

Safe Activism

Reducing the Risks and Impact of Arrest

Fall 2015



UNITED FOR
IRAN اتحاد ایران
برای ایران

The Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is to provide current and future activists in Iran with critical information on how to minimize the risk of being arrested, what to do if they are arrested, and how to mitigate the consequences of incarceration. This booklet lists key best practices for each stage of incarceration based on the experiences of over 30 activists in Iran and is premised on the idea that the more knowledgeable you are in your activism the better the outcome.

United for Iran recognizes that the climate of activism and arrests changes frequently and is different in each case. As such, this is a living document, which we will update as needed. We hope you will share your insights with us if you have additional information that could make this booklet more useful for all the activists working toward a free and just Iran.

About Us

In 2009, heavy-hearted by the violence in the aftermath of the Iranian presidential elections, United for Iran founder Firuzeh Mahmoudi began organizing a global rally to draw attention to the tragedy unfolding in Iran. What began as an idea turned into the biggest day of support for Iranian citizens and their quest for human rights in history. On July 25, 2009, in 110 cities across the world, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in support.

That one day of global solidarity evolved into United for Iran.

Today, United for Iran (U4I) is an independent nonprofit based in the San Francisco Bay Area working for civil liberties in Iran. We achieve our mission by advocating for human rights, increasing the capacity of civil society, and engaging citizens through technology.

We run campaigns that raise public awareness, leading to direct pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) to spare lives, release political prisoners, and stop prosecutions of people who post something on Facebook, show up at a rally, or otherwise exercise their right to have a voice in the country they love.

We also maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date atlas of Iran's political prisoners, prison systems, and judges. The atlas, with its 2000+ records, shines a bright light on Iran's judiciary system by making sure that every time a courtroom is used to take the life or the liberty of someone who is exercising her rights, the world will know.

We support the democratic movement inside Iran. The thousands of people who are willing to risk their lives and freedom need support from the outside. Through our global network of activists, organizations, and supporters, we share best practices and strategies from activists around the world. We provide strategic and organizational support to activists inside the country.

Finally, we are developing technology to support human rights and civil society. As Iranians gain access to new technologies, we create opportunities to break the walls of censorship, isolation, and oppression. We focus on mobile applications that are secure, simple, and robust, and allow people in Iran to organize, to communicate, and to raise their voices.

We envision an Iran where the liberties and human rights of every citizen are honored. An Iran where ordinary citizens are empowered and engaged in public affairs. An Iran that is vibrant, open, and democratic. We believe that defending human rights is the responsibility of us all, and everyone has a role to play.

Credits and Acknowledgments

Mahdieh Javid is the principle author of this booklet. Mahnaz Parakand wrote the legal section. Emily Warren and Mahdieh Javid translated the booklet to English.

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Methodology

In the first phase, United for Iran interviewed 17 Iranian activists representing a diverse set of backgrounds and circumstances. In its selection, U4I paid special attention to the ethnic, religious, and gender diversity of Iranian activists and their various fields of activism. The overwhelming majority of the selected activists had been arrested and released within the five years prior to this publication (2009 or later). The participants answered 41 questions that focused on: advocacy goals, preventative measures, the manner of arrest, methods of interrogation, tactics for keeping information safe, prison conditions, talking to media, and the reaction of their families. Using the information provided by the participants, U4I developed a preliminary draft of findings and best practices on how to avoid arrest and reduce the costs of incarceration.

In the second phase, United for Iran facilitated a three-day workshop with seven of the 17 original activists to review and build upon the initial findings from the interviews in the first phase. Participants made comments and suggestions, including recommendations on the inclusion of additional sections. U4I incorporated the results of the workshop and produced a second draft of the booklet.

During the final phase, U4I solicited the input of ten additional activists and experts to complement the expertise and background of the original interviewees. Among them were two Iranian activists and Internet security experts who produced the Digital Security section, and two attorneys who wrote and reviewed the Legal Rights section of the booklet.

Introduction

There are not many written sources for activists in Iran on reducing the possibility of arrest and minimizing the consequences of incarceration. This booklet has been produced with the help of over 30 Iranian activists and with a particular focus on the diversity of their experiences and backgrounds.

United for Iran has aimed to offer a range of solutions in this booklet. On the one hand, advocates in Iran operate under varying conditions and have different resources. On the other hand, individual activists do not have the same strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, a tactic that might be useful for an activist under one condition might not be effective for a different activist or in a different situation.

Ultimately, as an activist you must determine what the best strategy is for you; keeping in mind the conditions you face and your own resources. United for Iran's goals in producing this booklet are to prevent suppression of Iranian advocates' legal and nonviolent actions and to inform them about the most effective tactics used by activists in the country.

The end result will be that you know:

- 1. How to reduce the possibility of being arrested and convicted,**
- 2. What to expect in case of arrest, and**
- 3. How to minimize the consequences of incarceration while in prison.**



LET OUR PEOPLE BE

① Avoid Arrest and
Minimize Incriminating Evidence

② Digital Security

③ Legal Representative

1. Avoid Arrest and Minimize Incriminating Evidence



Preventing arrest is one of the most effective ways to continue resistance and have a positive impact. The best strategy is to plan and carry out your activism in a way that minimizes the chances of arrest, so you can be effective in your work.

Avoid Physical Harm: Steps to prevent bodily harm are often simple yet effective. In some cases, activists need direct physical protection. For example, if you have participated in a protest at your university, leave the campus in a group. The larger the group of people you are with, the greater protection you will have. Individuals, whether police or plainclothes agents, are often intimidated by witnesses and become more cautious and are less likely to cause physical harm.

Invite Well-Known Figures to Public Events: When planning to participate in a public event that you predict will attract individuals who would want to harm participants, invite socially or politically influential people (e.g. well-known university professors, or religious leaders) to the event. The presence of respected figures will help keep the event peaceful. This has been a common and successful tactic for activists in other countries as well.

Avoid Being Followed: Prior to going to a secret meeting, make sure no one is following you. For example, walk or drive several blocks past the meeting place, and only enter the place after you are certain you are not being followed. If you are walking, you can use the side view mirrors of parked cars to monitor activities behind you.

If you believe you are likely to be imminently arrested, activists suggest:

- Remove all sensitive information and material from your home.
- Talk to your immediate family, or at least one trusted family member and inform them that you might get arrested. Prepare them for the steps they might need to take after your arrest. (Please see the “Family” section.)
- Contact your trusted friends and ask them to report the news of your arrest to media if you are caught. (For more information refer to the “Role of Media” section.)
- Leave town without attracting attention.
- Have a friend with you at all times, so that in case of arrest your family and friends are notified immediately.
- Set simple code words with your family, so that during visitation in prison you can inform them how you are really being treated without alerting the guards.

Pursue Nonviolent Activism: Many of the interviewed activists believe that practicing nonviolence can be an effective strategy in preventing arrest. If nonviolent activists are arrested, they can defend their activities more easily, have greater support in civil society and media, and are less likely to be convicted.

Minimize Documents: Security organizations monitor and seize information in an attempt to pressure you and violate your rights. Minimizing your personal documents mitigates this risk. Follow the suggestions listed in the “Avoid Arrest and Minimize Incriminating Evidence” section to reduce the chances of arrest and harsh sentence.

Follow Phone Communication Strategies: Never communicate sensitive information, including the time and place of your next secret meeting, over the phone. Instead, at every meeting determine the time of the next gathering. If you think a fellow activist, friend, or acquaintance does not take sufficient precautions when talking on the phone, do not pick up his or her phone calls. If you must communicate over the phone, choose simple code words in advance, phrases that do not raise suspicion. For example, if you want to communicate that you have been successful in carrying out an action, in your phone conversation in response to a dinner invitation you can say, “I just had dinner.”

Do Not Keep Sensitive Documents at Home: Do not keep confidential documents related to your activism at your home, office, or other places that could be searched in case of your arrest. If it is necessary to retain some documents, keep them at a location that is unlikely to be searched.

Do Not Keep Important Personal Documents at Home: Keep important personal documents such as your national identification card and passport with a trusted friend who is highly unlikely to get arrested. It is commonplace for activists to spend a lot of time and effort to recover their official documents.

Do Not Keep Illegal Items: Do not keep any illegal items at your home. Alcoholic drinks, illegal drugs, banned movies, and especially weapons could make the case against you stronger and more complicated. At the very least, keeping such items will increase your anxiety at the time of arrest and your interrogator(s) can use these violations to further pressure you to confess.

Do Not Record Your Daily Schedule: Do not keep a journal, personal calendar, or anything that keeps daily record of your activities. In the event of your arrest, your notes could be an important source of information for your interrogator. In one case, a group of activists were subjected to a long and complicated interrogation process because one activist had kept a calendar that was discovered.

Destroy Unnecessary Documents: Periodically review all the documents that are related to your activism and destroy anything that is not necessary to keep.

2. Digital Security



Many people do not recognize the importance of digital security until they are faced with government officials having access to their digital information. As an activist you should be much more concerned about cyber security than the average citizen because if your information is compromised it will put other activists at risk as well.

