

**Iran, the Media, and Human Rights
A Media-Monitoring Study**

The Comparative Report

By Victor Kattan¹



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Introduction

Over two separate three-month periods in 2007, rapporteurs based in fourteen different countries were charged with the task of monitoring a selection of their local newspapers, for articles and news features containing reports that could be classed as general human rights stories.² Their objectives in collating this information and undertaking the media-monitoring exercise was to identify and analyse any disparities in the reporting of human rights stories in Iran, in order to gain an overall picture of the way in which human rights violations are reported there and in the other countries being monitored. Although Iran is widely lambasted for its human rights record, the purpose of this study was not to highlight specific instances of human rights abuses in Iran.³ Instead it was to analyse how issues pertaining to human rights are presented by the Iranian and international press to their readers and to the world at large.

In addressing these considerations, each rapporteur noted the exact nature of the human rights stories appearing in the media. For instance, whether the human rights story concerned the right to freedom of expression or the right to life; the frequency of human rights coverage in the individual publications; and the nature of the publication that had carried the news item (whether a broadsheet or tabloid, whether liberal or conservative, and so on). Their findings were collated and analysed in two separate reports corresponding to the different monitoring periods. These reports have been published online and both may be accessed by clicking [here](#).

This third report is a cross-analysis of the two previous reports, examining and analysing the rapporteurs' findings, identifying the chief trends evident in both reports as well as the key differences, ascertaining which themes appear to have been persistent over the two three-month periods, and generally pulling out the salient features of both reports. In completing this comparative exercise, this report considers the following points in turn. First, the manner in which the countries featured presented human rights stories in the media, including a cross-comparison between the countries; second, the nature of the publications that picked up human rights stories in Iran (for example, their political leaning, circulation, format, etc); and fourth, the types of human rights violations reported in each country's media and whether any trends are discernable as to which violations or stories were deemed most newsworthy.

For ease and clarity's sake, the reports which cover the periods January-April and July-September 2007 will be referred to throughout this report as 'the first report' and 'the second report', respectively. These terms will be used interchangeably with the following phrases 'the first monitoring period' and 'the second monitoring period'.

1. Identifying the Manner in which the Countries Featured Presented Human Rights Issues in the Media

The countries selected for monitoring during the two periods comprised a range of different political and religious ideologies, although with a decisive emphasis on 'the West' with regards to the international media. Iran's Islamic conservatism contrasted with Western

² The two periods covered were January – April 2007 and July – September 2007. The media monitoring exercise aims to establish and draw conclusions from the way in which human rights issues are presented by both the Iranian and international media alike, although where the international media is concerned having a particular focus on the so-called 'Western' media. Therefore, the media of Western Europe was monitored (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Austria), together with that of the United States and Canada. However, in order to present a balanced analysis of international coverage, Poland and Russia, two countries that were both formerly Communist, were also included in the study. Australia, Spain, and Turkey were later added and monitored in respect of the second period (July – September 2007). And of course, Iran's media was also monitored.

³ To state that Iran suffers from a poor human rights record is not to make a controversial statement. The country's partiality in adhering to the international human rights conventions it has ratified has been well-documented by governments and non-governmental organisations alike. See e.g. Amnesty International on Iran at: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10594>.

Europe's secular liberalism, Poland and Russia furnished results from a former-Communist angle, while Turkey is the only country in the study that could be described as being straddled between the East and the West.⁴

1.1 Iran

The first feature to be noted, common to both reports, was the fact that Iran's press contained the most extensive coverage of what may be deemed human rights stories. As the country subject to the monitoring exercise, it would be somewhat odd if these issues were not touched upon to the greater extent by Iran relative to the other countries, regardless of the language in which the stories are packaged and the nature of the discourse.

The first point to be noted is that Iran's strict Islamic orthodoxy and scepticism of human rights is viewed by the current Iranian government as a 'trojan horse' aimed at introducing Western liberalism and democratic principles into Iran via the "backdoor." As such, the Iranian government is quick to point out the failures of other states when they fail to live up to their own human rights obligations, a tactic Iran uses to deflect criticism of its own failures in its propaganda war with the West. This is evident from Iran's attitude towards human rights which may be gleaned from President Ahmadinejad's comments made in a now notorious speech he delivered to the UN General Assembly during his trip to the United States in September 2007.⁵ There the Iranian President launched a scathing attack on 'certain powers', insisting that 'human rights are being extensively violated...especially by those who pretend to be their exclusive advocates.' In this, he alluded to the existence of 'secret prisons' and 'trials and secret punishments without any regard to due process...'

