he had been informed by Speaker Ali Larijani that debate over a proposal signed by 20 MPs to impeach Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli over recent events had been postponed until after the February 21 parliamentary elections due to opposition from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. He said: "We believe that the Interior Minister, as the authority in charge of implementing the decision of the three branches of state regarding fuel consumption, should be held accountable by the people's representatives for his great error in not making the necessary preparations and damaging the Islamic Republic by causing considerable financial and human loss."¹²¹

Civil society in Iran has also spoken out. Sixteen mothers whose children were killed amid violent state crackdowns on street protests called on Iranian authorities to allow the UN to visit the country to establish a fact-finding committee on rights violations in a [statement](#) published on December 17, 2019.¹²²

A [statement](#) was also released by a group of prominent artists on November 30, 2019, signed by almost 59,000 people, which said:

"No one can forget the bitter days of November: the faces of young people who lost their lives, the people who were wounded, the mothers who were in mourning and the fathers who had no patience. The wishes of honorable young men, whose blood was spilt by incompetence, are being ignored with accusations that they had ties to

foreigners. The name and identity of every single person who was killed will become clear as the dust settles and the flow of information and communication resumes. What was their crime? They were only fed up with not being heard. They were shouting against incompetence.”¹²³

The Iranian Writers Association (IWA) issued a [statement](#) on December 1, 2019, condemning the crackdown and demanding the immediate release of detainees who have been “denied their human rights for expressing their opinion or protesting.”¹²⁴ The statement said:

“Every corner of Iran is mourning the atrocities left behind from the confrontation between the people and the authorities. The monster, who previously silenced the people with deceitful fangs of intimidation and oppression and interrogated free thinkers and activists in dark dungeons, held them for long periods, tried them behind closed doors, imprisoned them based on forced confessions and banned them for working or leaving the country, has now put its secret detention centers at the disposal of unknown agencies and openly assaulted protesters with bullets for shouting what they had held back in their throat.”¹²⁵

Iran’s Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (UWTSBC), which has over 17,000 members, also issued a [statement](#)¹²⁶ on December 1, 2019, “[strongly and firmly condemning](#)” the state’s bloody response to the protests.¹²⁷



Member of Parliament and leader of the women's faction Parvaneh Salahshouri, as quoted in *Mostaghel Newspaper* on December 2, 2019

“There is great discrepancy in the reports we have been receiving.... We have become aware of juveniles who lost their lives...[and] there has been negligence in providing precise information.”

THE JANUARY 2020 PROTESTS

The state's intense violence against protesters and massive arrests quieted the streets of most cities in Iran by early December 2019. Yet on January 11, 2020, street protests **broke out** again.¹²⁸ Centered largely but not exclusively in several universities, this unrest was triggered by public outrage over the Iranian government's admission that on January 8, 2020, the Revolutionary Guards had **shot down** Ukrainian Airlines flight PS752, killing all 176 passengers aboard, after denying responsibility for three days.¹²⁹

This admission came only days after 56 people died in a **stampede** at a badly managed funeral for Iranian General Qasem Soleimani on January 7.¹³⁰ Public fury at the government's incompetence and lack of transparency exploded and public protests resumed, despite the fact that many in the nation had briefly united against the US's **killing** of the general days earlier.¹³¹

The state's response, while not as lethal as the November 2019 crackdown, was nevertheless characterized by extreme and unlawful **violence**.¹³² Firsthand and eyewitness accounts and video obtained directly by CHRI from sources in Iran, as well as accounts from other credible organizations, again documented the state's excessive use of force against the protesters.

The use of force by state security forces during the January 2020 unrest included the use of tear gas against civilian crowds in enclosed places, the beating of protesters, and what appeared to be live ammunition fired at unarmed civilians.