No one can say with certainty what level of digital security is ideal for you. Should you use a complicated encryption system or are simpler measures sufficient? Do the benefits of carrying a cell phone outweigh its risks? You know best how sensitive and risky your activities are and after educating yourself on digital security, you are the best person to answer these questions.

Even if you believe your level and form of activism is not very risky, as a citizen of an authoritarian country, the actions of cyber crime offenders and government threaten your personal information.

It is necessary for activists to be up-to-date about the latest cyber security issues and techniques. A practice that is considered safe today can be very risky tomorrow. “An Introduction to Digital Security¹” and “Advanced Digital Security²” written by Nima Rashedan and published by the Tavaana Institute are two indispensable resources.

1 https://tavaana.org/sites/default/files/Introduction%20to%20Digital%20Safety_1.pdf

2 https://tavaana.org/sites/default/files/Advanced%20Cybersecurity_0_0.pdf

This booklet has relied greatly on the information published in the latter source. Radio Farda's cyber security section¹, Tavaana Tech², and Amin Sabeti's weblog³ are also good references. If you are fluent in English or Arabic, a booklet published by Access⁴ for Middle-Eastern citizens is also a valuable documents.

Do Not Save Sensitive Information: Memorize phone numbers, addresses, and other information that could be incriminating. Do not write them on paper or save them electronically.

Categorize Information in Different Emails: Keep a number of email accounts and categorize the information based on level of confidentiality. Use one email only for personal and non-activism related exchanges. Use another email to communicate information that is sensitive. Set up the second email under another name. If the information is highly confidential you can go beyond the security provided by Gmail and use PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) for maximum protection. For more information about PGP review the article listed in footnote seven⁵.

Do Not Text Confidential Information: Never use texting to communicate sensitive information. Any form of communication with a phone is unsafe and text messaging is one of the least secure forms of communication. For example, if your phone conversations are not recorded or monitored when an exchange is taking place, it is very difficult to determine what was said. On the other hand, the history of your texts is usually retrievable months and even years later.

1 http://www.radiofarda.com/section/cyber_security/1978.html

2 <https://tech.tavaana.org/>

3 <https://aminsabeti.net/>

4 <https://www.accessnow.org/pages/protecting-your-security-online>

5 deepdotweb.com/2013/11/11/pgp-tutorial-for-newbs-gpg4win

Delete Classified Information Quickly: When you receive a sensitive email or electronic message, delete it from both your inbox and trash as soon as you read it.

Do Not Save Sensitive Information: Memorize phone numbers, addresses, and other information that could be incriminating. Do not write them on paper or save them electronically.

Follow Internet Cafes Strategies: Be mindful of security cameras in Internet cafes. If you want to send a confidential email, open a new account under another name. Internet cafes can easily trace your activities; therefore if you are at a cafe do not check the emails that you use for your activism. If you have to send a confidential email, open a new account under another name and make sure you are not revealing your identity in the message. Furthermore, be sure to use private browsing, which is explained in more detail in the section titled Computer Security.

Delete Information: Periodically use software that thoroughly erases the information you wish to delete from your computer. Often, when you delete a file from your computer the information is not erased and can be retrieved. Use software like File Shredder to thoroughly remove the unnecessary files.

Be Aware that Your Phone's Location Could be Traced: Since your cell phone location can be traced, your location can be easily determined when you carry your phone. If you are going to a secret meeting, either leave your phone at home or turn it off and take the battery and SIM card out.

Password Security

Use Strong Passwords for your Computer, Cell Phone, Emails, and Social Media Accounts: A strong password is no shorter than eight characters. Do not use words that can be found in an English or Persian dictionary, or personal information that are easily accessible, such as date of birth, telephone numbers, or names of family members and friends. It is very important to use upper and lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters.

- Use different usernames and passwords for your profiles.
- If you have a Gmail account, use the two-step verification for accessing your account.
- Do not enable your computer or cell phone to auto-fill your passwords; otherwise anyone who gains access to your computer could also access your emails, and other accounts.¹ If you think you will forget your different usernames and complicated passwords, use password management software such as LastPass or 1Password.

Give Your Password to a Friend: Tell a trusted friend, preferably one that lives abroad, the passwords to your email, Facebook, and other accounts and ask the friend to change your passwords as soon they are notified of your arrest. This friend should not change the passwords to your personal and non-confidential accounts. Allowing your interrogator access to your personal email could be an effective way of gaining his trust.

1 http://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/publications/files/computer_wisely_e.pdf

Use HTTPS: One method of secure communication is using https (and not http). The “s” in https stands for secure. The https scheme protects the exchange of information between the user and the website being visited. It constantly checks the website’s server through the user’s browser and thus, recognizes if the connection is being intercepted. There are HTTPS Everywhere add-ons for Google Chrome and Firefox.

Bypass Filtering: For bypassing Internet censorship use Tor, Psiphon, or other known and reliable Virtual Private Networks (VPN). Make sure that the circumventing software that you are using is genuine and not an imitation. Recently a circumvention software named Psiphone (with an added “e”) was able to gain access to users’ private information.

Computer Security

- Keep all your software up-to-date. Outdated software is the main entry for hackers. Operating systems, anti-viruses, firewalls, browsers, and popular software like Acrobat and JavaScript should be updated frequently. If you have confidential information saved on JavaScript it is best to erase the software in its entirety.
- When storing information on USB flash drives make sure to encrypt them by using software like BitLocker, so that in case you lose the flash drive your information is not easily retrievable.
- If you have to save any confidential information use Google Drive instead of your computer's hard drive.
- Your computer saves your Internet history. To prevent this, use the private browsing feature of Web browsers: Incognito in Google Chrome, Private Browsing in Mozilla Firefox and Safari, and In Private in Internet Explorer.
- Use CCleaner for encrypting your files, deleting cookies, and making your files irretrievable. CCleaner is also capable of erasing traces of recently used documents.
- Routinely erase your browser's temporary files by deleting site history and downloads in your browser's preferences.

Security in Social Media

The security of your social media accounts is as important as your email.

- Use strong passwords for your accounts.
- Activate the option of ID verification for entering your Facebook account.
- Access your Facebook only from one computer and register it as a “recognized device,” so that if someone attempts to access your account from another computer, you are notified.
- On Facebook, be very mindful of what statuses and pages you “like,” since many of them could be public and seen by anyone.
- Always assume that among your Facebook friends there are people whose accounts are accessible by the government. Therefore the authorities can see your private profile and postings through these friends.
- Do not reveal your geographic location, date of birth, and city in your profiles.
- Routinely check the IP addresses and computers that have recently accessed your account.
- Do not accept friend and connection requests from people that you do not know.
- Whether on social networks, other websites, or in your email do not open links that appear to be scams.
- Do not use others’ laptops, desktops, cell phones or tablets to access your social media accounts.
- Always logout after accessing your accounts.
- On websites like Facebook, configure your setting so that the names of your friends are not displayed. Simply displaying your connections could create a serious risk for other advocates.

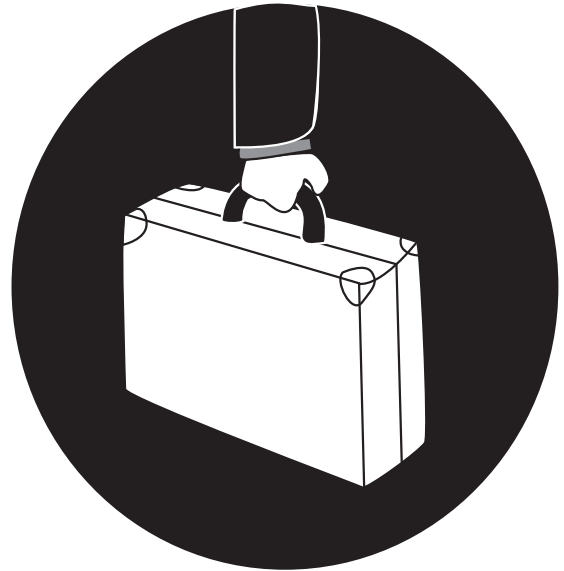
Cell Phone and Tablet Security

The most important measure for keeping your mobile secure is making sure the operating system is up-to-date.

- Only use applications that are well known. Lesser-known applications often pose the highest security risks.
- Install a reliable mobile security app and firewall on your phone and tablet.
- Choose strong passwords for your smartphone and tablet and make sure to lock your phone and tablet as soon as you are done using them.
- Only connect to secure WiFi connections and do not connect to networks you do not know.
- Purchase your apps from well-known and reliable app stores.
- Before purchasing an app, read the online reviews and comments to see whether users have had security concerns.
- Pay attention to access permissions an application requests. Some applications gain access to most of your information once you agree to their terms and conditions.
- If you want to carry your phone with you to a potentially sensitive event because you think you might need to take a video, remove your SIM card.
- If you are going to use your cell phone for keeping or communicating sensitive information, do not use jailbroken phones.
- Only have your Bluetooth on when you are using it.
- Download software that enables you to erase your phone contacts in case it is lost or stolen. For android phones you can activate this software on your Google Account¹.
- Do not activate app features that access your GPS location. If you ever choose to share your location, deactivate the feature immediately after use. This way you do not leave a history of your locations on various sites and services.