Secondly, and perhaps most significantly, the Iranian press' ability to explicitly label a story as one concerning human rights, or to admonish the Iranian authorities for not protecting those rights, is severely curtailed. This is partly due to the country's strict restrictions on the freedom of expression and that of the press, a fundamental human rights violation in and of itself by the standards of international human rights norms.⁶ The first report notes that, 'All newspapers in Iran are monitored and scrutinized by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance.'⁷ Furthermore, due to a series of laws,⁸ including provisions contained in the Constitution, the media in Iran – the printed press, broadcasters on radio and television, internet providers – is heavily restricted in terms of what and how it may publish a story. Due to this, the practice of self-censorship is reported to occur on a widespread basis and because of this, we cannot accurately gauge what issues would be flagged up as human rights stories were those newspapers that were monitored, such as **Etemad** and **Aftab e Yazd**, free to do so.

However, the observation made above, that Iran's press contained the largest number of human rights stories, was qualified with the important, and somewhat ironic, caveat, which was made clear in both reports.⁹ This was that the manner in which these news stories were presented in Iran differed fundamentally to those of the other countries surveyed. What the 'western' media would essentially publish as a human rights story and involving human rights violations, the Iranian press would simply detail as a factual occurrence or a mundane instance of criminal justice. So for instance, **Etemad**, an Iranian publication, on 25 January published a news item describing how 'the defence lawyer of the deceased Zahra Kazemi [a Canadian-Iranian photo-journalist who died in highly suspicious circumstances whilst in custody of the Iranian police in June 2003] said that soon the decision of the case will

⁴ However, Turkey's media was monitored in the second period only: July – September 2007.

⁵ See the second Media Report, p.7

⁶ Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has ratified, protects the right to freedom of expression and the freedom to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print...'

⁷ See the First Media Report, pp.62 & 63 for detailed commentary on the ownership structure and political stances of the Iranian Print Media.

⁸ See pages 4 & 5 of the First Media Report for a list of the legislative restrictions imposed on the press; these provisions include Articles 3, 9, 24, 168 and 175 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Press Law of March 19, 1986.

⁹ See p.47 of the First Report and p.39 of the Second Report for further comments relating to this issue.

be announced by the judges of the Iranian Supreme Court. In an interview he acknowledged that the case has been under investigation by the Court for three months.' In contrast, the **National Post**, a Canadian newspaper, published a commentary only two days later, on 27 January, blaming the Iranian government for the *murder* of Kazemi (as opposed to her death) and accusing Iran 'of gross violations of civil and political rights, especially those of women and students...'¹⁰. The Iranian media's commentary is factual and impersonal, while Canada's coverage explicitly alludes to the Iranian government's involvement in the journalist's death and cites its general breaches of human rights. Moreover, where **Etemad** quotes Kazemi's defence lawyer as simply stating the length of time that the Supreme Court in Iran has taken to resolve this case, various publications in the international media have gone a step further and criticised the 'delay' as, at best a breach of due process, and at worst, a state-sponsored cover-up of the circumstances surrounding and leading to the journalist's death.

In his summary of the media monitoring for the second period, the Iranian rapporteur put forward one possible reason for the Iranian newspapers' practice of self-censorship:

'It seems that the authorities in Iran consider the concept of human rights as a device to pressure the Government, which may explain why activists and newspapers advocating this are suppressed.'¹¹

1.2 Western Europe

The newspapers in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK were mostly concerned with political relations between the West and Iran, especially over its intention to enrich uranium allegedly for building a nuclear weapon, its alleged support for the insurgency in Iraq and its tense relations with Israel. Only occasionally were human rights violations explicitly raised. As the rapporteur from Spain noted, the press is only concerned about Iran:

