

The People Executed or Sentenced to Death in Iran's Protest Crackdown

An updated look at the Iranians who have been hanged, and those on death row, as the government tries to crush a monthslong uprising.

By **Farnaz Fassihi and Cora Engelbrecht**

Jan. 12, 2023

They include a doctor, a rapper, a karate champion, a barber and an actor, sons, grandsons and fathers. They are among the people Iran has hastily sentenced to death in its campaign to quash the monthslong uprising against the Islamic Republic.

In December, two men were hanged in quick succession. On Jan. 7, two others met the same fate. At least 15 other men and boys remain at risk of execution. Some human rights groups cite higher numbers, which The New York Times was not able to independently verify.

Executed: a man visiting his parents' graves, 39 / a karate champ, 22 / a barista, 23 / a shop worker, 23

Sentenced to death: a teenager, 19 / a barber, 22 / a radiologist, 53 / a man who had three jobs, 22 / an actor, 26 / a father, 45 / a bodybuilding champ, 26 / a rapper, 24 / a father, 43 / three protesters in Isfahan / three protesters in Nowshahr

Most of the men have been charged with "moharebe," a broad term that means waging a war on God and that typically carries the death penalty in Iran.

Their trials were fast-tracked behind closed doors by Iran's Revolutionary Court system, with government-assigned lawyers representing the defendants. The evidence presented has often been opaque, sometimes relying on coerced confessions or grainy video footage. Rights groups say that in some cases, there are accounts and evidence of torture.

Not every detail of the judicial proceedings or the purported crimes could be confirmed, but The Times interviewed friends and relatives of some defendants and corroborated information with activists and reports by Amnesty International and other major human rights groups.

This article will be updated as individual circumstances change or new information is found.

Executed

Sayed Mohammad Hosseini, 39, hanged on Jan. 7.



Sayed Mohammad Hosseini
via Radio Zamaneh

Sayed Mohammad Hosseini was hanged about two months after his arrest in early November. He was accused of killing a member of the Basij, a volunteer militia operating under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, during the protest in Karaj, a city about an hour from the capital, Tehran.

After a visit to the prison where Mr. Mohammad Hosseini was held, his lawyer, Ali Sharifzadeh Ardakani, said on Twitter that his client had suffered physical abuse: “He has been severely tortured, beaten up, with tied hands and closed eyes, kicked in his head and falling unconscious, beaten up with an iron bar to his soles of the feet and given electric shocks on different parts of his body.”

There was very little personal information about him, and his extended family has not spoken publicly to the media.

Mr. Mohammad Hosseini had said he was on his way to the cemetery where his parents were buried when was arrested.

“The knife I had on me was for planting flowers and plants around their graves,” he testified.

Mohammad Mehdi Karami, 22, a karate champion, hanged on Jan. 7.



Mohammad Mehdi Karami
via Amnesty

Mohammad Mehdi Karami was hanged on Jan. 7, also about two months after being arrested in Karaj. He was accused of the same crime as Mr. Mohammad Hosseini: the killing of the Basij member during protests in that city. The court relied on forced confessions that were broadcast on state television, according to Amnesty International.

Mr. Karami had won more than a dozen medals in national karate competitions, according to a video message made by his parents. A video of Mr. Karami competing in a karate match shows him with a red belt and a member of the audience cheering his name. He bows at the end and gives a high-five to another athlete.

Mr. Karami’s family migrated from Kurdistan Province to Karaj, in Tehran Province, for work; his father told the newspaper Etemad that he sells napkins and tissues on the street.

Majid Reza Rahnavard, 23, a shop worker, hanged on Dec. 12.



Majid Reza Rahnavard.
Sean Gallup/Getty Images

Majid Reza Rahnavard was arrested on Nov. 19 in the northeastern city of Mashhad and was hanged from a crane in public less than a month after his arrest. He was the second protester known to be officially executed.

He was accused of stabbing to death two members of the Basij militia and wounding four other people in Mashhad.

A video shared with The Times by one of Mr. Reza Rhanavard's relatives shows family members bringing flowers to his grave. "There is nothing I feared more than them taking my 23-year-old son," his mother can be heard saying through sobs. "God damn all of you who killed my son."