1 <https://www.google.com/android/devicemanager>

3. Legal Representative



It would be in your interest to talk to and hire an attorney prior to your arrest, since it will reduce the risk of having an ineffective court-appointed lawyer¹. Having a competent attorney also makes it easier for your family to understand your legal challenges, reducing their anxiety and insecurity.

Choose an Attorney Carefully: Choose an attorney that has the required experience, skills, and dedication to represent your legal interests. Be selective. Talk to your friends and inquire whether they recommend a lawyer and why.

¹ Iran's Criminal Procedure Code was amended after this booklet was produced. According to the new Criminal Procedure Code only lawyers that have been pre-approved by the Head of the Judiciary may intervene during the investigation stage in security related cases. Nevertheless, seeking the advice of an attorney during the initial phases of your activism will assist you in understanding your rights better and the attorney can advise your family in case of your arrest, even if he/she is prohibited from legally representing you.

Give a Trusted Friend Power of Attorney to Hire Legal

Representation on Your Behalf: If you are not able to hire an attorney prior to your arrest, you can give a trusted friend or family member power of attorney to hire a competent defense lawyer in case of your arrest. This choice could also protect you from having an incompetent court-appointed lawyer or worse, an attorney who might work against your interest.



- ④ Arrest
- ⑤ Detention
- ⑥ Interrogation
- ⑦ Common Interrogation Tactics
- ⑧ Effective Tactics for Protecting Information
- ⑨ Confession
- ⑩ Ask for Forgiveness without Admitting Guilt
- ⑪ Solitary Confinement
- ⑫ Protest in Prison and Hunger Strike
- ⑬ The Pressure to Become an Informant
- ⑭ Court

4. Arrest



Knowing what usually happens at the time of arrest will reduce your fear and anxiety and will help you react intelligently. This section provides some of the most common arrest practices.

Security agents usually go to the house or workplace of activists to arrest them. However, it is possible for an advocate to get arrested on the street. While the arresting officers are at times respectful and professional, in many cases they try to set fear and anxiety in the arrestee from the first moments to make the interrogation process easier for the investigator. In addition to verbal and physical abuse, the officers will most likely blindfold and handcuff you. They will put you in a car without telling you the destination. In some cases, even if you are blindfolded, they will ask you to bend with your head down so you will not see where they are taking you.

Stay Connected with a Trusted Friend: If you have reason to believe you might be arrested, ask a friend to call you at least once a day. In that case, if the friend cannot reach you in more than a day, he or she will know that you have probably been taken into custody. Remember that your location can easily be traced through your cell phone, so it would be best if you use other phones. (For more information on this point refer to the “Digital Security” Section.)

Do Not Be Alone: If you are expecting arrest, try not to be alone so your family and friends can be informed of your arrest as soon as possible. Be around people who are unlikely to be arrested, like non-activist family members. The presence of other people at the time of arrest also discourages the arresting officer from becoming violent.

Go into Hiding: If you believe you are at risk of imminent arrest, avoid going to your home or office, turn off your cell phone, and stay away from your usual places, until it appears the authorities have changed focus. There are numerous cases of activists who believe they avoided arrest by being inaccessible while the authorities pursued them. These activists returned to their regular routine weeks or months later.

Ask to See the Arrest Warrant: Most activists that we interviewed believe it is best to ask to see the arrest warrant. Although in many cases the arresting officers either do not have a warrant or refuse to show it, if you do see the warrant you will know the court that has issued it. Knowing who has authorized the arrest makes it easier for your attorney and family members to follow up with your case.

Prepare for Your Transfer to Prison: If you are arrested at home, ask the officers if you can change your clothes. The temperatures in Iranian prisons are often either too cold or too warm and in many cases detainees keep the clothes that they have when they are arrested. Therefore, put on layers of clothing so you can prepare for the possibility of being in prison for more than one season, and for the general varying temperatures of prison.

Take Cash: The authorities allow you to spend the cash you have at the time of arrest to shop at the prison commissary. You could be prohibited from having visitors for a period of time, in which case your family will not be able to bring the items you need, or the money to buy them. Having cash at the time of arrest will allow you to buy your necessities.

Keep Calm: In most cases it is best to keep calm when you are being arrested, especially if the authorities have a legal arrest warrant. If the situation is tense, take control by being silent, friendly, funny, or reminding the agents of your legal rights. Avoid confrontation, especially one that might lead the agents to act violently. In most cases, the arresting officers do not know much about the charges and the evidence against you, and any altercation would be useless.

Destroy Sensitive Information: If you have any confidential documents related to your activism on you at the moment of arrest, try to get rid of them as soon as possible.

Home Searches

The majority of advocates who participated in the development of this booklet had their homes searched after their arrest. The authorities also searched the offices of some of the activists. At the same time, some activists were able to deceive the authorities by sending them to their parent's home so that their actual residences were not searched.

If you take the precautions recommended in the first chapter of *Safe Activism*, do not worry about the search; know that it is unlikely that the authorities will discover any evidence at your home.

- There is no legal requirement for the defendant to be present when his or her residence is being searched. However, an occupant of the house, like the defendant's spouse, should be present.
- The agents should give a list of all the evidence they have gathered from your dwelling to the occupant who is present. If they fail to make a proper list or do not offer a copy, the occupant can refuse to acknowledge the evidence that was gathered from the house and not sign the evidence list.

5. Detention Center



Spend time to prepare yourself for the possibility of arrest. Expect the prison authorities to act illegally and at times violently. Being prepared and expecting this conduct does not mean you will be subject to it. However, it will help you accept the difficulty of your situation and reduce some of the psychological pressures.

Admission Process: Upon arriving at the prison or detention center you will be searched and fingerprinted. The authorities will take your mug shot. After you put on the prison uniform, the authorities will take you to the dispensary for a health check. During the first few days in prison, they will also formally inform you of your charges.

In the provinces, some of these practices are either ignored or carried out at a later time. Often in the provinces, especially in small municipalities, the authorities treat all activists as security threats. In small towns, there is usually only one detention center and it is often run by Ministry of Intelligence.

Dispensary: During the initial phase of admission, prison authorities usually take the inmate to the clinic. If they fail to take you to the dispensary, request to have a health check-up. Once at the clinic, record all of your health issues. If you were injured during the arrest or interrogation, inform the clinic staff.

If you are arrested in provinces, you are less likely to be taken for a medical check-up. In some cases the prison authorities will only ask you to write down your health issues, and any medication you are taking on the admission forms. You can still request to be seen by a doctor. However, depending on the authorities' reaction, you might not want to insist on a medical check-up. In many provinces, taking a new inmate to the dispensary is not considered regular practice; therefore insisting could result in a negative reaction.

Formal Charges: In many cases you are formally charged during the first few days of detention. Either a judge will come to the detention center or you are taken to the court. However, in some cases, even though it is illegal, the defendant is charged after spending a few weeks or even months in prison.

Temporary Detention: In many cases the judge issues a temporary detention order against you as he formally informs you of the charges. The duration of a temporary detention is no longer than one month. In order to keep you for longer than 30 days, the prosecutor needs to ask for an extension. If the judge approves this request you can be held for another 30 days. You should ask your attorney to object to the temporary detention order every time.

Basic Supplies: The prison authorities usually supply you with a towel, blanket, underwear, toothbrush, toothpaste, Quran and Mafatih religious texts. If they fail to provide any of these items you can request them from the guards.

- You have to purchase other basic necessities from the prison commissary. For example, women prisoners who are held in non-security wards must buy their own sanitary napkins. In many detention centers, you do not need to wait until the designated shopping days to buy the items you need. Request from the guards to purchase the items for you.
- The correctional system in Iran is not uniform. You can use this disorganization to your benefit. Sometimes, the commissary staff are willing to purchase some restricted items for the prisoners. You can ask them to bring in the items that you need, even if you believe the articles are prohibited in prison. For example you can ask for moisturizer, hair conditioner, cleaning solutions, dental floss, and olive oil.
- At the same time, because correctional officers violate the law in many cases, they might not provide you with articles that you are legally entitled to. For example, sometimes at the request of the interrogator, your Quran and other reading materials will be taken away.

Distinguishing between Prison Guards and Interrogators: Some prison authorities consistently aim to put pressure on political detainees. However, there are other prison employees, like prison guards, who may simply want to finish their shift and go home. Male activists often do not experience much difficulty with prison guards.

- However, prison guards' interaction with female activists is usually more complex. They tend to demonstrate more inappropriate and abusive behavior towards female activists. In some cases guards show special animosity against a female detainee. Therefore, female activists should take more precautions in their interaction with the guards and keep their contacts as calm and composed as possible.