- (a) when the leaders of the world superpowers consider that the world's safety is at risk (i.e. information regarding the nuclear bomb);
- b) when there are executions in Iran;
- c) when there are issues affecting the rights of Iranian citizens that have a link with other nations (for example, the case of Hani Esfandiari, an Iranian-American scholar who was not allowed to leave the country accused of espionage); and
- d) when there are purges of journalists, or media outlets are closed down (often after a press release of a Western NGO such as Reporters without Borders).¹²

Apart from these issues, the European press is generally not too perturbed about what is happening within Iran although certain stories relating to cultural issues, such as the fact that women in Iran are obliged to wear the headscarf and were arrested for not wearing it properly; the crackdown by the Iranian authorities on "Western" hairstyles; and the arrest of hundreds of teenagers who attended a "satanic" rock concert, which were widely reported.¹³

1.3 North America

Canada's media addressed the issue of human rights in Iran most extensively during the first monitoring period, while the USA generated the most coverage during the second monitoring period.¹⁴ The latter result could be described as the most surprising especially as during the

¹⁰ The First Media Report, p.10.

¹¹ The Second Media Report, p.45

¹² The Second Media Report, p.46.

¹³ The First Media Report, p.21 (BBC Online News, 29 April), The Second Media Report, p.13 (Toronto Star, Der Spiegel, the Guardian, 5-6 August).

¹⁴ See Table 1 'Top Ten Ranking Countries Reporting on the Human Rights Violations in Iran', First Media Report, p.35; and Table 1 'Top Ten Countries Reporting on the Human Rights Violations in Iran', Second Media Report, p.33, for precise statistics.

first monitoring period, the US, given its preoccupation with Iran in its foreign policy, was found to have dedicated the least newspaper space to human rights stories in Iran. Table 1 of the first report shows that the USA published only eight stories during the first monitoring period and was in seventh place. However, the second report's findings depicted somewhat of a reversal in this trend. The USA leapt to first place at the end of the second monitoring period, with 39 reports on human rights issues in Iran, an astonishing increase of 31 news stories (while Canada's coverage had slipped five places to fifth place).

Table 1, First Report

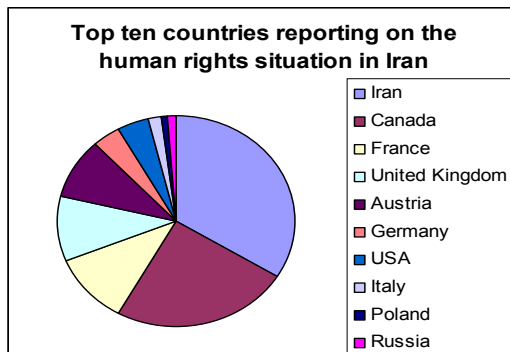
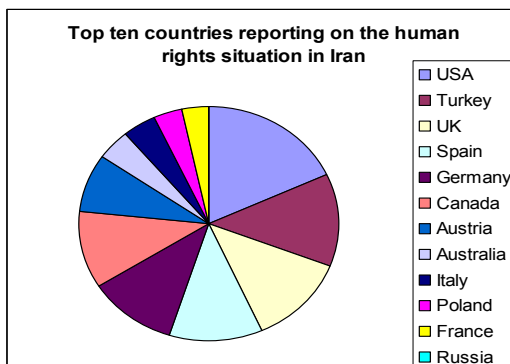


Table 1, Second Report¹⁵



With regards to the turnaround in the USA's coverage of human rights in Iran, the second report records that:

'A major explanation for the US press interest in Iranian human rights violations is that during the study, two US nationals were arrested and detained on alleged espionage charges...One might surmise that the reason for this high level of reporting was because the individuals concerned had dual US/Iranian nationality and worked for prominent American institutions...'¹⁶

Another plausible explanation for this massive surge of interest in Iran human rights violations may be the fact that President Ahmadinejad's visit to the USA to address the 62nd General Assembly of the UN coincided with the second monitoring period. The presence of an Iranian

¹⁵ The second media report analysed Iran separately from the other newspapers and therefore this table excludes Iran. For information on Iranian papers see tables on p.10 of this report.

¹⁶ Second Media Report, p.36

head of state in the USA at a time when relations between the two countries are extremely fraught may have contributed to a heightened interest in Iran's internal policies.