Mr. Reza Rahnavard worked at a shop selling women's clothing and shoes in Mashhad. He was an avid athlete who trained as a gymnast and a wrestler, relatives said.

In a video taken before his execution and verified by his family, Mr. Reza Rahnavard appears blindfolded with a hand in a cast. In the video, he tells a reporter: "I don't want them to cry at my grave. I don't want them to pray and recite the Quran for me." He adds, "Be happy and play joyful music."

Mohsen Shekari, 23, a barista, hanged on Dec. 8.



Mohsen Shekari.
via Twitter

Mohsen Shekari was executed less than three months after his arrest. He was the first protester known to be killed in an official execution.

He was accused of burning a trash can, blocking a road, stabbing a member of the Basij militia with a machete and threatening public safety.

Mr. Shekari had lived in Tehran with his parents, where he was employed at a coffeeshop in a working-class neighborhood. He liked baggy cargo jeans and bandannas wrapped around his wrist, photos on social media show.

In one video posted on social media, he can be seen singing at a cafe accompanied by a guitar. “I now have one wish only, that is to see you one more time,” he sang. “You are my lone star.”

Sentenced to death

Mohammad Boroughani, 19.



Mohammad Boroughani.
via Twitter

Mohammad Boroughani was arrested in Pakdasht, an industrial city outside Tehran. He was accused of wielding a machete, setting fire to the governor’s building and injuring an official on duty with a knife. The court, citing Instagram messages, called him “a leader of the riots” in Pakdasht.

“I went out to the streets because of an Instagram story my friend posted. I don’t know anything about politics,” Mr. Boroughani said at his trial, according to a report by the semiofficial Tasnim News Agency. When the judge asked him why he took videos of the clashes he replied: “I ask for forgiveness and mercy. I got caught up in the moment and did these things.”

When Mr. Boroughani turned 18, he rapped about his life:

“I won’t forget the games of childhood, bikes and playing — we were so happy — now we don’t know if we are down or up — only memories are left, the more we get older the less joy — now my only friend is a cigarette and I’m suddenly 18.”

His father makes his living by gathering metal scraps to sell, according to Iranian media reports.

On Jan. 2, Iran’s Supreme Court announced that it had upheld the verdict against Mr. Boroughani.

Mohammad Ghobadlou, 22, a barber.



Mohammad Ghobadlou.
via Amnesty

Mohammad Ghobadlou was arrested in Tehran on Sept. 22, and accused of running over a police officer with a car, killing one person and injuring five others. As evidence, the court relied on a confession that Amnesty International said was coerced under torture.

Mr. Ghobadlou worked at a barbershop in Tehran. In his Instagram videos, he jokes with his clients. In one video, he says that in Iran they call the sons of rich politicians “aghazadeh,” which translates roughly as “gentlemen,” but that “the real aghazadehs are the ones who earn their own living.”

After his arrest, his mother said in a video posted on social media that her son was bipolar and that he hadn’t taken his medicine for months. On Jan. 9, a group of 50 psychiatrists wrote a letter to the judiciary objecting to his death sentence.

The same morning, hundreds of protesters flocked to a prison on the outskirts of Tehran when word spread that Mr. Boroughani and Mr. Ghobadlou were at risk of imminent execution. Their parents were also present, wailing and sobbing.

On Dec. 24, the Supreme Court announced that it had upheld the verdict against Mr. Ghobadlou.

Hamid Ghare Hassanlou, 53, a radiologist.



Hamid Ghare Hassanlou and his wife, Farzaneh.
via Amnesty

Hamid Ghare Hassanlou was arrested on Nov. 4 in Karaj and was accused of being involved in the killing of a Basij member during protests.

His wife, Farzaneh, 46, who was with him, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison without visitation rights. The court relied on confessions from Dr. Ghare Hassanlou’s that Amnesty International said were extracted under torture and she withdrew.

The Iranian medical community around the world has mobilized to stop Dr. Ghare Hassanlou’s execution, with thousands of doctors demanding that he and his wife be released.

Dr. Ghare Hassanlou is known in Iran's medical community for having long served underprivileged areas. He built several schools in rural and low-income towns, donated medical equipment to clinics, treated patients for free and volunteered in a public clinic, according to his colleagues and his family's online posts.