Abuse by Dispensary Staff: The dispensary staff sometimes treat detained activists more like criminals than potential patients. As a result, they do not always believe an activist has genuine health issues. In some cases, the staff can even be abusive. For example:

- Some prison doctors and nurses sexually abuse female detainees. If you are subjected to such conduct, object and ask them to stop any inappropriate behavior. If in the moment you believe direct confrontation will have negative consequences, you can tell them to stop the examination and request to be returned to your cell. In cases when the detainee objects to the inappropriate conduct, the dispensary doctor and nurse often become self-conscious and stop the conduct.
- Sometimes dispensary personnel, either carelessly or with intent, overprescribe psychiatric medication to detainees. Psychiatric drugs can affect a patient's short-term memory or cause dizziness and fatigue. Some of the drugs are also habit forming. If you have a history of depression or other mental health issues, insist on being prescribed medications that you have previously taken and in correct dosage.

Psychological Pressure and Transfer to the Interrogation Room: Often when a political prisoner is transferred to the interrogation room he or she is blindfolded. The authorities often walk you around almost in a maze to confuse you. In some cases they make an activist face a wall in one of the corridors for over an hour. The aim of these actions is to make you as anxious as possible.

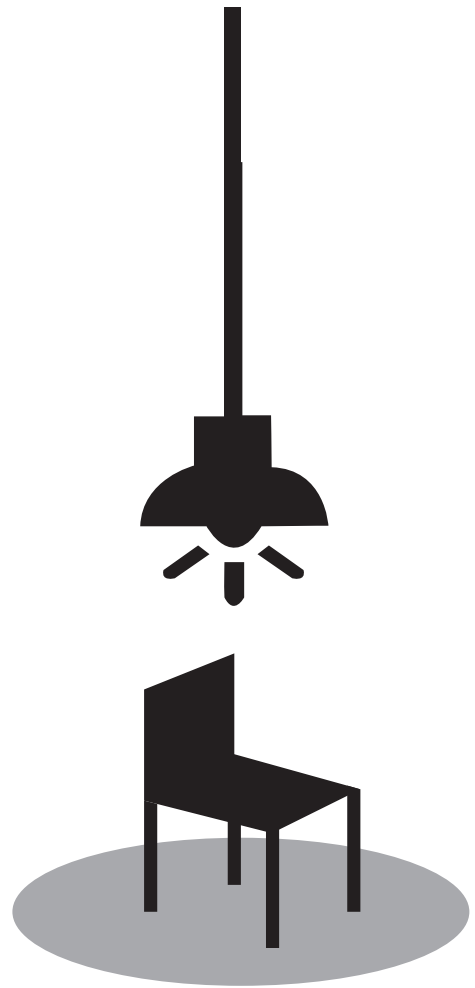
Psychological Pressure and the Use of Sound: Expect to hear a range of noises in prison including: screams, cries, and animal howls. Since you are under serious psychological pressure, some of these noises could be hallucinations. However, prison personnel sometimes make sounds that can intensify prisoners' fears and anxieties. These noises could come from other cells or outside. For example, in Evin Prison the guards periodically scream and make loud noises at night to communicate to each other that they are awake. Try to ignore the sounds as much as possible and remind yourself that such noises do not concern you.

Preparing for Interrogation Prior to Arrest

- If you are part of an activist group, make sure to collectively discuss the possibility of arrest and your responses to the most common questions. Have a plausible cover story for your activities so members can provide believable and coordinated answers in case of arrest. This has been an effective tool for many activists.
- If you are arrested, after your release notify every activist whose name you mentioned in your interrogation. Any discussion of another activist, whether truthful or not, critical or insignificant, should be fully explained to that activist. This way, if the activist is arrested later, he or she is less likely to lose confidence when the interrogator reveals the information he¹ has learned through you.

1 Almost all interrogators in Iran are male. On very rare occasions when a female interrogator is used, she will question a female detainee.

6. Interrogation



In the Iranian judicial system confession plays an increasingly important role. In a significant number of cases, there is no evidence besides an activist's own self-incriminating statements or the statements of others. Consequently, an activist's performance during interrogation is extremely important. Advocates must do their best to protect any information that could incriminate them. However, resistance in a framework of an interrogation does not mean the interviewee must remain silent or be hostile; it means not revealing critical information. While resistance is extremely challenging, it is in the best interest of the activist.

Many activists are somewhat familiar with interrogation tactics before they are arrested. Since the conditions are different for every questioning, predicting your interrogator's specific conduct can be difficult. Keep in mind that many activists are not subjected to the harshest interrogation tactics. Investigators mostly rely on an approach that Iranian activists call "white torture," which include solitary confinement with no communication, psychological pressure, and relatively minor physical torture. Overall, Iranian political prisoners suffer from anxiety and psychological torture more than physical mistreatment.

The main cause of anxiety for detainees is lack of knowledge about their condition. Often activists do not have answers to simple questions like: Where am I being held? What am I charged with? What evidence do they have against me? How will I be treated? Learning about what usually happens to political arrestees will reduce your anxiety and fears.

Overview of the Interrogation Process: The interrogators usually begin by asking about your personal information before focusing on your activism. At the end of the interrogation process, you will be asked to write your "confessions" or sign a statement they have written on your behalf. Keep in mind that interrogation is not a linear process and there could be a number of breaks. Sometimes after days or weeks of no interviews, it could resume again.

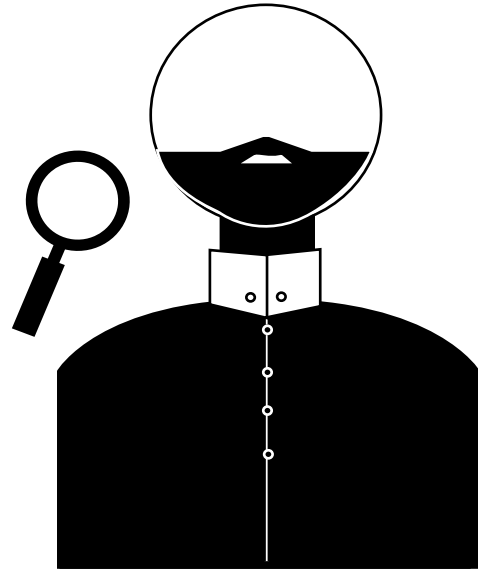
- More than one "interrogation unit" can question you. For example, some activists are interrogated by a group of two or three individuals for days and then a new group of investigators take over and restart the process.
- Usually the interrogators ask you a series of questions in several sessions. Then they will send your case, including your statements, to the court. Often the defendant is no longer questioned after this point and waits for his or her trial. In some cases the defendant is released on bail or personal surety.

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The most difficult part of prison was the psychological pressure. Physical abuses like beatings had little effect on me and sometimes made me feel more determined. However, solitary confinement, not seeing or talking to my family, and being held incommunicado were very difficult.

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7. Common Interrogation Tactics



Interrogation is a mental game. The most significant goal of this game is gaining information. Interrogators use a range of tactics and rely on trial and error to achieve their objective. Once a method appears ineffective, the interviewer will change his approach until he feels he has gained as much information as possible. In this section the most common interrogation tactics are explained.

Interrogators Reveal Some Information to Gain More: Investigators will reveal some information to make you believe they know much more than they actually do. This trick is often used early on to convince you it would be futile or even against your interest to protect your information. At times interrogators will show genuine or forged written confessions of other activists. Keep in mind the interrogators do not know everything about you; if they did, they would have no reason to question you.

Good Interrogator, Bad Interrogator: One of the most common tactics is when a “good interrogator” and a “bad interrogator” question the detainee. While the bad interrogator treats you harshly, the good interrogator pretends to care about your interests. The combination of these treatments has proven very effective in making a defendant talk. The interviewee is especially vulnerable to kindness after the bad interrogator’s threatening and often intimidating conduct. In the anxiety-filled conditions of interrogation, the good interrogator’s kindness makes it very tempting to reveal information. However, in reality there is no good or bad interrogator. There is only one type of interrogator: one who wants you to reveal information.

Interrogators Lie: A significant part of what interviewers claim during an interrogation is lies. They often incorporate some truths to make the defendant believe everything they say or the substance of their argument is true. For example, an interrogator could bring a forged newspaper to suggest that the conditions outside the prison are unstable and therefore people have forgotten about you. Some of the most common lies told by interrogators include: claiming to know a lot about your activism; claiming to have a lot of evidence about your personal relationships including pictures and videos of your sexual relationships; claiming that one of your family members is extremely sick or has even died; and claiming that no one is aware that you have been arrested.

The false stories you hear in prison are not limited to the interrogation room. For example, you might hear manufactured noises while you are in your cell. Also you should be skeptical of what you believe you have overheard by chance. A number of activists have experienced overhearing false tales in prison and believing they are true; including stories about other activists being arrested or confessing.