Casualties

During the January 2020 unrest, state security forces and members of the Basij volunteer militia beat peaceful protesters with batons, used tear gas against crowds of civilians (including in enclosed places), and fired what appeared to be live ammunition at unarmed civilians. This violence has been documented by firsthand and eyewitness [accounts](#),¹³³ and [video footage](#)¹³⁴ sent to CHRI from Iran from protesters in Iran that was [verified](#) by the Associated Press.¹³⁵

In one [video](#) obtained by CHRI, Iranian state forces fire tear gas and beat protesters who have gathered in the streets on January 11, 2020.¹³⁶ A second [video](#) sent to CHRI, also from January 11, shows protesters at Amirkabir University in Tehran being beaten and tear-gassed by security forces.¹³⁷ In a third [video](#) acquired by CHRI, tear gas is shot directly into a crowd outside the Shademaan Metro Station in Tehran at approximately 7:30 pm Tehran time on January 12, 2020.¹³⁸ A fourth [video](#) shows the preceding incident from a different angle.¹³⁹

Amnesty International [reported](#): “The evidence indicates that on 11 and 12 January security forces fired pointed pellets from air guns...at peaceful protesters causing bleeding and painful injuries. Security forces also used rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray to disperse protesters as well as kicking and punching them, beating them with batons and carrying out arbitrary arrests.”¹⁴⁰

The Iranian government has released no official information or numbers regarding any deaths related to the January protests or the number of people who were injured, and due to the news blackout, there is no reliable information on these numbers. However, the following testimony in this report, the above-referenced video footage, and reports from other credible organizations indicate multiple injuries from indiscriminate beatings, tear gas (including its use in enclosed places), and the firing of undetermined ammunition by security forces.

There were also credible [reports](#) that injured people did not go to hospitals for fear of arrest, as state security and intelligence agents maintained a heavy presence at some of the hospitals, further inhibiting estimates on the number of people injured.



Arrests

As during the November 2019 protests, the authorities violently arrested civilians exercising their right to public protest. Included in the arrests were significant numbers of students at universities engaged in peaceful sit-ins. Moreover, the authorities routinely withheld information on the arrests from the families, including those of juvenile detainees, as the accounts below indicate.

In addition to the [reports CHRI received](#) from the University of Tehran, the University of Isfahan in central Iran, Noshirvani University in Babol (Mazandaran Province), Kharazmi University in Tehran and Razi University in Kermanshah (western Iran), there were also reports of students at other universities who were arrested.¹⁴¹ For example, Amnesty International also received [reports](#) of arrests in Ahvaz (Khuzestan province), Isfahan (Isfahan province), Zanjan (Zanjan province), Amol and Babol (Mazandaran province), Bandar Abbas (Hormozgan province), Kermanshah (Kermanshah province), Sanandaj (Kurdistan province), Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan province), Shiraz (Fars province), and Tabriz (East Azerbaijan province).¹⁴²

There have been no official numbers provided by the authorities on arrests after the January 2020 protests. However, on January 14, 2020, Judiciary Spokesman Gholam-Hossein Esmaili [said](#) “about 30 people have been arrested during recent incidents” in connection with plane crash protests.¹⁴³ No further details were given. Based on the firsthand accounts CHRI received on the arrests, this number is a gross underestimate. Unconfirmed reports have reported those arrested numbered at least 500.

Unlawful searches and confiscations

CHRI also learned that during the arrests, security and arresting agents conducted searches of the protesters, confiscated personal possessions and items without consent, and also conducted searches on the homes of protesters without warrant, again confiscating personal items. (See accounts below.)

Internet shutdowns

CHRI also received reports from sources in Iran that there were brief, intermittent [internet disruptions](#) during the January 2020 unrest.¹⁴⁴ For example, several sources in Tehran [told](#) CHRI that they were experiencing internet disruptions and outages in parts of Tehran on January 12, 2020, and that they could not use their phones for several hours.¹⁴⁵ Access to the global internet was also [disrupted](#) nationwide in Iran for 10 minutes on January 14, 2020, according to internet monitoring organizations.¹⁴⁶

Inhibiting treatment of injured protesters at hospitals

According to a [report](#) by Amnesty International, there was a heavy presence of state security agents in hospitals. This inhibited the medical treatment of injured protesters in two ways—Amnesty said they had received multiple reports that injured protesters were reluctant to go to hospitals for fear of arrest, and that doctors were turning away injured protesters, fearing arrest if they treated them.¹⁴⁷

Threats against students, hospitalized protesters and their families

Firsthand accounts received by CHRI indicate that direct threats were made by state security and intelligence agents against students participating in peaceful sit-ins, hospitalized protesters who had been injured by security forces, and against their families. Most often the threats were focused on ending further participation in any protests and not speaking to the media. (See accounts below.)

