

اطلس زندان های ایران

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IRAN PRISON ATLAS

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A statistical study of political court cases in Iran First Quarter of 2020



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April 2020

In the past few years, the IPA has worked on collecting, verifying, documenting, and publishing information on political prisoners. The charts below include data on citizens who were arrested due to political reasons or reasons of beliefs during the first 3 months of 2020. Each of the individuals below fall into one of the following categories:

- individuals who were arrested and remained in detention for more than two weeks;
- individuals who received unsuspended prison or lash sentences;
- individuals who were arrested in order to carry out a previous sentence

To learn more about IPA's definition of a political prisoner, please read the methodology. The information related to releases was not included in this report.

When analyzing data, you should bear in mind that we don't have the ability to access and document every single case of human rights violations. Two variables heavily influence the published information: the severity of repression in each region, and the human rights' activists level of access to credible sources.

IPA has tried to present the data related to political prisoners by using various categories such as gender, ethnicity, religion, convictions, field of activity, the province where arrest took place, and organizational membership. We aim to offer a comprehensive picture of the condition of Iran's political prisoners in the first quarter of 2020.

It should be stressed that there is no absolute and linear link between the number of political prisoners and the behavior of political and civic activists outside of prison because, in addition to activities of individuals and groups, other parameters, including the government's behavior in each particular period of arrest and prison, makes a difference.

To explain this phenomenon we can put forward the claim that the government's general approach to repression can be divided into two parts: permanent and variable.

In the permanent part, the government tries to continue repression, irrespective of the mood of society and while ignoring domestic and foreign forces. Ideological issues — like the imposed Hijab or the forcing of media to cover certain news on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — belong to the permanent part of the equation. But this part is not limited to ideological matters. For instance, the violent and permanent repression of activists in Kurd-populated cities is unlikely to be rooted in the government's ideological approach. From the time that the Islamic Republic consolidated itself these issues have been major fields of repression, with some variation of intensity.

But the variable part of the government's repression changes according to the mood of the society. Its intensity is influenced (much more than the permanent part is) by domestic and foreign forces. For instance, in some periods, the government considered possession of Marxist books to be a sign of enmity with the Islamic Republic; in other periods, it allowed such books to be legally published. In other periods it murdered writers and translators; in other periods, it didn't target them as much.

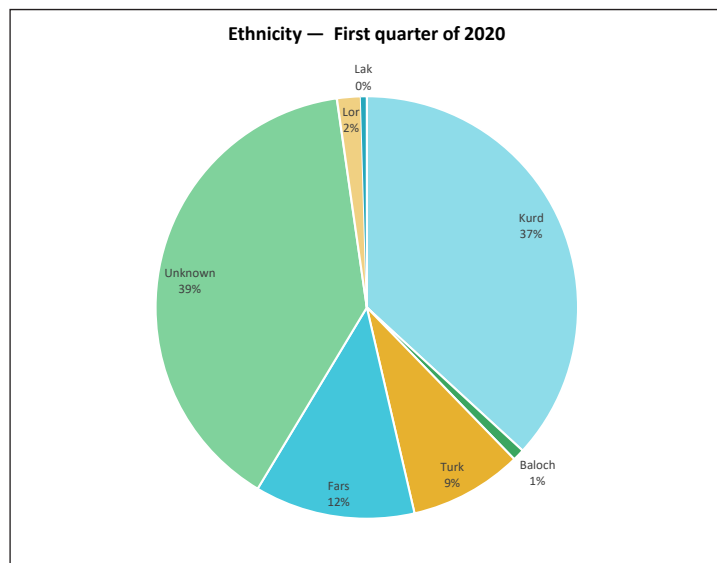
This dual approach can also be seen in the phraseology used by the security forces. The "murky space" and the "red lines of the regime" are the phrases used by the regime's authorities and agents to justify the variable part of repression. Instead of basing themselves on "the law," they justify their actions by reference to the concept of the "red lines of the regime." When the regime is threatened, the "red lines" recede and repression increases.

