


**EDUCATION UNDER SIEGE:
EXPULSIONS OF STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS
FROM IRANIAN UNIVERSITIES**



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Education Under Siege: Expulsions of Students and Professors from Iranian Universities

Expulsion of Students and Professors as the New Academic Year Begins

Universities in Iran have always been strongholds of freedom and justice, playing a pivotal role in social and political movements and serving as centers of protest. Iranian students have been at the forefront of these movements, leading calls for change.

This role has been crucial throughout Iran's history in sparking significant transformations, such as the 1979 Revolution and subsequent protests. During the nationwide uprising of 2022, universities were a central force in the protests.

The active and widespread participation of students led the Iranian regime to draft new regulations aimed at stifling any spirit of dissent or critical thinking. These new rules imposed severe restrictions on individual and social freedoms within universities.

Security institutions have been given unchecked power in universities, using disciplinary, political, and legal measures to suppress freedom-seeking students.

Over the past two years, [thousands of students](#) have been banned from continuing their education. Many of these students, targeted for their political activism and participation in protests, have been expelled, suspended, or denied access to university housing.

With the approach of the new academic year 2024-25, the regime once again intensified pressure on Iranian universities and students, fearing the reopening of campuses and student gatherings. Nearly 200 students were banned from attending classes or continuing their education, accused of vague offenses like online activism or refusing to comply with mandatory hijab rules, as part of the ongoing crackdown since the 2022 protests. Some of these students are also facing legal charges and are currently imprisoned.

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Students Denied Their Right to Education

Among the students barred from continuing their education is [Sadaf Heydari](#), a student at Tabriz University. She was suspended for two semesters and banned from university housing after posting on Instagram about the helicopter crash involving [Ebrahim Raisi](#). The university's disciplinary committee handed down these punishments in response to her social media activity.



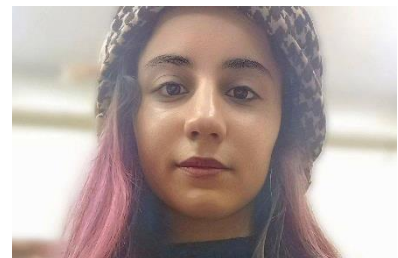
[Shaghayegh Akbari](#), a Ph.D. candidate in political sociology at Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran, was also suspended for four semesters by the Ministry of Science's central disciplinary committee. Her punishment was based on her Instagram posts and stories, as well as an interview she gave to the newspaper Ham-Mihan, where she criticized the university's heightened security measures and the treatment of students by campus security forces.



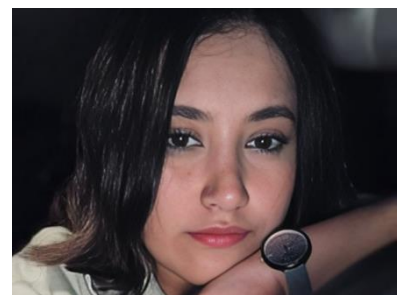
This is not the first time Shaghayegh has faced disciplinary action; she was previously [suspended for 12 months](#), and the new suspension puts her academic future in serious jeopardy.



[Sahra Rezaei](#), a student at Allameh Tabataba'i University, was expelled following a ruling by the Administrative Justice Court. Rezaei, a 22-year-old Afghan national, was in her seventh semester studying journalism when the court upheld her expulsion. She had been arrested during the nationwide protests in October 2022 and was released in December of the same year.



At the University of Tehran, the disciplinary committee suspended [Sheida Aghahmidi](#), an anthropology student, for two semesters. Sheida's suspension was based on accusations of disrupting university activities, failing to meet student conduct standards, and non-compliance with mandatory hijab regulations.



[Yekta Mirzaei](#), a sociology student at the University of Tehran, was suspended for two semesters by the university's disciplinary committee. The decision was based on charges of failing to comply with [mandatory hijab rules](#), disrespecting student conduct guidelines, and insulting national or Islamic values.



[Reyhaneh Ebrahim-Vandi](#), a counseling student who began her studies at Al-Zahra University in 2021, also received a two-semester suspension, which will count toward her academic years. The disciplinary committee's decision cited accusations such as "creating chaos and unrest at the university and spreading false information."

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In addition to this suspension, Reyhaneh had previously been verbally banned from entering the university during the previous semester without any formal written order. Despite her repeated attempts to seek clarification, university officials have yet to provide a clear explanation for their actions.

[Motahareh Gouneii](#), a suspended student from Tehran University of Medical Sciences, along with her husband, was [banned from continuing her studies](#) and forced to transfer to Ardabil University. Motahareh Gouneii, a dental student and former political secretary of the Islamic Students Association at Tehran University and Tehran University of Medical Sciences, was arrested by security forces in 2022 in connection with the nationwide protests.



She was arrested by the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) intelligence on May 2, 2023, and transferred to Evin Prison, later released on bail after a few days. In July 2024, she [was sentenced to one year in prison](#) by Branch 29 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.