Punishment of activists speaking out

Individuals in Iran who spoke out publicly against the state's actions, especially prominent people or activists, were swiftly punished by the authorities. For example, additional restrictions were imposed on former presidential candidate and Green Movement leader Mehdi Karroubi, who has been under extra-judicial house arrest in Tehran for nine years, after he held Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei responsible for the January 2020 events in an [open letter](#) on January 11, 2020.¹⁴⁸

One of Karroubi's sons, Mohammad Taghi Karroubi, [told](#) CHRI on January 14, 2020 that the security establishment had pressured the family not to publish the letter.

"On the day that my father's letter was published, security officials contacted my brother [Mohammad Hossein Karroubi; called Hossein Karroubi by the family] before publication and demanded he put a stop to it or else he would suffer consequences. Then they

*broke into my brother's house, even though he had already reported himself to Evin Prison. There was no one in his house. They broke the front door and searched the house for several hours and took away his and his children's personal belongings. Following Hossein's incarceration, the authorities also banned all visits with my father by second-tier family members such as his only sister. Visiting privileges have regressed to last year's restrictions. His children can only see him once a week and as of today (January 14) body searches of visitors inside the house have resumed ... phone contacts have been completely cut off and newspaper deliveries have become more restricted. My other brother went to see my father tonight but he was not allowed inside."*¹⁴⁹

Excerpts from CHRI interviews with eyewitnesses, victims, their families and lawyers

The following excerpts are from transcripts of interviews CHRI conducted with the families and lawyers of protesters and detainees, and with eyewitnesses to events surrounding the January 2020 protests and the state's violent crushing of the unrest.

The January 2020 protests began on January 11, 2020, at Amir Kabir and Sharif Universities in Tehran. Protesters in Tehran and at least one other city (Amol in Mazandaran Province) faced a heavy security presence, according to eyewitnesses. A student activist in Tehran who asked not to be named **told** CHRI:

*"At the end of gatherings on Saturday night [January 11], all the activists received threatening phone calls. The callers didn't say where they were calling from and their phone numbers did not show up. They warned us not to participate in any protests. They called one of the students who had been hospitalized for inhaling tear gas and told him that he was never going to leave the hospital bed. They called the wife of another activist and warned her that they would soon summon her husband. They were making a lot of threats that they were going to make arrests and turn our lives into hell, in some cases, they even made death threats."*¹⁵⁰

The protests in Tehran continued on January 12. An eyewitness who asked to remain unnamed for security reasons **told** CHRI on January 12, 2020:

*"The streets were full of security forces; they were everywhere. There were riot police and special forces' vehicles in front of the University of Tehran. There were water cannons in Revolution Square while Ferdowsi Square was packed with special motorcycle units. There were significantly more plainclothes security agents on the streets, and they wouldn't let anyone hang around. We walked toward Azadi Square where we had planned to gather. But on the way, motorized units were maneuvering near Dr. Gharib Street brandishing guns with long barrels to scare off the people. Sometimes they would stop people and confiscate their identity cards."*¹⁵¹

Another eyewitness [told](#) CHRI on January 12, 2020:

“There was a clash on Shademan Crossing. They attacked people in groups and beat them with batons to disperse them. People would escape into side streets and then come back. We were going toward Azadi Square but the road was completely blocked in front of Sharif University. I couldn’t guess how many people or security forces were there. Every time people came together the security forces would attack. There was a lot of tear gas being used and people were being struck with batons but weren’t dispersing. They would run and come back again.”¹⁵²

Video clips sent to CHRI and later [verified by the AP](#) appeared to show blood on the pavement in Azadi Street at Ostad Moin crossing later that evening and two wounded people.¹⁵³ An eyewitness who said he saw one of his friends being shot by security forces [told](#) CHRI: “At the clinic they told him he had been shot with a pellet, but the wound was too deep, and he had to go to a hospital.”¹⁵⁴

Tehran police chief Hossein Rahimi [said](#) on January 13, 2020, that his forces “absolutely did not shoot” at protesters because they had been “given orders to show restraint.”¹⁵⁵ Yet eyewitnesses [told](#) CHRI that they saw “motorized units ... brandishing guns with long barrels.”¹⁵⁶ The state-funded Fars News Agency [reported](#) only that police “shot tear gas in some areas.”¹⁵⁷

