



Rights and freedom

'You will be killed': Iran's female journalists speak out on brutal crackdown

Ahead of a trial of journalists who covered the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, reporters describe beatings and threats as government agents try to wipe out independent media

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It was a chilling warning from government agents. A young female journalist based in Tehran recounted the calls and messages she had received: "It said they were at my sister's place and were there to rape her."

These were the same agents from Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) who had interrogated her after she had attended one of the [nationwide protests](#) that erupted last year after the death in custody of a 22-year-old woman, [Mahsa Jina Amini](#), who was arrested for wearing her headscarf improperly and then reportedly beaten into a coma.

Ahead of the [expected trial this week](#) of two female journalists, who were among the first

to report on the death of Amini, reporters in Iran have described the violent beatings, threats and imprisonment they have faced for reporting on protests in the country.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a female journalist said she feared for her life, despite being released uncharged after being detained by the IRGC for three days. She had been arrested while covering protests as a reporter after Amini's death.

"They [IRGC agents] have messaged me several times with death threats that they will kill me, like the protesters they killed during the protests," she said.



📷 The Iranian journalists Niloofar Hamedi, left, and Elaheh Mohammadi are among those detained. They have been accused of orchestrating protests with the CIA. Photograph: Abaca Press/Sipa

Another female journalist said she had been told that she had "no right to cover the protests" and could not interview the families of anyone killed.

About 40% of all those journalists detained in the past seven months have been female, according to the press freedom organisation Reporters Without Borders.

The two female journalists due to go on trial this week are accused of conspiring with hostile foreign powers, a charge that potentially carries the death penalty. They have been imprisoned and held in solitary confinement since being arrested shortly after their reports appeared in September 2022.

▲▲ Many citizen journalists have filled the void of official journalists who are trapped by censorship

Niloofar Hamedi, who works for the reformist newspaper Shargh Daily, and Elaheh Mohammadi, who writes on gender equality and social issues for the Hammihan

newspaper, were accused of “orchestrating the nationwide protests” through their reporting, as well as being accused of working with western intelligence, especially the CIA.

Journalists in [Iran](#) say much of the brutality has been focused on citizen journalists, both male and female, whose reports and photos were seen across Iran and abroad.

Often less well-known, these citizen journalists had “filled the void of official journalists who are trapped by censorship”, a female journalist said. “Out of fear of international reaction, the Iranian government harasses well-known journalists less, but punishes anonymous citizen journalists.

“I know many of them [citizen journalists] who were beaten in custody, and their legs were broken. All the videos and pictures published during the protests were from these citizen journalists, not official media,” said the journalist.

The dwindling number of jobs for independent journalists - as well as threats to their lives and freedom in Iran - has forced some who spoke to the Guardian to join state-run media outlets to be able to make a living. They still hope for the chance to report freely again.

“The people of Iran are more aware and wiser than ever but, with all the wealth and weapons in the hands of the dictator, how will Iranians fight against this authoritarian regime?” the journalist said. “Sometimes I think of leaving Iran, but who will then help voices to be heard?”

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