Interrogators Create an Intimidating and Anxiety-Filled

Environment: One of the most common tools for interrogators is fear. If you are held in a security ward, you will most likely be blindfolded during the entire interrogation process. Sometimes after an investigator enters the room, he remains silent for a long time. You will only hear the sound of pages turning, suggesting the interrogator is reviewing your case.

Also, as mentioned above, interviewers will feed your anxiety even outside the interrogation room by putting you in a solitary cell, playing sounds, preventing you from seeing or talking to your family, or not questioning you for several days.

Threats: Another frequently used interrogation tactic is making threats. Some of the most common threats include: claiming you would receive a harsh prison sentence, claiming your family will be harmed, and claiming you will be tortured or raped. People who are accused of armed resistance and those specially targeted by the Iranian intelligence service are often threatened with arbitrary execution as well.

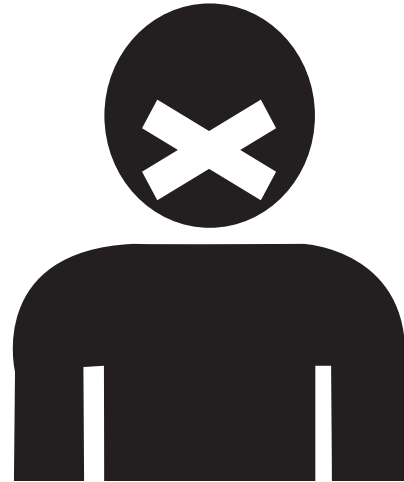
Physical Torture: Some of the most common physical tortures in Iranian prisons are: hitting the detainee with objects, making the detainee stand up for long periods, forcing the detainee in stress positions, preventing the detainee from sleeping, and pouring cold water on the detainee.

Psychological Torture: Interrogators' most common tactics for psychological abuse include: insults, threats, humiliation, and talking extensively and explicitly about the detainee's private sexual relationships.

Sexual Harassment and Assault: Interrogators also use sexual harassment and abuse to break activists' willpower and make them talk. Investigators sexually harass and insult both male and female activists; threaten them and their loved ones with sexual assault and rape, and in some cases rape them with objects.

Kindness: Activists insist kindness can be the most difficult tactic to resist especially if expressed after a period of harsh treatment. Many activists break down after an interrogator makes a kind gesture.

8. Effective Tactics for Protecting Information



The most important fact you should remember is that interrogation is a mental game and a show designed to encourage you to make incriminating statements. In order to protect yourself from this game, you need to learn the rules. As previously discussed, interrogators rely on trial and error to determine what is the most effective tactic for making you talk. They change their methods based on how you react. Your tools should be as diverse as their tactics.

Interrogators have more experience with the interrogation game than detainees. They have been trained for extracting information. Their superior knowledge about the evidence against you and position of power allow them to exercise much control over the interview. However, this inherent imbalance of power does not mean a prisoner cannot influence and control the process. An interrogator, like anyone else, wants to feel smart. He wants to believe he is competent at his job. Therefore, an exercise of power by the detainee must be carried out with care and caution. Often the most effective strategies available to detainees are those that subtly feed interrogators' ego.

Refuse to Trust: An activist should never trust his or her interrogator. Your first armor during questioning is distrust. Assume that the person questioning you lies about almost everything. There is no such thing as a friendly or mundane chat between you two. Keep reminding yourself of the inherent untrustworthiness of interrogators.

Insist on Being Informed of the Formal Charges: Legally an interrogator may not ask a defendant questions that are irrelevant to the charges. For example if an individual is officially charged with “propagating against the state” for writing a critical blog, legally the investigator cannot ask the accused whether or not he drinks alcohol. Thus, a defendant is not required to answer questions that are unrelated to the charges.

If the authorities do not officially charge you prior to questioning, insist on finding out what the charges are so you can object to irrelevant questions. You can respectfully remind the interrogator of your legal rights. Even though the investigator might respond by becoming harsher, it is helpful that he understands you are aware of your legal rights.

Keep a Balance between Resisting and Pretending to Cooperate: While being questioned, consistently aim to strike a balance between withholding information from your interrogator and pretending to cooperate with him by offering relatively insignificant information. Openly resisting your interrogator will make him more hostile. Acting as if you are willing to fully cooperate will make him more eager to gain maximum information.

While you should not provoke or belittle the interrogator, you do not want to come across as someone who has completely broken down.

Especially early in the interview, if you show that you are scared and are willing to do anything to please the interviewer, you will encourage him to be more coercive and aggressive. Therefore at all times during the interrogation you need to seek a balance between resistance and appearing to cooperate.

Hide Your Vulnerabilities: The more reactive you are to a tactic the more the interrogator will use that strategy against you. Showing that you are vulnerable to a method signals to the interviewer that it is an effective tool of getting information from you. Therefore, if the investigator uncovers your vulnerabilities he will put more pressure on you.

Creating a “virtual trench” is one of the most important tactics for hiding vulnerabilities. Under this method, you will try to mask both your weaknesses and strengths. If the interrogator begins threatening you with something that you are especially fearful of, act as if it is not significant. At the same time, pretend your strengths are actually your vulnerabilities. For example, assume your family is not particularly concerned about who you date or that they know and like the person you are dating. If the interrogator threatens that he will shame you by telling your family about your dating life, pretend that you are concerned and do not want your family to find out. Every time the interrogator threatens that he will reveal your personal information act worried. Because the interviewer believes he has found a weakness he will focus on this approach. However since you are not truly fearful, you are less affected. As with any other tactic, be careful not overplay your hand.

Categorize Information Based on Sensitivity: There is a difference between deciding to talk in a more cooperative manner and giving up completely. You can maintain your integrity even if you decide to share some information. Without a doubt, your first goal should be to protect all information. However, if you reach a point where you feel you must pretend to cooperate more, mindfully choose what information to share. You can begin by talking about some topics that are not confidential. For example, after several days of intense questioning, one activist decided to admit that he had written for foreign media. His articles had been published under his own name and a simple search would have revealed the information. However “confessing” to this public information changed the mood in the interrogation room and made the process less hostile.

Try to decide prior to arrest what information is relatively safe to admit, since it could be difficult to make such a determination under the coercive environment of interrogation. Keep in mind confessing to anything, regardless of how insignificant, should only happen after a period of pressure. Making an admission early on will make the interviewer believe that with more coercion he will gain much more from you.

Reject or Explain Evidence: You can reject or explain any evidence either in its entirety or partially. For example, you can deny that you were ever present at a protest or reject the nature of your presence. You may say, “I was only passing by and not taking part in the demonstration.” Although explaining evidence is an effective tool, you should not render it ineffective by relying on it too much.

Explain Prior Lies: If you are forced to lie, do not agonize over the possibility of being caught. Most times the interrogator knows that you are not being forthright. For those who peacefully fight for their rights, hiding the truth at times is a moral obligation. Insist on the truthfulness of your statements even if they are not true. Ultimately if they are revealed you can explain by saying, “I didn’t know,” “I had forgotten,” or “I was afraid it would be misleading.” However, remember if interrogators find out you have been dishonest, they usually begin calling you a liar and use it as a tool for humiliation.

Give an Ethical Confession: If you reach a point where you believe you can no longer resist cooperating, focus on your own activities. Although it is difficult not to mention anything about your relationship with other activists, the less you bring up their names, the more you protect them. Keeping the focus on your own activities will keep your admission within ethical bounds and prevents undue complication in your legal case.

Gain Control after Confessing: As previously discussed, activists have different strengths and are questioned under different circumstances. Sometimes an activist can no longer resist an interrogator's tactics. If you ever reach this point and confess, know that the fact that in this moment you can no longer resist does not mean you have completely lost your strength. This phase will also pass. You will once again feel empowered and can deny parts or all of your statements by saying:

1. "I was forced to lie under pressure."
2. "I had forgotten. The truth is different from what I said."
3. "You misunderstood my meaning."

Manage Confrontations with Fellow Activists: You could be forced to watch another activist's interrogation, torture, mistreatment, or false confession. The interrogator might even bring in one of your former colleagues to tell you to confess. Although these are not common experiences for activists, preparing for them will only make you stronger. If you are faced with this situation, you can tell your colleague you do not understand why he is not being truthful and he must have been through a lot.

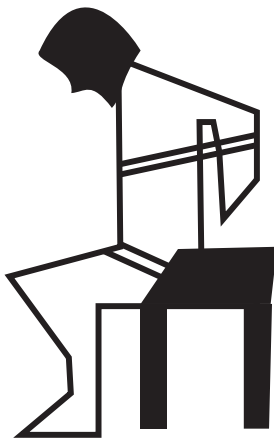
Buy Time for Yourself: Sometimes, especially when the good interrogator is questioning you, you can buy time by saying, "what you are telling/asking me is a lot. I need a few days to reflect on it." Sometimes just delaying the interrogation process by a few days can help you pass a challenging period.

Use Your Sex to Your Advantage: Female activists' often face additional hardship because of their sex. However, female activists can also use their gender as a layer of protection. For example, if during questioning you are alone with the interrogator, you can object and ask him to either open the door or have a second person present.