As protests were ongoing in Tehran, authorities temporarily [closed](#) the underground metro station at Azadi Square with people trapped inside.¹⁵⁸ Multiple reports [stated](#) that the authorities used tear gas in enclosed areas such as the metro station.¹⁵⁹

CHRI also received multiple reports that protesters were physically attacked and arrested at universities in Tehran and other Iranian cities on January 14, 2020. One eyewitness who asked to remain unnamed [told](#) CHRI:

Interview with a student activist in Tehran on January 12, 2020



“They called one of the students who had been hospitalized for inhaling tear gas and told him he was never going to leave the hospital bed... they even made death threats.”



“Every time people came together the security forces would attack. There was a lot of tear gas being used and people were being struck with batons but [they] weren’t dispersing.”

Interview with an eyewitness in Tehran on January 12, 2020

“The front entrance of the University of Tehran was full of security agents. They closed off the area between the 16th of Azar and 12th of Farvardin Streets and didn’t allow anyone to cross for some time. But even when they opened up the road it was hard to move because there were agents everywhere.... The Basijis were wearing khaki uniforms without head caps but some of them had completely covered their faces with masks that only had eye and mouth openings. They had stationed a lot of Basijis, including youngsters who seemed to be 14 to 15 years old, at every street crossing and the university’s entrances and exits. There were also some armed agents in Basiji uniforms on motorcycles maneuvering in the adjacent streets. They had brought vans that looked like taxis from the outside that had cages inside. They were also using ambulances from the Oil Ministry and the State Welfare Organization to transport the anti-riot forces and Basijis. There were mini-busses, too, which brought plainclothes agents who dressed like civilians. They would walk the streets and start discussions with people about the downing of the passenger plane being a terrible act and when people agreed, they would arrest them.”¹⁶⁰

A student activist who asked not to be identified told CHRI that a water cannon was stationed in front of Amir Kabir University of Technology in Tehran and its eastern sidewalk was blocked off. At one point, the university’s gates were closed and plainclothes agents beat protesters trapped inside. The student activist **told** CHRI:

“After they closed the university’s gates, plainclothes agents began beating the students. We were trapped there for two hours. The internet had been disrupted and the phone lines weren’t working for some time.”¹⁶¹

Students were also arrested at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran. Another student activist who asked to remain unnamed **told** CHRI:

“The Basijis based at Shahid Beheshti University were carrying posters of Qassem Soleimani as well as posters of some of the victims of the plane crash, and when the

*students started chanting: 'if you're really mournful, why did you sit and wait three days?' a clash broke out. At first the clash was between the students and the Basijis but then other older-looking forces were brought in to our university from outside to suppress the students."*¹⁶²

Protests also occurred at the Alzahra University in Tehran, the University of Arak in Markazi Province, the Fine Arts University in Isfahan, central Iran, and the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili in Ardabil Province. At the University of Isfahan, in central Iran, eight student activists received threatening calls from the university's security office demanding that the protests be canceled.¹⁶³

CHRI received reports that University of Tehran personnel assisted a raid by state forces on a dormitory on January 16, 2020. An eyewitness who resides at the Student Martyrs Dormitory where the raid took place told CHRI:

*"While students gathered to protest the Revolutionary Guards' missile attack on the Ukrainian passenger plane..., the security forces, with the help of the university's security guards, carried out a raid and arrested more than eight students. When plainclothes agents began searching for the personal belongings and phones of the detained students, students at the dorm objected and protested."*¹⁶⁴

The eyewitness told CHRI that the university's security office ignored students' complaints about the raid and told them not to speak to media outlets about the arrests, and that "special forces" on motorcycles tried to suppress a peaceful, silent sit-in outside the dorm that was organized after the students were arrested. He stated:

"The eight detained students are from the university's various colleges, but their families haven't yet gotten permission to publicize their children's names. Also, the university administration office told us not to talk to the media so that the authorities could follow up

Interview with a student activist in Tehran on January 12, 2020



"After they closed the university's gates, plainclothes agents began beating the students. We were trapped there for two hours."