Suspension from Education: A Cruel Punishment for Students

The right to education is a fundamental human right recognized by numerous international agreements. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Iran is a signatory, emphasizes in Article 26(1) that “education shall be free and accessible to all, and higher education shall be equally available to all on the basis of merit.” This right ensures that everyone, regardless of race, religion, gender, or political beliefs, has access to education.

However, in Iran under the clerical regime, this right is widely violated. Many students have been suspended for various reasons, particularly for participating in protests or even posting critical comments on social media. As seen in the previous examples, for female students, not adhering to [the mandatory hijab](#) adds another layer of justification for these punitive actions.

Suspension from education has become a primary tool for suppressing critical and dissenting students in Iran. These students, often leaders of popular protests, are expelled and prevented from continuing their studies due to their activism.

Such punishments not only contradict the regime's own constitutional principles but also violate its international obligations. Yet, the regime continues to pursue this oppressive policy as a means of controlling dissent.

Dismissal of Professors

The expulsion of students and professors in Iran dates back to the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution and the regime's so-called “Cultural Revolution.” During this time, the clerical regime shut down universities for 30 months in a sweeping “purge” to suppress political and ideological opponents. Many prominent professors and elite students were expelled for opposing the regime's ideology. A significant number were imprisoned, and some were executed in the mass killings of the 1980s, including the 1988 massacre.

This trend has continued in subsequent years. The most recent wave of professor dismissals began with the election of Ebrahim Raisi in 2021. By 2023, [158 professors who were critical](#) or protested had been expelled, and 60 others were forced into early retirement. Attempts to

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reinstate these professors have been ignored, leading some to migrate abroad while others have been left unemployed or found new careers. (Setareh Sobh – September 16, 2024).

According to the newspaper “Etemad” on September 13, 2023, these professors were either opponents of Raisi’s election or supporters of the 2022 protests in Iran.

Dismissal, suspension, salary cuts, forced retirement, summons by university security, and interrogations by intelligence agencies are just some of the pressures placed on professors. Their removal is often tied to their support for students or holding critical viewpoints. Additionally, they face exclusion from professional opportunities, research funding, and academic projects.



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Hollow Promises for the Return of Suspended and Expelled Students and Professors

The widespread suspensions and expulsions of students and professors have turned this issue into an urgent social demand. Masoud Pezeshkian, the newly appointed president by the mullahs’ Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who assumed office after widely boycotted elections, promised on August 29, 2024, to review the cases of expelled students and professors and reinstate them in universities.

However, many students and professors believe these promises are merely aimed at quelling protests and winning public favor, with no real intention to change the situation.

On September 14, 2024, Pezeshkian’s Minister of Science, Hossein Simaei Sarraf, stated in a media interview that the reinstatement of expelled students and professors depends on the judiciary, adding, “I’m not sure if the judiciary will revisit these cases.” His remarks suggest that even at the highest levels of Pezeshkian’s administration, there is no serious commitment to resolving the issues of suspended and expelled individuals.

In this context, Saeed Habiba, Deputy Minister of Science and head of the Student Affairs Organization, claimed that there is no precise data available on the number of students with disciplinary cases. He added, “Universities independently make decisions on such matters, but so far around 50 suspension or expulsion cases have been sent to the Ministry of Science, and fewer than five involve expulsion.” (ISNA, September 18, 2024)

In an open letter to Pezeshkian on September 22, 2024, expelled professors stated that no practical steps have been taken so far. The letter demanded, "We, a group of dismissed professors, request a clear statement and decisive action on this matter to determine whether there is genuine intent or if the reinstatement of a small handful is merely for political propaganda purposes!"



5 What Solutions Exist for the Return of Students and Professors?

The dismissed professors have outlined the reasons for their expulsion in an open letter:

"What has unjustly happened to us is the result of unscientific and non-transparent mechanisms for determining general qualifications and employment status, thought policing, suppression of free thinking, and intolerance toward critical thinking. A major part of the issue lies in laws and regulations that violate 'academic freedom,' which have been enacted in recent years. These laws have empowered non-academic authoritarian institutions to suppress professors.

"The process of investigation and assessing general qualifications in universities has become a playground for the authoritarian practices of ideological, political, and security entities. The university, along with its academic and administrative bodies, has effectively turned into an operator for these institutions in selecting and qualifying faculty members!

"What is presented as the 'legality' of dismissing professors is the product of this unhealthy and irresponsible quasi-legal mechanism. It is evident that laws are respectable only when they protect the human rights of all citizens and do not conflict with the principles of neutrality and justice as fairness. Such authoritarian and unjust 'legislation' is the root of corruption and inefficiency in universities."

They concluded, "It is obvious that the return of dissident and critical professors is possible and desirable only if we witness a change in this unhealthy system."

Such change will not occur until this dictatorial regime, which cannot tolerate any dissenting or opposing views, is replaced by [a democratic and pluralistic republic](#) that respects the fundamental rights of the people and governs based on the rule of law in Iran. And indeed, that day is not far off, to be realized by the people and the resistance of Iran.