General

In the report, the sentences have been documented on the assumption that Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code will apply to them. For instance, if someone is sentenced to five years in prison on the charge of "gathering and collusion for acting against national security" and to one year on the charge of "propaganda against the regime," if Article 134 is applied, the prisoner will have to serve only five years. In such cases, the IPA documents the sentences as five years and the numbers in this report are based on such a calculation.

In the first three months of 2020, the Islamic Republic issued politically-based sentences for 147 of its citizens, 38 of whom were sent to prison for their sentences to be carried out, and 35 others spent more than two weeks in detention.

The fact that the number of those with sentences is four times that of those who spent more than two weeks in detention shows that the judicial machinery is going over the cases of the last Persian calendar year (which finished on March 20), especially those of the November 2019 protests; and that it is speedily issuing sentences. At the same time, due to the vast repression in the Iranian society in 2019, some activities have decreased, which is why there is only one arrest for every four issued sentences.



In the first three months of 2020, the Islamic Republic's judiciary sentenced 147 opponents and critics of the government to a total of 526 years and three months in prison. That is an average of about three years and seven months in prison for each opponent or critic of the government.

Over the last 3 months, the Islamic Republic sentenced three participants in the November 2019 protests to death. Each of those sentenced to death were in their 20s. These sentences were issued by Abolqasem Salavati, the infamous judge of the Iranian regime. Based on IPA data, at least 26 percent of the political cases in Tehran's revolutionary court are decided by this judge. The Islamic Republic has also confirmed the death sentences of seven individuals convicted of membership in an extremist Salafi group. Generally speaking, the IPA does not document the cases of people who are charged with targeting ordinary civilians or who engage in hate speech against communities; but there are indications that the cases of these

seven individuals are ambiguous. In addition to the usual and more or less unchangeable fact that the government refused to hold a fair trial for them, there are many indications that the security bodies in western Iran were interested in capital punishment for these seven individuals – raising questions about the motivation for the sentences.

The Islamic Republic has also sentenced three dissident citizens to a total of 60 blows of the lash.

Prison	Death penalty	Lashes	Internal deportation and social deprivation	Financial penalty
526 years and three months	10 counts	60 lashes	2 cases	305,000,000 Iranian rials

In the first three months of 2020, 38 people were sentenced to a total of 75 years and five months in prison. That means that any dissident citizen who was sent to prison has to spend an average of two years of his or her life behind bars.

Gender

Of the 220 cases reviewed here, 177 (80%) were men and 43 (20%) were women. This is a drastic increase in the ratio of women who have been arrested, which during the 2016-2018 period was about one woman to nine men.

	Sentence issued	Sentence carried out	Temporary arrest	Total number of cases
Women	28 (19%)	11 (29%)	4 (11%)	43 (20%)
Men	119 (81%)	27 (71%)	31 (89%)	177 (80%)

Religion

As mentioned in the IPA's methodology, our researchers, when not sure about someone's religion or ethnicity, might register the person's likely religion or ethnicity based on his or her geographical position and other facts.

This means that our statistics on religion and ethnicity are, to a large degree, based on estimates. Additionally, since the personal or family faith of non-Shia individuals are usually mentioned in reports, most of those whose religion is registered as 'unknown' are either Shia or were born in Shia families. Also, most of those whose ethnic belonging is unidentified are Persian, Turkic or, in some cases, Lor.

Ethnicity

Based on official statistics, Persian-speakers constitute around 60% of Iranian society. If things were proportional, 60% of Iranian political prisoners would likely be Persians. But even if we assume that all cases with an unidentified ethnicity are Persian, they would only account for 51% of all prisoners – about 10% less than the number of Persian speakers in the country at large.

This shows that in the first 3 months of 2020 ethnic minorities were more exposed to repression than the majority Persian ethnicity. For example, 37% of all studied cases are for Kurds despite the fact that they constitute less than 10 percent of Iranian society, according to most demographic sources.

As stated in the beginning of the report, the systematic repression of Kurds in Iran, irrespective of the conditions of domestic and foreign forces, has become a constant in the strategic apparatus of the Islamic Republic.