The day before their arrest, Dr. Ghare Hassanlou and his wife were driving home from work when they encountered a large protest honoring a young woman who had been killed by security forces. When they left their car in the traffic to walk, they were caught up in a melee of people assaulting a Basij member, Amnesty International and a colleague of the doctor said.

In a video released by state media, Mrs. Ghare Hassanlou can be seen trying to stop the assault on the Basij member.

On Jan. 3, the Supreme Court announced that it had overturned Dr. Ghare Hassanlou's verdict, citing shortcomings in the investigation. The case was returned to the original judge for retrial, leaving the doctor still at risk of a death sentence.

Mahan Sadrat Marani, 22.



Mahan Sadrat Marani.

Mahan Sadrat Marani was arrested in late October in Tehran. He was accused of attacking a Basij member with a knife, setting a motorcycle on fire and damaging a mobile phone. The court's evidence relied on low-quality video footage in which no knife is visible, according to Amnesty International.

Since his arrest, the Basij member and the cleric who filed the complaints have withdrawn them to try to save Mr. Sadrat Marani from execution, they said.

Mr. Sadrat Marani's father told Iranian media that the family had "kissed the hands of the two men," hoping to persuade them to speak out against their son's sentence. Mr. Sadrat Marani's grandmothers made a video pleading for mercy.

After a public backlash and a campaign by the Basij member, Mr. Sadrat Marani's execution was suspended just hours before he was scheduled to be hanged at dawn. His situation remains precarious.

Photos on his social media show Mr. Sadrat Marani riding motorbikes and wearing fashionably mismatched sneakers. He trained as a bodybuilder and lived with his parents and sisters, working three jobs to help his family get by, according his grandmothers said in the video.

Hossein Mohammadi, 26, a theater actor.



Hossein Mohammadi.
via Amnesty

Hossein Mohammadi was arrested on Nov. 5 at his home in Karaj, and accused in the killing of a Basij member during a large protest in Karaj. The court used forced confessions broadcast on state television against him, according to Amnesty International.

Mr. Mohammadi, an award-winning theater actor, wrote poems, sang and acted in several short films and plays, and won the best actor award at a local art festival.

On Jan. 3, the Supreme Court announced that it had overturned Mr. Mohammadi's verdict, citing shortcomings in the investigation. The case was returned to the original judge for retrial. He is still at risk of being sentenced to death.

Manouchehr Mehman Navaz, 45.



Manouchehr Mehman Navaz.
via Iran Human Rights

Manouchehr Mehman Navaz was arrested on Sept. 25 in Gharchak, in Tehran Province.

He was accused of setting fire to a government building and to several cars, and of attacking a security guard's outpost by throwing Molotov cocktails. In its decision against him, the court relied on his text messages to a friend, which the judge said placed him in a protest, and grainy footage. Prosecutors requested he be hanged in public at the same place as the arson.

As with other defendants, very little information is publicly available about Mr. Mehman Navaz. He is married and has two teenage daughters, according to the Iran Human Rights Network.

Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh, 26, a bodybuilding champion.



Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh.
via Human Rights in Iran

Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh was arrested on Sept. 23 in Tehran and accused of burning a trash can and tires and destroying highway rails in a protest. The court relied for evidence on grainy video footage that his lawyer said did not show him.

On the day he was arrested, he was told he would be executed, he said in a phone call with his family that was posted on BBC Persian.

Mr. Nourmohammad-Zadeh is a bodybuilder who, according to social media posts, has won medals in statewide competitions.

He worked at a small jewelry shop in a mall near where protests broke out in September. Mr. Nourmohammad-Zadeh has said all he did was kick a trash can outside the mall and move rails that were already broken, according to the tape published on BBC Persian. More than 100 employees and shop owners at the mall signed a petition vouching for his innocence.

Part of a religiously conservative family, he said he prayed three times a day, read the Quran in his cell and did not understand the charge of “moharebe,” a term he had been unfamiliar with until his arrest.

His two grandmothers made a video pleading for his exoneration. “Our child is innocent; we are two desperate old women begging you to forgive him,” one of the women said.