Also, you can object to interrogations that take place late at night or early in the morning. In a number of cases when female activists have expressed displeasure with being interrogated during unusual hours or by a single male investigator, the questioning team has become more cautious and respectful.

Cope with Physical Torture: The Islamic Republic of Iran has a long history of torturing and mistreating prisoners. In the 1980s, when the Iranian government felt less secure about its power, many activists were tortured and executed. Today cultural, religious, and ideological minorities such as Kurds, Arabs, Balouchis, Bahais, and members of People's Mojahedin are the prevalent victims of state sponsored torture in Iran.

Unfortunately, there are few effective tactics to deal with harsh torture. Anyone can break under harsh treatment and make incriminating statements. However these tips may be helpful:



1. Interrogators often lie that they intend to intensify the torture.
2. People's ability in enduring torture varies. Some people have been able to tolerate harsh physical abuse. Your endurance could also be high.
3. A person who uses violence to achieve his goal is weak. Breaking under torture does not make you weak.

There are two tactics for dealing with physical mistreatment and torture. You should decide which one is most effective for you.

1. Scream: If you believe you are about to be subjected to harsh physical torture, you can start screaming as soon as it begins. Usually interrogators are not keen on revealing their violent tactics, since the supervising interrogator prefers interviewers using tactics other than physical violence. Yelling and screaming could be an effective method as it attracts prison personnel's attention.

2. Pass Out: You could pretend that you are hurt as soon as the beating begins and appear to pass out soon after. Like all other tactics, it is important that your response to the interrogator's conduct appears to be genuine. Once you seem to be unconscious further physical assault will be futile and it would be unlikely that the interrogator will continue with the attack for long.

Report Torture: Report every act of torture to the clinic personnel. If you are being held in a solitary cell during this time, ask your guard to bring you a pen and paper so you could request a medical check-up in writing.

You can also play mind games:

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Some activists believe remaining silent and dodging answers is the best tactic. However, once they are arrested and questioned, they realize remaining completely silent or obviously resisting to answer makes the interrogator angry and prolongs the process. One effective method is to resist for a period and then pretend that you are breaking down and want to reveal some information. However you must be very careful and act in a believable manner. Otherwise it could have negative effects.

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Group and Parallel Interrogation

Dealing with parallel interrogation is much more difficult and complicated than being the only interviewee in a case. The smallest information revealed by any member of the group will be shared with the other interviewees, and in response they will reveal more information. Focus on not being the first person that makes a disclosure.

In parallel questionings, interrogators might put you face to face with a fellow activist who has confessed. The activist might tell you that he or she has revealed everything; therefore your resistance will be pointless. If you are faced with this scenario, tell the other activist that his/her statements are not true. Say, "I'm not sure what you have been through and why you are making these claims." Even if what the other activist is saying is true, for your own interest, that of fellow activists', and your cause, you are not obligated to confirm his/her admissions.

9. Confession



Interrogators will always pressure you to incriminate yourself or other activists. During the last phase of the interrogation you will be asked to write down your admissions. The evidence that is used against you in court is this written admission and not the oral discussions with the interrogator.

Resist Incrimination: Your first objective should be to avoid making any incriminating statements against yourself or fellow activists. Take your time before answering any question, especially the written ones. Think about the question carefully before responding. You can use the tactic of wasting time that was discussed above.

Give Vague Answers: Instead of answering directly you can write down general statements that are not evidence of guilt. For example you can quickly tie your response to the country's economic challenges and the issues that Iranian youth face. Avoid giving clear and direct answers by using phrases like, "I don't know," "I'm not sure," "maybe," and "perhaps."

Use Illegible Handwriting: Write illegibly and cross out words to make your answers unclear. In the case of one activist, his illegible confession, written with shaky hands, was thrown out of the case because it was evidence of torture.

Write What You Think is in Your Best Interest: Interviewers usually go over the answers you intend to give to written questions beforehand. Regardless of the agreed upon answer, always write what you see fit. Sometimes interrogators tear an activist's answers over and over again because the activist refuses to give the responses the interrogator wishes. The interviewer's aim is to force you to write what he wants. You should only write what you think is in your best interest.

To manage some of the pressure, you can change the structure of the answers and your sentences in the second and third tries. Remember this is a psychological game for which the interrogator is getting paid. Even though the process of rewriting your answers could be an exhausting one, it can easily determine your legal fate.

Be Cautious of Yes/No Questions: Pay special attention to questions requiring yes or no answers. They are often used as an indirect way of getting a confession. Do not give short answers to these questions.

Date and Number the Pages: After you are finished with your response, cross out all the blank areas. Make sure to number and date all the pages. In one case, the undated written admissions of one activist was used as evidence that he was involved in an incident that took place after his confession.

Ensure Written Confessions Include the Question: Sometimes interrogators ask you to write down the answers to their oral questions by leaving a few lines blank on top. In your answer first write down the question. For example write, “In response to question X, I think Y.”

Recount Confession: If you make a confession due to physical or psychological mistreatment, you can implicitly or explicitly refer to the abuses in your written admission. For example, you can write that you are giving these answers due to your “present conditions.” Such reference could be helpful in court. You can also explicitly write on the bottom of each page that you are being forced to make incriminating statements. Since your interrogator will likely react negatively to such statements, this tactic might not be very practical. Nonetheless, keep in mind that this option is available.

Avoid Televised Confessions: It is very difficult to give a harmless televised confession. Always resist giving any videotaped admission. Iranian authorities often manipulate video admissions, since the purpose of a televised confession is as much about affecting public opinion as it is about convicting you. Your statements could be edited and used against you or other activists in unrelated cases. There have been cases where an activist’s videotaped confession about a particular event was used to incriminate other activists in a completely separate event. Once you give a videotaped confession you will have no control on how it will be used.

Use Stuttering and Nervous Tics: In a videotaped admission, you cannot rely on tactics that are used in written admissions. The best strategy for avoiding a video admission is to render the film unusable. Therefore, frequent stuttering, nervous tics, and other movements and sounds that disrupt sentences midway are effective tools.

Alter Your Appearance: Because televised confessions can be very detrimental, sometimes activists take extreme measures to avoid them. For example, a minority rights activist, after being forced to agree to a videotaped confession, decided to scratch his face. As a result, the authorities were not able to videotape his admission. While he faced retaliation afterwards, his admissions were not aired on national television, unlike a number of other activists who were arrested with him.

Give an Ethical Confession: If you are forced to write about other activists in your statement, stick to general information. For example, you can write that the activist is a bad student, or you met him or her in university. Sometimes you can mention some of their public forms of activism. Prior to arrest, talk to other activists that you work closely with and ask them what information about their background they think is safe to share. This coordination will prepare you and the other activists.

10. Ask for Forgiveness without Admitting Guilt



Usually during the process of interrogation the investigator will claim that if you are remorseful and ask to be forgiven, you will receive a lighter sentence. Remember that this claim is also part of the overall strategy to coerce you into incriminating yourself. If you ever choose to ask for forgiveness, do so without admitting to guilt. For example, if you are asking for leniency in a case in which you are accused of participating in a demonstration, stress that you do not recall taking part in any protest, or that you were simply a witness; but you ask to be forgiven for any mistake you might have made.

11. Solitary Confinement



Solitary confinement is often a very difficult experience, especially early on when activists usually do not know why they have been arrested. Some of the most common experiences in solitary confinement are: zero to little interaction with other people; exposure to extremely cold or warm temperatures; exposure to constant light; reliance on guards to be taken to the restroom; and, in rare instances, being monitored by hidden video or audio recorders. These experiences lead to loss of appetite, loneliness, insomnia, hallucination, and the feeling that your life is completely controlled by others.

Search the Cell: When the authorities first put you in a solitary cell, search the entire room thoroughly. Even check underneath the carpet. You may find a pen, a piece of paper, or a note from a previous prisoner. Also search your blindfold and uniform; sometimes there are hidden notes in them that could be a source of courage.

Attempt to Write: Ask the guards to give you a pen and paper. If your request is denied, carefully take a pen or pencil when you are in court or the investigator's room. Writing could ease some of the psychological pressure of prison. Often guards find out that an activist has found a pen from new writings on a cell's wall. To keep your writings more private you can write on the side of a Quran or a Mafatih. If you were kidnapped and believe no one knows you have been arrested, write your name, date, and general conditions so those who are held in your cell after you are notified.

Furthermore, if you gain access to a pen, during visitation you can very carefully write a message for your family in the palm of your hand or your wrist. Make sure to erase the message before returning to your cell.

Remind Yourself of Your Beliefs: The longer you are in a solitary cell, the lonelier you will feel. Loneliness will make you question your beliefs and decisions. However, doubting yourself will make you more vulnerable to interrogation. Repeat and review your beliefs and values when you are alone. Do not question your actions even if you believe you have made some mistakes. Prison is not the place for examining your values. You can scrutinize your beliefs once you have been released.