Field of activity

When you divide cases based on field of activity, we can see a significant reduction of religious repression compared to other forms of repression. In the Persian calendar years 1395 to 1397 (March 2016 to March 2018), more than 30% of political and belief cases registered in the IPA were religious cases, compared to only 16% in the first quarter of 2020.

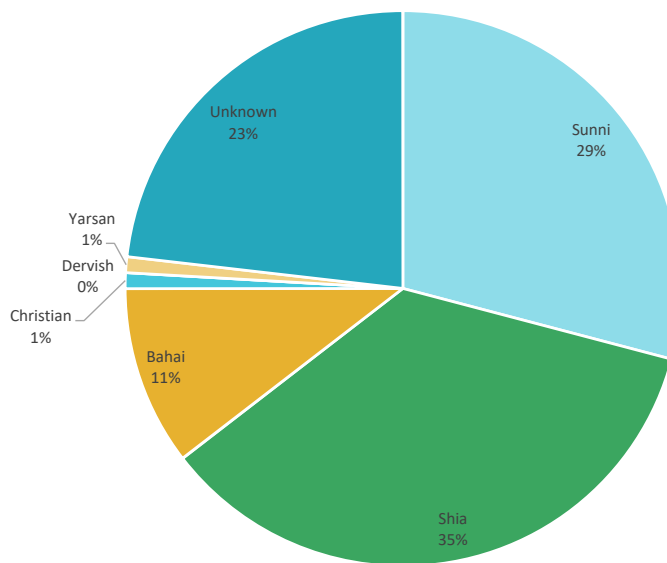
These numbers imply that either religion is losing its place as a key avenue for social participation in Iran and citizens are more engaged in secular activities; or because the society has become more political, the government has made a tactical decision to reduce the repression against minorities and religious dissidents and refuse to open a new front against them.

Additionally, the pie chart below can be interpreted as showing the following: The judicial security machinery of the Islamic Republic continues to be struggling with citizens who have entered direct confrontation with the government. Since the activities of workers and those for women's rights has found a completely political orientation in the past year, we could consider the workers' and women's cases to be part of the directly political cases as well. If we consider directly political cases to include those for workers, political party activities, women's rights, human rights, street demonstration and other political convictions and pro-democracy activities, they come to encompass more than 70% of the cases. Those cases that could be called indirect (i.e. those belonging to activities in journalism, arts, cyberspace, civic, ethnic and religious activity) encompass around 30% of cases. With such a categorization we can conclude that the security-judicial machinery of the Islamic Republic has spent most of its resources on repressing groups that have directly challenged the government on political grounds.