1.4 Eastern Europe

A further consistency evident in both media reports was the fact that both Poland and Russia showed very little interest in the human rights stories emanating from Iran. These two former Communist countries appeared at the bottom of the tables in the two reports which depicted the total coverage dedicated to such stories. In the first report, Poland's monitored press published only three stories, while Russia featured only one. While Poland's position improved in the second monitoring period, to eight stories, the Russian press did not publish a single story. The one solitary human rights story that was covered in Russia during the first monitoring period was published by *Izvestiya* on 24 April 2007, and it concerned women's rights. The by-line of the feature read: 'The hunt for women in breach of "Muslim dress code" has paid off'. The sparse attention paid to human rights in Iran by Russia and Poland may probably be attributed to certain historical and political factors, an account of which is well beyond the scope of this study.

1.5 Turkey

Turkey was not featured in the first report and it is therefore not possible to undertake a comparative exercise with regards to any patterns discernable in its own reporting over the two time periods. However, several critical points may be extracted in relation to its coverage compared with that of the other countries' in the monitoring exercise.

Turkey claimed the second highest coverage of human rights news during the second monitoring period, publishing 'a significant number of stories...from the use of the death penalty, to stories on minorities and cultural rights.'¹⁷ As mentioned above, Turkey presents an interesting and unique take on the study because of its status as a crossroads between Western and Islamic cultures. The following observations, made by the rapporteur in Turkey, are particularly telling:

'Due to the fear of the possible constitutional amendment, some journalists compared the regime in Turkey and in Iran... In the stories concerning the comparison of Turkey and Iran the human rights issue was not particularly mentioned, but rather they focused on the process of the regime change in these countries'; and further, '*Hurriyet* columnist Yalcin wrote a story about the regime change in Iran and questioned whether Turkey could become like Malaysia or Iran.'¹⁸

Of course one of the major paradoxes in Turkey, which is a secular state, is that the headscarf is becoming increasingly popular,¹⁹ whereas in Iran, where women are compelled to wear it, the headscarf is seen – in certain circles – as a system of oppression.

1.6 General Observations

It ought to be highlighted that, whilst both reports reached the conclusion that 'human rights stories in Iran are not considered particularly newsworthy by the Western press',²⁰ this is by no means indicative of the countries' interest, or lack thereof, in Iran. On the contrary, almost all of the rapporteurs noted that Iran had a constant presence in the media during the two

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Both quotes taken from Second Media Report, p.47

¹⁹ This was recognised recently when Turkey's parliament voted in favour of a law lifting the ban on wearing headscarves in university campuses. See Sabrina Tavernise, "Turkey moves to lift headscarf ban at universities", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 Feb. 2008.

²⁰ First Media Report, p.3

monitoring periods, only the media was not concerned with human rights violations as such but with the big political stories. For instance, the rapporteur based in Austria wrote for the first report: 'The focus of the Austrian print media was Iran's uranium enrichment programme and the British marine hostage drama';²¹ the rapporteur in France stated: 'Most of the stories reported by the French media concerned the financial sanctions imposed against Iran [by the UN]';²² and the rapporteur in Germany wrote: 'The German newspapers paid more attention to security issues and gave almost no attention to human rights issues'.²³

This trend was evident also in Russia and Poland, in whose newspapers the coverage of human rights stories in Iran was negligible. The rapporteur in Russia wrote that: '...most articles in the Russian press concentrated on the development of Iran's nuclear programme and Iran's relationship with the US. There was a lot of news on the sanctions imposed on Iran...', while the rapporteur based in Poland stated: 'the human rights situation in Iran was an almost non-existent topic in the Polish newspapers. Instead, there was plenty of news on foreign policy...On average there was a story on Iran in the Polish broadsheets everyday...[however] the overwhelming part of the reports concern political issues'.²⁴ These series of comments give the general idea.²⁵ They were repeated throughout the second report as well. For example, the rapporteur based in the UK observed of this period that: 'Despite Iran's deteriorating human rights record, the media was still more concerned with publishing stories on Iranian-US and Iranian-Israel relations and Iran's alleged involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq in July'.²⁶