Be Aware of Irregular Menstrual Cycles: Many women activists have reported irregular menstrual cycles while in prison. Often once they are released their cycle automatically reverts back to its natural rhythm. If you experience irregular periods in prison, make sure to ask to be seen by a gynecologist. Prison authorities will be especially concerned if you are unmarried. You can take advantage of your condition to receive benefits that otherwise would not be available to you.

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Under no circumstances allow yourself to wonder how your family is doing. [Trust that] they are doing better than you because they are not the ones in prison. Wondering about their wellbeing will not be help to you.

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Use Tools for Coping with Solitary Confinement: Although solitary detention is very difficult, there are some tried and tested tools for relieving some of the pressure. These tools will help you better cope with solitary confinement:

- Having a daily and detailed routine
- Daily exercising and dancing
- Eating three meals a day
- Drinking a lot of water
- Masturbating
- Reading and memorizing the books that you have access to
- Cleaning your cell
- Thinking about happy memories and taking refuge in your imagination
- Creating single-player games
- Attempting to communicate with prisoners in the adjoining cells, without talking about incriminating topics
- Meditating. For example, rounds of 4-second inhales, and 4-second exhales
- Requesting to go to the bathroom or to take a shower in case there is no shower or toilet in your cell
- Requesting medical check-ups
- Reading what is written on the walls

12. Protest in Prison and Hunger Strike



Prisoners can object and protest in various ways. You can refuse accepting standard services and entitlements like visitation, phone calls, and yard time. Sometimes prisoners even refuse to be interrogated. Certainly protests have costs and the authorities will react. However, in some cases when the prisoner is well known and receives a lot of media attention, or if the authorities have treated the prisoner especially harshly, a well-planned protest can be effective in regaining some control.

One of the most common methods of protests for Iranian political prisoners has been going on hunger strike. There are two types of hunger strikes. In the most common form hunger strike, sometimes called “wet hunger strike,” the protester refuses to consume food, but continues to drink water, tea, and other liquids. The second type is called “dry hunger strike.” A prisoner who goes on a dry hunger strike will not eat any food or consume any liquids. This is substantially more dangerous since it can cause serious bodily harm in a short period. A dry hunger strike is not an effective tactic, since a prisoner cannot survive more than a few days.

United for Iran does not recommend going on any form of hunger strike. Denying nutrition to your body can have long-term negative health effects. However, if you believe a hunger strike is your only viable option, keep these tips in mind:

Considering All the Facts: Before deciding on whether to go on a hunger strike, consider that it may cause your body irreparable harm. Weigh the serious harm and possible benefit carefully.

Preparing: A week prior to going on a strike, slowly cut meat and animal products out of your diet to slowly prepare your body.

During Hunger Strike: Keep your body hydrated by drinking a lot of liquids. Make sure that you are having sufficient salt and sugar to keep your electrolytes balanced. Try to be as physically comfortable as possible. Find a relaxed position and keep warm. Avoid putting any additional stress on your body.

Ending Hunger Strike: When you decide to end your hunger strike, reintroduce food to your body slowly. During the first two days only have light and soft foods like soup, fruit and vegetable juice.

13. The Pressure to Become an Informant



At some point during your interrogation, an agent will most likely ask you to become an informant and provide the authorities with information after your release. They typically make this proposition close to the conclusion of your interrogation, since in the final stage of questioning the mood is friendlier and there is much less hostility and resistance.

The best reaction to this request is to immediately and decisively reject the offer, even if you have previously confessed and provided the interrogator with significant information. Becoming an informant will give the authorities a tool to control you even after you are released. Understandably, some activists do not want to disturb the relative peaceful tone of the last phase of interrogation or risk delaying their release. They agree to become an informant, thinking once they are out they will not cooperate. This is the wrong strategy. It is extremely difficult to back out of being an informant, and the interrogator will use your agreement as a tool to pressure and control you once you are released. If you hesitate in rejecting the offer, your interrogator will think that with additional coercion you would give in. Therefore hesitation results in more pressure.

You can reject the proposition without challenging your interrogator. For example, you can say that you are completely drained and can no longer have any contact with other activists. You can even claim that you have come to believe that your friends have betrayed you and you do not want to see or associate with them in any way.

Make sure not to sign any document that refers to you as an informant.

14. Court



Prior to going to court, if possible talk to your attorney and become completely informed about your case. If you have a court-appointed attorney, it is even more important for you to contact him and see whether he appears to be trustworthy. Not having an attorney is better than having one that works against your interest. If you believe you cannot trust your court-appointed lawyer, talk to other political prisoners and ask about their experiences.

Learn your basic legal rights. In the last section of the Persian version of *Safe Activism*, a summary of defendants' rights prior to arrest, after arrest, and in court are listed and explained.

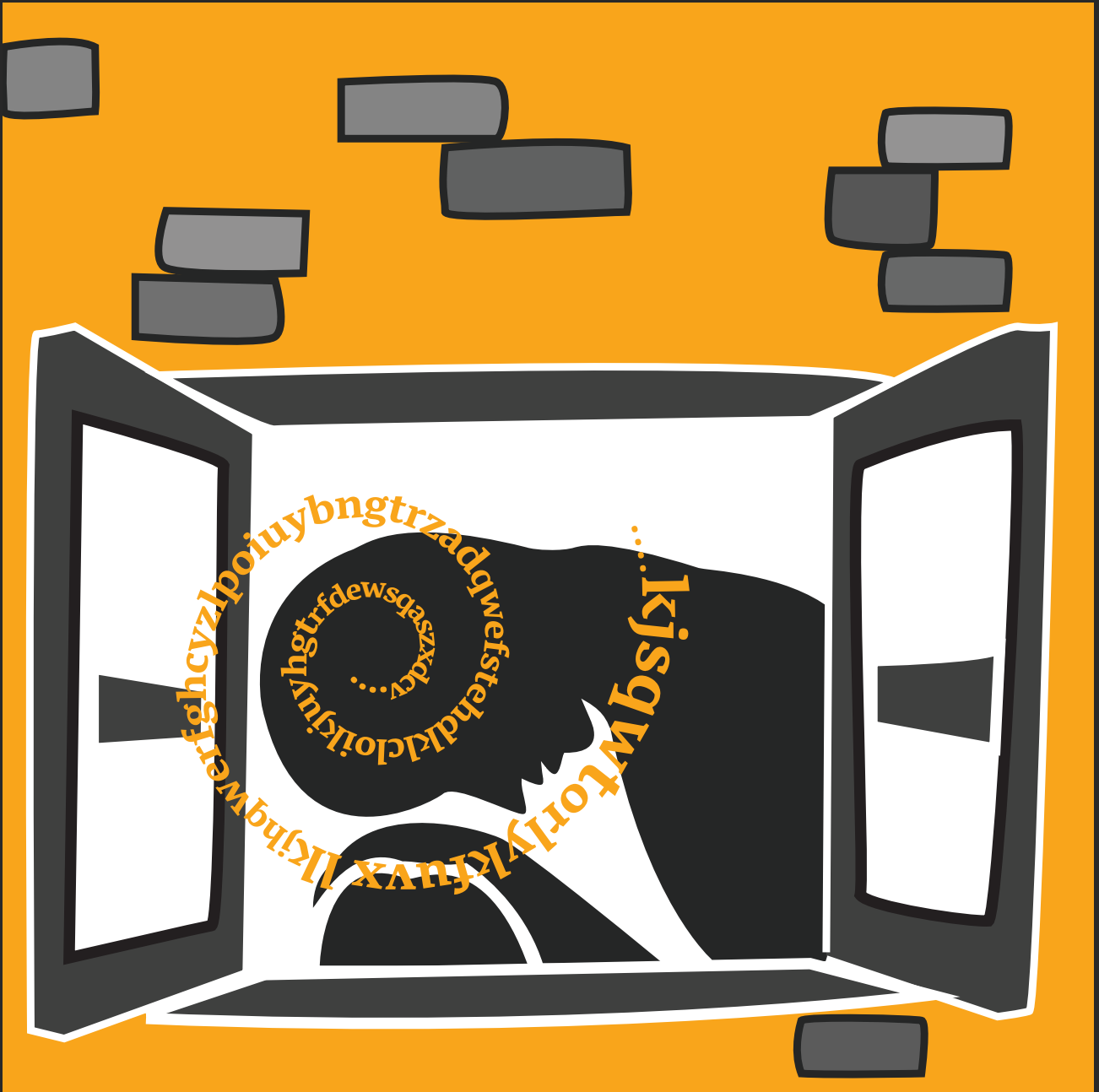
Positive Perspectives of Prison Experience

Once you are arrested and taken to a detention center, make the best of your experience. Activists often call Evin Prison “Evin University.” Imprisonment could be an opportunity for growth.

Meeting Other Activists: In prison you have an opportunity to get to know other activists and learn from them. Your shared stories and experiences could give you strength. You should always keep in mind that some inmates are informants; therefore avoid talking about any experience that could get you or others in trouble. However, even if you doubt a cellmate’s trustworthiness, talk to them and establish a social structure that is beyond your relationship with prison authorities. Social relationships in prison can help your mental balance.

