

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-elections-48-million-voters-denied-01-03-2012,41969.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

denied information

Elections: 48 million voters denied information, 48 journalists denied freedom

1 March 2012

On the eve of tomorrow's parliamentary elections in Iran, Reporters Without Borders condemns the censorship imposed on the media, which prevents them from playing their role during the polling, and the continuing, relentless crackdown on journalists.

Iran's 48 million voters are being denied the independently-reported news and information they need to make a choice. The crackdown on journalists and netizens has intensified. No independent media has been spared the political and judicial harassment that the various ruling clans have orchestrated since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in June 2009.

A total of 48 journalists and netizens are currently detained, making Iran the world's third biggest prison for the media.

"The governmental media are free to organize the regime's propaganda for this election 'among friends' but the authorities have imposed all-out censorship on the media, even the ones that support the regime, and oversee their work closely," Reporters Without Borders said. "The orders are clear – the only stories to be published are those that encourage people to go and vote.

"Since the start of the campaign, the media have received directives instructing them to refer to the 'Iranian people's great victory' and not to mention or cover certain stories such as the boycott calls by several political currents. In the past few days, judicial officials have even called newspaper editors to dictate their front page and demand their silence on certain subjects."

Many cases of censorship have occurred during the campaign. The weekly *Hadiss Ghazvin*, for example, was charged on 27 February with "publishing false information with the aim of upsetting public opinion." A prosecutor said that, in its latest issue, the newspaper "published photos of prisons, poverty, executions and so on in order to paint a sombre picture of the country, and predicted a low voter turnout."

At the same time, many foreign correspondents were unable to obtain visas to cover the elections. Three days before the polling, Iranian embassies returned applicants' passports without any explanation.



As a result of in-fighting among the regime's clans and tension between Iran and the international community, these elections have been marked by threats and fear. Messages posted on billboards in the major cities say "If you don't participate in the elections, the westerners will attack the country" and "If the turnout is not more than 50 per cent, United- States will attack Iran."

The messages are falsely said to be quotations from statements by media based abroad that are banned in Iran, such as the website *Balatarin* and *Radio Farda* (*the Farsi-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*). The same messages have also been repeated incessantly on national radio and TV stations in recent weeks.



“As a result of the imprisonment of journalists, closure of newspapers, filtering of news websites, jamming of satellite TV stations and suppression critical opinion, these elections cannot be conducted in normal manner and are therefore meaningless,” Reporters Without Borders said.

“Without freedom of expression, fundamental rights cannot be guaranteed and protected. The right to vote requires that voters also have the right to be freely informed, which is not the case in Iran. The Islamic Republic should end a situation that is unacceptable.”

[Iran is ranked 175th out of 179 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.](#)