Finally, it was clear that the media deems a story newsworthy in Iran when an individual, or individuals, bearing the nationality of a particular country was involved. In contrast, human rights violations without this link were not deemed newsworthy. For example, the rapporteur for Turkey noted that 'the death sentence of two Kurdish journalists received relatively extensive coverage'.²⁷ No doubt this story was deemed newsworthy in Turkey due to the large Kurdish population in that country. This trend is reinforced elsewhere in the reports with regards to several of the other countries that were subject to the monitoring exercise. It has already been noted with regards to the USA and its interest in two individuals having dual US and Iranian nationality that were captured by the Iranian authorities and accused of espionage. Similarly, Canadian journalists took a particular interest in Iran when a family of Iranian nationals who had resided in Canada for a length of time and whose son was of Canadian nationality was detained in Texas. Moreover, the story of the photo-journalist, Zahra Kazemi, who had both Iranian and Canadian nationality was deemed newsworthy. As both reports explain, newspapers editors are likely to find such stories more appealing as they provide a 'hook' onto which the story may hang, and which their readers will be more readily able to relate to. This trend was also seen in respect of France, Austria, Germany, and the UK in respect of the high-drama British marine hostage affair in March 2007.

2. The Nature of Publications Reporting Human Rights Issues in Iran

The second part of this report explores the nature of the specific publications that chose to publish human rights stories in Iran as features. To this end, a range of different papers were monitored: broadsheets, tabloids, papers with both liberal and conservative editorial slants, free papers, daily papers, supplements, and so on.²⁸

²¹ *Ibid.* p.49

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* p.51

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.53

²⁵ See Appendices 1 of both the First and Second Media Reports for the full comments made by each rapporteur (at pp. 49 & 40, respectively).

²⁶ Second Media Report, p.48

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Please consult Appendix 2 of the First Media Report, 'Background Documents on Print Media', at p.58 for a comprehensive account of the ownership structure and political stance of all publications monitored.

Speaking in broad terms, the most obvious trend that was clear from both reports was the fact that broadsheets tended to report more human rights stories in Iran than their tabloid rivals. Furthermore, as the first report highlighted, 'although most newspapers purport to be independent, those generally associated with liberal values, such as the **Guardian**, the **Toronto Star**, **Der Standard** and **Liberation** made the list of top-ten-ranking newspapers reporting on Iranian human rights violations.'²⁹ By contrast, tabloids tend to 'sensationalise' their news coverage to a larger degree, in order to capture their readership's interest, which stereotypically tend to prefer fast snippets of digestible news without the intense political, legal, scientific, or other intellectual jargon. So for example, the rapporteur in the UK found that: 'The Sun...found the study undertaken by an Israeli NGO which concluded that Iranian children are being taught to hate the West more newsworthy than [the] public executions (in fact, that newspaper did not publish a single story, apart from this one, on the internal human rights situation in Iran during the entire monitoring period).'³⁰ The results speak largely for themselves; as noted in the first report, 'with the exception of **20 Minutes**, no other tabloid made the list of the top ten ranking newspapers reporting on human rights violations in Iran'³¹.

However, this pattern was not always consistent and the monitoring exercise recorded some exceptions. For instance, **Le Figaro** and the **National Post**, which are generally seen as conservative papers, also ranked highly.³² Furthermore, the rapporteur based in Australia found that **The Daily Telegraph**, which she described as being a 'tabloid, right-wing conservative' newspaper 'to most consistently carry dedicated articles concerning human rights issues in Iran.' In contrast, she said '**The Australian** was more concerned with reporting on Iranian nuclear issues, radical Islam in Iran, the application of economic sanctions and UN Security Council sanctions on Iran, [and] Iran's comments on Israel'³³. This result defies the pattern described above that was established throughout the rest of the monitoring exercise.