*on the matter and gain their release. But we have heard that the bail set for the detained students... has been increased several-fold in order to prevent them from being released. Also, the university's security guards were complicit in the raid by the security forces that led to the arrests. The leader of the student council at the University of Tehran was present at the dorm when the raid happened. He contacted the university's security office and the chancellor to tell them what was going on and they said they already knew. That means the raid had been coordinated with them."*¹⁶⁵

The source [told](#) CHRI that the students had decided to protest the arrests and get "answers" from university officials by organizing a silent sit-in outside the dorm that had been raided, but that gathering was also suppressed:

*"We sat in front of the Student Martyrs Dormitory and suddenly the special forces arrived on 50 or 60 motorcycles and began maneuvering in front of us. Our protest was a silent one. We were not chanting any slogans. We were only demanding to meet Mr. Soleimani, the head of security at the university, to get some answers. When Mr. Soleimani eventually appeared, he made some insulting comments and took the side of the security forces. It was as if he was protecting their interests instead of protecting the students. He said the detained students had violated the rules and insulted the Supreme Leader.... We were protesting the arrest of the students and the presence of plainclothes agents on campus. But we didn't get a straight answer... At the moment, the students don't feel secure. They are all worried; worried for the detained students and for their own safety."*¹⁶⁶

Encapsulating the climate of fear at the universities, Amir Sharifi, a student residing at the Student Martyrs Dormitory [tweeted](#) on January 16, 2020:

*"The silent sit-in in front of the dormitory at the University of Tehran has been attacked by tens of motorcycle units of the special forces. From this night onward, all the student dorms are unsafe, especially at the University of Tehran. We don't know where we will wake up in the morning."*¹⁶⁷

And well-known university student activist Zia Nabavi [tweeted](#) on January 16, 2020:

*"Yesterday evening I was in Revolution St. and saw plainclothes agents dragging away a young man toward Fakhre Razi St. His friends who were standing at a crossing said he was only taking pictures of the amassing special units across the street."*¹⁶⁸

Detentions and prosecutions

There has been little publicly available information on any prosecutions or convictions for those arrested during the January 2020 protests. It appears that most of those arrested were probably subsequently released, yet the complete lack of transparency regarding the arrests, detentions, interrogations and any prosecutions is deeply troubling given the beatings, forced "confessions," denial of access to counsel and other due process violations, and withholding of information from families that marked the treatment of those arrested during the November 2019 protests, as well as the Islamic Republic's longstanding pattern of abuses by security, intelligence and judicial officials.



State security forces inflicted severe and unlawful violence on its population with impunity, with a government that was either unable or unwilling to raise any objections.

Investigations and Accountability

There were multiple calls for accountability in and outside government in Iran regarding the IRGC's shooting down of the Ukrainian passenger plane and the government's denial of responsibility for three days, but few statements regarding any investigation of or accountability for the state violence against the individuals protesting those events in January 2020.

Member of Parliament Mahmoud Sadeghi offered a somewhat innocuous [tweet](#) on January 22, 2020: "When our interests and national security are being threatened by foreigners, internal disputes should be avoided and the state should recognize the people's right to engage in civil protests. Self-control by the protectors of order and security will reduce tensions and encourage protesters to show respect towards the country's foundations."¹⁶⁹

Yet essentially, Iran's state security forces inflicted severe and unlawful violence on its population with impunity, with a government that was either unable or unwilling to raise any objections.

PUBLIC PROTEST AND THE LAW

The right to protest is guaranteed under Iranian law. Article 27 of Iran's [Constitution](#) states, “Public gatherings and marches may be freely held, provided arms are not carried and that they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam.”¹⁷⁰

Public protest is also a basic right under international law. Article 21 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), to which Iran is a State Party, affirms the right to peaceful assembly—and the vast majority of the protesters during both the November 2019 and the January 2020 protests were peaceful—as were the many bystanders killed by Iranian state security forces.¹⁷¹

Even in instances where a government can argue public property was at risk or crowd control measures were needed, the response of the Iranian security forces far exceeded what is permitted under international law, which significantly restricts and imposes conditionality on the use of force by law enforcement officials.