Saman Seydi, 24, a rapper and graphic artist.



Saman Seydi.
@samanyasinorg

Saman Seydi, known professionally as Yasin, was arrested on Oct. 2 in Tehran. He was accused of possessing a pistol and shooting three times in the air during protests. As evidence, the court relied on confessions that Amnesty International said were forced under torture.

Mr. Seydi, a rapper and graphic artist, is a member of Iran’s Kurdish minority and lived with his parents and two sisters. He posted his music videos on his Instagram page, often rapping in Kurdish about social injustice.

“You never know how strong you are until you become someone’s rock,” he wrote on his page alongside a selfie.

Mr. Seydi’s father, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, told the ILNA news agency that he worked in a wood factory and that he had lost one son in a car accident. He said that he and family members had dedicated their lives to defending the Islamic Republic and that many of them, including his brother, had been killed in the war and were its martyrs.

“My son is an artist, my son is not a rioter,” Mr. Seydi’s mother said in a video posted on social media.

Reza Arya, 43, father of two.

Reza Arya was accused of killing a Basij member during a large protest in Karaj. In a video published by Mizan a news agency overseen by the judiciary, Mr. Arya said that he only kicked the officer twice and then left the scene.

On Jan. 3, the Supreme Court announced that it had overturned the verdict, citing shortcomings in the investigation, and the case was returned to the original court for retrial. Mr. Arya is still at risk of being sentenced to death.

Three protesters in Isfahan

The men were found guilty of killing three security officers during a coordinated attack in the central city of Isfahan during a protest on Nov. 16, according to a report by Mizan. The men were charged with a series of offenses, including “moharebe.”

They will have a chance to appeal the verdict, but such severe charges are likely to be upheld. In each case, the court relied on coerced confessions without lawyers present, according to rights groups. This is what we know about them so far:

Saleh Mirhashemi Baltaghi, a 36-year-old karate champion and coach, was accused of wielding a weapon, “forming and managing a criminal group” and “collusion leading to crimes against internal security,” according to the judiciary.

In a video posted on BBC Persian on Tuesday, his elderly parents pleaded for intervention to stop their son’s execution. “God, he was our breadwinner,” his mother said. “He was the one who opened the doors for us.”

Hamideh Abbasali, an Olympian and the captain of the national women’s karate team, condemned the sentence on Instagram. “Another athlete, again from karate,” Ms. Abbasali wrote in a post under a photograph of Mr. Baltaghi in his karate uniform. She had condemned the execution of Mr. Karami, the karate champion who was executed on Jan. 7.

Majid Kazemi, 30, was charged with wielding a Kalashnikov, participating in “illegal gangs” and collusion.

A third man, **Saeed Yaqoubi Kordafli**, was accused of “drawing a weapon and using a belt clip” and colluding against the “internal security of the country,” according to the Mizan report.

Three protesters in Nowshahr

Iran’s judiciary has sentenced three men, including two 18-year-olds, for leading a violent protest on Sept. 21 in the northern city of Nowshahr.

This is what we know about them so far:

Javad Rouhi, 35, was accused of “leading a group of rioters” and “inciting people to create insecurity,” as well as setting fire to public property and burning the Quran, according to Tasnim News.

The court relied on Mr. Rouhi’s coerced confession as evidence.

In a video circulating on social media platforms, Mr. Rouhi’s father said his son suffered from mental illness. The father also lamented that he has been allowed to visit his son only once in prison and had been denied other communication during the three months he has been confined.

“We have not heard anything from him,” he said in the video. “My son has neurological disease. I call on the Iranian people to hear my voice.”

Arshia Takdastan and Mehdi Mohammadifard, both 18, received similar charges for allegedly galvanizing the crowd in the northern cities of Nowshahr and Chalous. In both cases, the court relied on forced confessions as evidence.

Mr. Takdastan was accused of arson and destruction of public property and inciting violence, according to the judiciary.

Mr. **Mohammadifard** was sentenced to death twice for leading the protest and for hurling a Molotov cocktail at a government building, according to a Mizan report.

He also received was sentenced to seven years in prison on a litany of charges including creating antigovernment propaganda and insulting Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Leily Nikounazar contributed reporting.