Over the course of the two monitoring periods it was established, quite conclusively, that a newspaper is far more likely to report a human rights issue in a specific country if it has its own news correspondent residing there. This point is embodied in the results acquired from the **Guardian** newspaper. This British broadsheet persistently outperformed its rivals and ranked highly in the tables of both reports³⁴ which listed the order in which the various publications featured human rights stories on Iran. This conclusion is also supported by the results garnered by the UK's press as a whole:

'...more than half of the stories surveyed appeared in only one British newspaper, the **Guardian**, which came first out of all the newspapers monitored... One explanation for this, as noted in the previous media-monitoring study, is because that paper has a correspondent based in Tehran, which can make all the difference as he is physically on the ground and is consequently in a better position to search for stories. The tabloids...which do not have any correspondents based in Iran, reported very little on anything happening within the country.'³⁵

The first report explained the disadvantage of those papers' without locally-based correspondents as '[having] to rely on news agencies for their stories or send special correspondents to Iran when a major story breaks, while the **Guardian** has local access to the news.'³⁶ This result can hardly be described as surprising. The very fact that a newspaper decides to base one of its reporters in a particular location implies a prior interest in the news emanating from that location. In supporting this analysis, the **New York Times** also ranked highly with its coverage of human rights news in Iran during the second monitoring period,

²⁹ First Media Report, p.48

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.56

³¹ *Ibid.* p.48

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Second Media Report, p.40

³⁴ The **Guardian** newspaper was listed second (out of all Western publications) on Table 2, 'Top Ten Ranking Newspapers Reporting on the Human Rights Violations in Iran', First Media Report, p.37; and it came first on Table 2, 'Top Western Newspapers Reporting on Human Rights Violations in Iran', Second Media Report, p.33

³⁵ Second Media Report, p.36

³⁶ First Media Report, p.39

publishing a total of fifteen stories.³⁷ As was pointed out in the second report, this newspaper also has a correspondent based in Tehran. The report states that: ‘... many of the other newspapers which ranked highly use Iranian freelancers, as opposed to only relying on the newswires.’³⁸ This latter point cements the observation that, even if the local source reporting the news is not directly employed by the newspaper concerned, a locally-based presence will, in any event, encourage coverage of the area’s human rights concerns.

Table 3, First Report

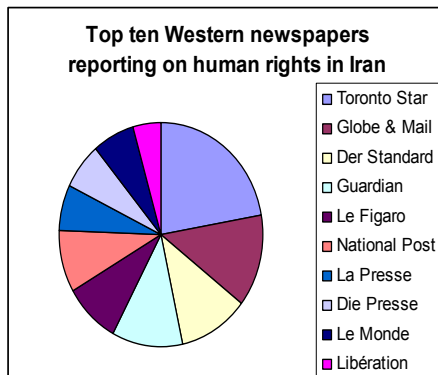
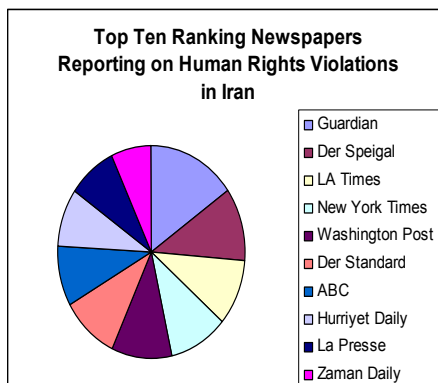


Table 2, Second Report



Moreover, another explanation for why certain newspapers report on Iranian human rights violations, whereas others do not, may depend on the particular newswire they subscribe too. For instance, if newspaper X only subscribes to the **Associated Press** and newspaper Y subscribes to **Reuters**, the **Associated Press** and **Agence-France Presse**, it might not be surprising to find that newspaper Y reported on more Iranian human rights violations than newspaper X. Alternatively, it may be that a particular newswire, say, for example, **Agence-France Presse**, covers the region in more detail. If this is the case, then those newspapers who do not subscribe to this particular newswire may miss out on certain stories that they would otherwise report. As we do not know which newswires certain newspapers subscribe too, it is difficult to surmise what impact this may have had on our study. But it would not be insignificant since many of the stories that were reported emanated from these sources.

In Iran, **Etemad** and **Aftab-e-Yazd** stood apart as the only two newspapers that gave any coverage to human rights issues within that country. Table 2 of the first report shows the former publication featured a total of 35 stories, while the latter was close behind with 32

³⁷ Second Media Report, p.33

³⁸ Second Media Report, p.39

stories.³⁹ No other Iranian newspaper featured on this list. During the second monitoring period however, **Etemad's** coverage dwarfed that of its nearest rival, **Aftab-e-Yazd**, by approximately 50 per cent. The reason for the large disparity between the two papers in the latter period when they were so close during the first is not immediately apparent, although **Aftab's** coverage remained about the same, at 37 stories, while **Etemad's** rose to 74, indicating that it was the latter paper that delivered extraordinary results.