The [UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#) requires that law enforcement officials apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms, and to minimize the risk of endangering uninvolved persons.¹⁷² These restrictions are explicitly detailed in the Basic Principle's General Provisions. For example, General Provision #4 states that law enforcement officials “shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms.”



Even in instances where a government can argue public property was at risk or crowd control measures were needed, the response of the Iranian security forces far exceeded what is permitted under international law.

When the use of force is “unavoidable,” the Guidelines require that officials “exercise restraint...minimize damage and injury...ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to any injured or affected persons at the earliest possible moment...[and] ensure that relatives or close friends of the injured or affected person are notified at the earliest possible moment.”

Moreover, in the event of unavoidable injury or death, officials, must “report the incident promptly to their superiors” and “ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials is punished as a criminal offence under their law.”

The UN Guidelines stipulate that even in the event of unlawful assemblies “officials shall avoid the use of force” and when dealing with violent assemblies, law enforcement officials may use firearms “only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary.”

In all respects, the authorities in Iran violated every one of these principles in their response to the November 2019 protests and the January 2020 protests. Lethal force was used on a wide scale—immediately and indiscriminately—resulting in the deaths of hundreds of protesters and bystanders and an untold number of injuries. In addition, medical assistance was not provided, families were not notified, and officials acting unlawfully were not punished.

CONCLUSION

Repression and the suppression of dissent and peaceful public protest are long-standing practices of the Islamic Republic. Yet the open killing of hundreds of unarmed civilians in the space of roughly one week is state violence on a scale not seen since the Iranian government's decision to kill thousands of prisoners in Iran in 1988. The state violence inflicted upon the protesters was swift, unhesitating and carried out with a vehemence that suggests not only a narrowing space for dissent in Iran, but also a state that has grown fearful of its own people and their discontent. This level of state violence, combined with the increasing intensity of mass protest in Iran, suggests a dangerously growing state-society divide in the Islamic Republic.

While it will be up to the Iranian people to decide how they navigate this sharpening confrontation, it is incumbent upon the international community—the UN and its human rights bodies, transnational institutions such as the EU, and governments worldwide—to bring the Iranian authorities to account for their excessive and unlawful use of force against protesters in the country, and their widespread violations of the right to life, the right to dissent, the right to peaceful assembly and public protest, the prohibition against arbitrary arrest and detention, and the right to due process and a fair trial.

It is also imperative that the international community continue to forcefully demand that the Iranian authorities allow and facilitate an independent investigation into state actions and accountability for any unlawful actions. The Iranian people were subjected to intense—and unlawful—state violence, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives, and at least so far, there has been no accountability. This gives a clear green light for future state violence against the civilian population, and raises the probability, if not the stakes, for future violent confrontation in Iran.

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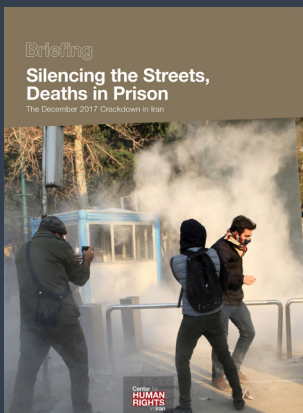
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Gunning Them Down State Violence against Protesters in Iran, documents the extraordinary state violence that was used against protesters in Iran during the unrest that gripped the country in November 2019 and January 2020. State security forces indiscriminately fired live ammunition into crowds of civilians, killing hundreds of protesters and bystanders and injuring untold numbers, and thousands were arrested. Through dozens of interviews with eyewitnesses, family members of those killed, and lawyers of detainees, this report documents the lethal violence the state used to crush the protests. The Iranian government has released no official numbers on those killed, injured or arrested, and there has been no investigation into the events or accountability regarding the killing of large numbers of civilians, which included bystanders, women and children. This report is a comprehensive documentation of these events.

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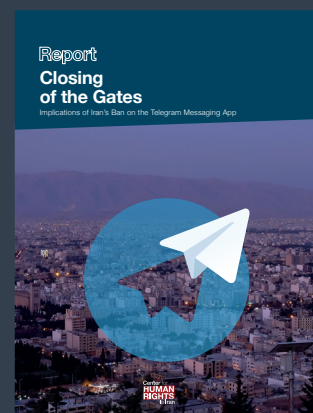
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