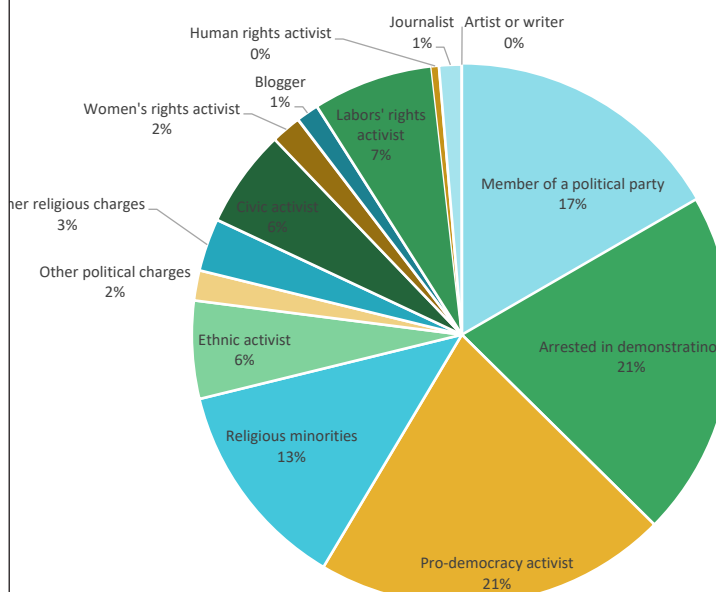
Charges

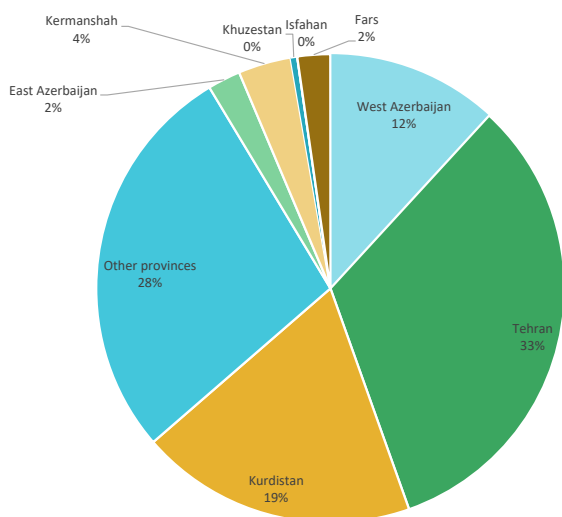
Even though the IPA has not published quarterly reports before, the experience of our researchers shows that the propor-

Personal or family religion — First quarter of 2020



Field of activity — First quarter of 2020



Political and belief cases divided by province — First quarter of 2020

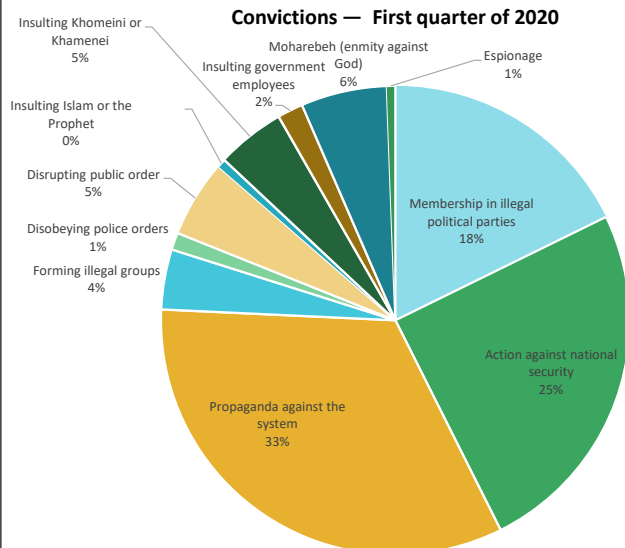
tion of sentences issued based on the conviction of “membership in illegal political parties” has increased compared to the past. From these changes, we can interpret that either the political struggles inside the country are becoming more organized than before, which is why the charge of “membership in illegal political parties” is used, more than before, as a basis for issuing sentences; or the judicial authorities consider membership in messaging apps as “membership in illegal political parties (groups)” and increased use of the applications has led to a rise in such convictions.

Provinces

The pie chart below shows political and belief cases divided by province. Just as in the past, an increasing number of human rights reports are from Tehran followed by Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan provinces. But if we only go over the sentences given due to street protests in the first quarter of 2020, we arrive at an unexpected result. In Kermanshah province, three people received a total sentence of eight years and six months in prison. In Kurdistan province, one person got a one-year sentence. In West Azerbaijan province, three people got 45 million Iranian rials in financial penalties and 60 blows of the lash. In Alborz province, one person got a one-year sentence. In Tehran, however, 23 people got a total of 66 years and six months in prison.

This shows that Kurdistan and Kermanshah provinces were among the main centers of November protests but very few of the protesters have been sentenced. In Khuzestan, Fars and Isfahan provinces there is so far no report of any of the November protesters being sentenced.

Therefore, either the government is yet to start sentencing protesters outside Tehran and is focusing on Tehrani protesters; or human rights reports for provinces outside Tehran are yet to be published.

Convictions — First quarter of 2020

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IRAN PRISON ATLAS

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Iran Prison Atlas is in search
for political prisoners

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