Table 2, First Report

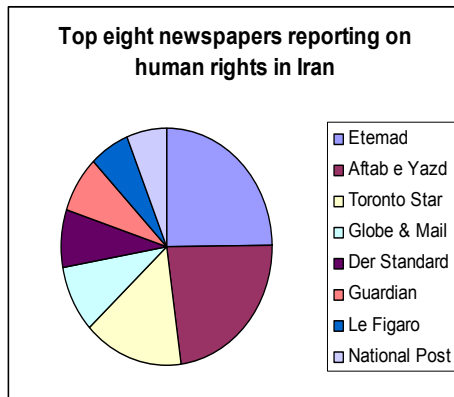
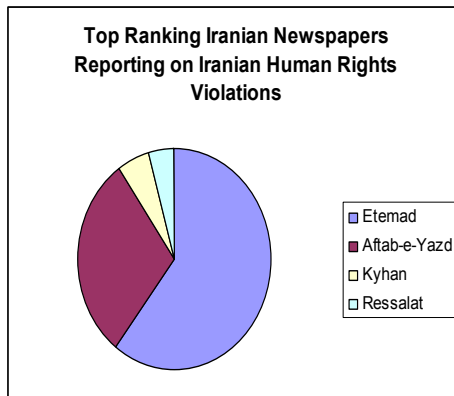


Table 3, Second Report⁴⁰



In any event, an appreciation of both papers' political leaning helps to explain this. Both **Etemad** and **Aftab-e-Yazd** are classed as reformist publications and this accounts for their lead in human rights coverage. By contrast, the Iranian papers described as 'hard-line'⁴¹, such as **Jomhuri Eslami**, **Siasat Rouz**, and **Hemayat**, did not feature any human rights stories at all. It has already been determined that the Iranian press is subject to rigorous scrutiny by the relevant authorities, which in turn affects their ability to present human rights news arising within their borders in anything approaching a frank manner. Although **Etemad's** 'coverage' of human rights stories outpaced that of the other Iranian publications monitored, this is not to say that this particular newspaper managed to buck the trend described above of conservatism and carefully reserved reporting. As the rapporteur in Iran

³⁹ First Media Report, p.37

⁴⁰ The second report analysed the Iranian and Western papers separately which is why the other papers do not appear in Table 3.

⁴¹ First Media Report, p.63

observed, **Etemad** sides with the conservatives when it comes to certain core Islamic principles'.⁴² However, he added that the paper 'follows up on many social, political and international concerns which make it a reformist newspaper as far as Iranian standards go. **Etemad** also published notifications by many human rights groups regarding the human rights situation in the country, and human rights protests'.

On the freedom of expression, it is interesting to note that President Ahmadinejad's visit to the USA sparked division between Canadian journalists. The rapporteur for Canada noted for the second monitoring period that: 'Most of the editorials and opinion pieces were very critical of Ahmadinejad and Iran's human rights record, but some said that the West's criticism of him was over the top. One claimed that Ahmadinejad's statements should be read in the context of him creating a diversion for his weak support at home, while another said that many of the criticisms of Ahmadinejad and Iran could easily be made against the West'.⁴³ However, this element of self-examination and reproach is not mirrored by the Iranian press, at least not in respect of the government. The rapporteur based in Iran found that 'in Iran, the newspapers cannot criticize the authorities by direct reference to the human rights conventions and other international instruments, *whereas they are free to monitor human rights violations by the Americans in Iraq or other parts of the world*'.⁴⁴

3. The Types of Human Rights Violations that were Reported

This final part of the report, which seeks to discern the trends evident in the specific human rights violations that the media chose to report, may be described as the pivotal aspect of the media monitoring exercise – at least in respect of the international media's coverage. This is because an overarching theme that was evident from the entire exercise was that 'human rights did not rank highly on the Western news agenda'. It could therefore be hypothesised that, of the human rights stories that were covered, there would either be some sort of compelling link between the news from Iran and the country publishing the story,⁴⁵ or that the nature of the human rights issue itself was such that it deserved attention, perhaps, for example, because of some shocking element. To some extent, this was certainly the case.