Close Encounter With the Intelligence Community: In prison you will have a close encounter with the intelligence community. This encounter will help you better understand those who are active on the other side and will offer you an opportunity to learn about their strengths and weaknesses.

Confidence: Prison is a difficult experience for activists, and has long-term psychological, physical, and financial effects. However, it can also make you realize your strengths, confirm your resolve, and improve your confidence.



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15. Consequences of Incarceration



As an activist you should actively avoid arrest. Imprisonment has many negative consequences and it will harm your cause and interests. However, sometimes even the most careful activists are caught and imprisoned. Knowing the common consequences of imprisonment and the tools to deal with them will help you address them better:

- Developing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD
- Feeling that because of your time in prison you have missed major opportunities
- Feeling overconfident
- Feeling guilty about your activism and the stress it has caused your family and friends
- Feeling like your family and friends betrayed you by moving forward with their lives when you were in prison
- Having trouble sleeping

You should also expect to receive phone calls from your interrogator and for your family to attempt to control different aspects of your life.

16. After Your Release



Once an activist is released from prison, life can be very taxing. However, as with the difficulties of prison and solitary confinement, there are coping tools that can assist you with transition to full physical and emotional recovery.

Exercise: After you are released make exercising and physical activity part of your daily routine. Exercising can ease the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

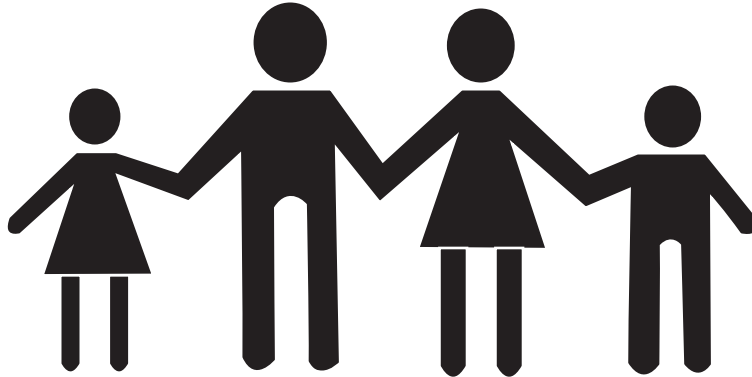
Seek a Trained Therapist: Talking to a therapist could be tremendously helpful. The best therapist is one you can trust and with whom you can connect. If you find it difficult to trust or respect your therapist, he or she is not a good fit and you should find one that meets your needs.

Become Social: You might feel like isolating yourself and cutting back on your personal interactions. However, having a support system and socializing can help you return to your normal self.

Talk: Talking with people you trust and expressing what you experienced in prison could take the edge off of the negative experiences.

Actively Pursue Joy: Go on a vacation, take a fun class, spend time with people you like, and consciously try to enjoy your life. Do things that give you pleasure and make you happy.

17. Family



While in prison, one of your biggest concerns will be your family and how they might be affected. Interrogators often threaten activists that their loved ones will be harmed. Unfortunately there is little that can be done about this anxiety. However, like all other tactics used by interrogators, the more you react, the more your vulnerability is used against you. Some advocates decide to tell their families about their activism just to prepare them for the possibility of their arrest. Informing your family and giving them guidance as what to do once you are arrested will reduce your anxiety in prison and better prepares them.

“

I was very worried that my family will be harassed. [My interrogator told me that if] I cooperated and agreed to the charges my family will be left alone. However, accepting the charges would have harmed my family, and myself much more.

”

Talk to a Trusted Family Member: If you do not find the conditions ideal for talking to your family, share with one family member, someone both you and your family trust, that you are an activist. You do not need to tell this person any details about your activism – in fact knowing less will protect her. However, ask this person to talk to your family after your arrest and communicate your wishes to them.

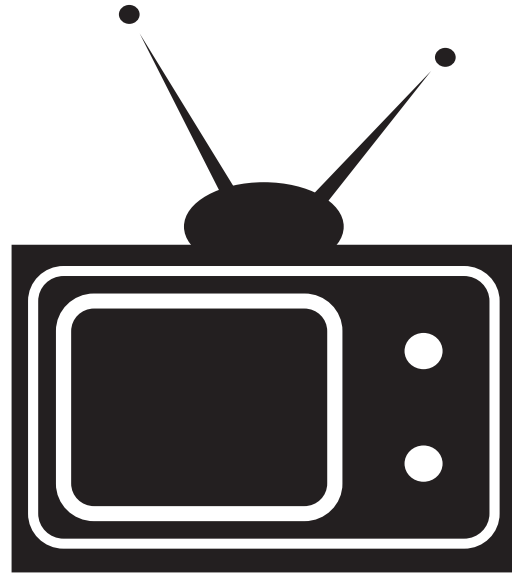
You can decide on simple codes with this family member, so that during visitation in prison you can inform your family on how you are really being treated without alerting the guards.

Prepare a To-Do List: Make a list of what you want your family to do after your arrest. For example you can tell your family that if the authorities asked, they should say that you and your girlfriend or boyfriend are engaged. Also you can tell them that talking to the media is almost always in the best interest of political prisoners. For more information about media strategies see the next section.

Follow up on Your Legal Case: Your family should follow up with your legal case. If you do not have an attorney, ask your family (and give them prior permission) to hire a lawyer on your behalf. Also, your family should persistently go to court and ask for visitation or your conditional release.

Often times in smaller provinces, interpersonal relationships are much more effective in releasing a political prisoner than pursuing legal channels. Therefore, asking a respected and well-connected figure to lobby for your release can be very effective. However, tell your family to be selective with whom they talk, and from whom they seek guidance.

18. Role of Media



Activists who contributed to Safe Activism, more than any other point emphasized the following: it is critical to inform the media about the arrest. Advocates stress that media coverage will make the interrogator more cautious and empower the arrestee. Often, authorities warn families of political prisoners that if they talk to media, their loved one will face serious charges. However, personal experiences of activists contradict this claim.

Effective Media Relations: Ask your family to avoid making any political statements when talking to media. They should report the details of your arrest and your conditions in prison. They can also stress that they are worried about you. Your family members are not lawyers. They can go beyond the facts and share their emotions. It is best for the most sympathetic member of the family, often the arrestee's mother, to talk to media.

Your family should make an attempt to only talk to reputable and trustworthy media outlets.

Remain Silent After Achieving the Desired Outcome: There are parallel and competing forces in the Iranian government and judiciary. Just as you can use these rivalries to your advantage, the plurality of power could cause problems. Be mindful that after you have your desired outcome, whether it is an acquittal in court or release from prison, do not provoke rival forces by making unnecessary statements to the media.

“

[Media attention] was very helpful in improving conditions. Even though because of the reports interrogators put more pressure on me, it showed they were feeling the heat. I also believe media coverage often helps with the defendant's release and legal procedures, because the authorities realize they cannot get away with doing whatever they want to the defendant.

“

Minority activists campaigned hard for my release. Persian-language media did not show much support. But just the support I received from ethnic minority activists was effective in my release.

“

You can see the value of media coverage by comparing the cases of those who did not receive any media attention to those who did. If an activist's arrest is not reported anything could happen to him.

“

University students campaigned for my release. They were very helpful to the point that the dean of our university was forced to step in and contact the intelligence services [on my behalf].

“ I believe overall it is in the interest of the defendant for the news to be published. Those supervising the defendant’s interrogator become more sensitive to the interrogator’s conduct.”

“ There was a campaign in support of a number of prisoners, including me. I believe it made my case move along faster or at the very least was helpful in granting me visitations.

“ No one has ever been protected because the news of her arrest was not reported.

“ Media coverage was very effective. The more my story was reported, the less pressure I felt in prison and the more I experienced other benefits.

“ I believe coverage by media, and websites, the interviews that my family and friends gave, and the statements that student groups published in my support all had positive effects and caused my interrogator to change his conduct.



19. Legal Rights



This section has been omitted from the English booklet. In the Persian version, a summary of defendants' rights prior to arrest, after arrest, and in court are listed and explained.

Conclusion

Seeking justice is a basic human condition. The rights that we enjoy today are due to the efforts of many who fought before us. In this battleground, no effort is insignificant. Any attempt, no matter how small, is a step toward reaching justice and dignity.

However, as you fight for your beliefs, you still have a moral responsibility to take care of your immediate needs and desires. Enjoying your life and spending time with your loved ones are two needs that require security. The more thoughtful you are in your activism the more secure you will be. Meanwhile, if you believe United for Iran could be of help do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

You can access Safe Activism on our website. Although this material is legal, it is best to destroy your copy after reading.

We wish you success.

United for Iran's mission is to work for civil liberties in Iran by advocating for human rights, increasing the capacity of civil society, and engaging citizens through technology.

To read the complete report visit: united4iran.org/safe_activism

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