In the first part of this report, we described how the nationality of an individual subject to a human rights story in Iran may serve as a factor increasing international attention. Upon analysing the *type* of human rights violations taking place and more importantly, the stories that the media latched onto and reported, it became evident that events, as well as nationality, functioned as a popular link. During the first monitoring period, women's rights attracted the most press attention, both within in Iran and from the international media. This topic generated 54 stories.⁴⁶ Yet during the second monitoring report, only ten such stories were reported.⁴⁷ This drastic drop in stories may be accounted for by the fact that International Women's Day coincided with the first monitoring period, on 8 March 2007. We may therefore presume that this event and the protests, demonstrations and arrests that it provoked in Iran invited international scrutiny, and the world's media responded.

A similar trait may be discerned in respect of the second report's results. Media coverage of the right to life rose from just 19 features during the first monitoring report,⁴⁸ to 50 during the second.⁴⁹ This may be plainly explained by the huge surge in executions that took place in Iran during this period, as evidenced by each of the rapporteurs' reports. Although the occurrence of executions may not be described as an 'event' in the same way that International Women's Day is, it denotes an obvious trend that was at the time sweeping through Iran, and was either too apparent or too shocking to be ignored. This was especially as certain websites were reproducing graphic photographs of the executions which were even

⁴² Second Media Report, p.44

⁴³ Second Media Report, p.42

⁴⁴ Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ As we saw in the first part of this report.

⁴⁶ See Table 4, 'Top Ten Types of Human Rights Violations Reported by Iranian and Western Press', First Media Report, p.40

⁴⁷ See Tables 4 & 5 in conjunction; Second Media Report, pp.34 & 35

⁴⁸ See Table 4, First Media Report, p.40

⁴⁹ See Tables 4 & 5, Second Media Report, pp.34 & 35

published in mainstream, family-oriented newspapers like the **Daily Mail**. Besides the USA, none of the other Western countries featured implement the death penalty within their criminal justice systems. In Iran, these executions routinely take place, particularly for crimes such as adultery, apostasy, and homosexual relations, and it is consequently not surprising to find that they draw criticism and international condemnation, particularly from Roman Catholic countries like Ireland and Italy, attracting general media interest and concern.

An aside point worth making is that a publication's presence in Iran meant that it was able to pick up the more obscure human rights stories as well as the obvious ones described above. It was noted in the first report that: 'In contrast to the **Guardian's** attention to the smaller stories, the other British newspapers were more interested in reporting on the big international issues...'⁵⁰ For example, the **Guardian** was the only paper to report about Iran's first female taxi service⁵¹ and it was one of the few newspapers, along with **Der Standard**, **La Presse**, **Le Figaro**, **Libération** and the **Daily Mirror**, to report that the Iranian government established a special resort on an isolated island in a lake for the exclusive use of women.⁵² Although these stories were not about human rights violations, they did touch upon issues relating to women's rights, showing that in some areas they do not face discrimination. Unfortunately, where the media did pick up on human rights stories in Iran, they were mainly negative. But human rights stories can also be positive, where progress is made.

4. Conclusion

News, like politics, is determined by events. It is therefore difficult to reach any general conclusions about media coverage of Iran beyond the specific events of the six months that were monitored in this study. In this regard it is clear that human rights violations are not deemed particularly newsworthy by the international media unless, (1) they are particularly heinous; (2) there is a link, usually nationality, between the person subject to a human rights violation and a western country; (3) the violation is so serious that it affects international peace and security; (4) the human rights violation was unusual, such as stoning or the establishment of an exclusive island for women only; (5) a Western company is implicated in a human rights violation, such as the sale of weapons to the Iranian government which are then used to implement human rights violations, like torture; (6) the human rights violation coincides with a particular event, like International Women's Day; (7) a government official, either Iranian or Western, raises the question of human rights at a press conference; (8) an international NGO like Amnesty International or Reporters without Borders issues a press release or launches a human rights campaign; (9) there is a Western journalist based in Iran or the newspapers concerned have a local correspondent living there; and finally (10) when fellow journalists have their human rights violated or free speech is curtailed.

⁵⁰ First Media Report, p.39

⁵¹ First Media Report, p.26

⁵² First Media Report, p.27.