

State-Sponsored and Societal Lesbophobia in Iran, 2024-2025

A Submission to EL*C Observatory on Lesbophobia, November 2025

6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network), was founded in 2010 following the first Iranian lesbian and transgender gathering. Its network and contacts span across Iran, and is a member of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). The organisation's mission is to promote awareness of LGBT+ human rights and combat homophobia, transphobia, and violence, with a particular focus on lesbian and transgender individuals. To achieve this mission, 6Rang employs key strategies, including strengthening member capacity to challenge discrimination, offering online counselling for LGBT+ individuals, especially lesbian and transgender Iranians, and conducting international advocacy and media work centered around research and documentation to raise awareness about sexual orientation, gender identity, and diversity within Iran.

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1. Context: Criminalization and Enforced Invisibility

The legal and social environment in Iran continues to impose profound and often life-threatening challenges on lesbian, bisexual, and gender-nonconforming individuals. Under [the Islamic Penal Code](#), consensual same-sex relations are criminalized for both men and women, and punishable by flogging, imprisonment, or even the death penalty. While [Articles 237 and 239](#) defines same-sex acts between men, it does not specify equivalent provisions for women. Nevertheless, expressions of intimacy between women—particularly in public or online—are frequently prosecuted under morality and public decency laws, such as “offending public modesty” or “promoting homosexuality.” Meanwhile, nonconforming gender expression may result in fines, corporal punishment, or forced “correctional” measures. The production, distribution, or discussion of any material related to sexual orientation is likewise criminalized, making even supportive or educational content illegal.

This web of criminalization does more than deny rights: it constructs queerness as moral corruption and a national threat. Iranian officials, religious clerics, state media, and



educational facilities regularly deploy [hate speech](#) that dehumanizes queer individuals as agents of immorality, “Western infiltration,” or “cultural decay.” Such narratives reinforce a state ideology that equates heteronormativity with patriotism, and queerness with treason.

The result is a condition of **enforced invisibility**. Visibility itself becomes incriminating. For lesbians, the act of existing openly, through appearance, speech, or online presence, can trigger arrest, violence, or public humiliation. Counselling and health services remain unsafe; many licensed psychologists openly practice “conversion therapy,” including electroshock treatment and other coercive methods, under the guise of moral rehabilitation. As research by [6Rang confirms](#), this exclusion from legal protection fosters impunity for violence, silences survivors of sexual and gender-based abuse, and isolates activists who attempt to advocate for their communities. The lesbian identity, systematically outlawed and pathologized, is thus forced into secrecy, an erasure that fractures community bonds and perpetuates cycles of fear, stigma, and internalized oppression.

2. Escalation of Lesbophobia Amid Global Far-Right Resurgence

In the past year, Iranian lesbophobia has evolved from a state-enforced ideology into a broader social phenomenon, fueled by the rise of far-right rhetoric both globally and within Persian-language media ecosystems. Across online spaces, queerness has increasingly become a tool for political insult : used online or offline by conservative state actors and opposition figures alike to delegitimize adversaries. This convergence of political extremism and moral panic has normalized hate speech, eroding the boundary between state propaganda and public discourse.

Posts circulating on Iranian social media platforms illustrate this phenomenon. In one widely shared [post](#), the LGBTQI activist and founder of 6rang, Shadi Amin, was targeted with insults linking her to “corruption” and “moral decay,” accompanied by the slogan [#ننگ_بر_سه_فاسد_ملا_چپی_مجاهد](#) (“Shame on the three corrupt: the cleric, the leftist, the mujahid”), and an image of a devil wrapped in a Pride flag. Such narratives reproduce the regime’s language of moral warfare, depicting homosexuality as a symptom of social and political degeneracy.



Religion has taken over the schools and the education system, including sexual and psychological deviance.

Let's also curse Mr. [شادی_امین](#) # of this corrupt bunch who is fabricating lies about Javidnam [نیکا_شاکرمی](#) #

[#ننگ_بر_سه_فاسد_ملا_چپی_مجاهد](#)

[x.com/RadioGenoa/sta...](#)

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In another example, [a viral post](#) (141k views) compares two photographs side by side one titled “Democrat Gay” and the other titled “Republican Gay.”. The author wrote:

“The one on the right is gay — it doesn’t produce any bad or negative feeling in me. He’s very handsome and sexy... Whoever he wants to sleep with is none of my business.

The one on the left, whether straight, gay, trans, or whatever else, is disgusting to me... Even if I don’t think about that part at all, the disgusting look is disgusting, that’s all — like the one on the left.”

While seemingly expressed in the language of personal freedom (“to each their own”), the post in fact reflects a deeply moralizing attitude that frames queerness as an aesthetic or psychological defect. By presenting disgust as a natural or apolitical reaction, such rhetoric hides structural homophobia behind the language of preference. In this way, prejudice is rebranded as a matter of opinion rather than discrimination. This pattern is increasingly visible in Persian digital spaces, where far-right narratives blend with everyday speech to normalize exclusion. These discourses mirror the state’s own logic of moral governance: sustaining the idea that certain bodies or identities are inherently impure and must be



removed from public visibility. They also reproduce patriarchal ideals of masculinity, in which only “masculine” forms of gayness are tolerated, while femininity ,especially in men or gender-nonconforming individuals, is treated as a source of disgust or shame.

This rhetoric reflects an ideological alignment between authoritarian conservatism and segments of the far-right opposition. While their political goals may differ, both deploy homophobia and misogyny as instruments of moral policing. The lesbian body becomes a symbolic battleground: used to defend nationalist purity, patriarchal authority, and traditionalist ideals.

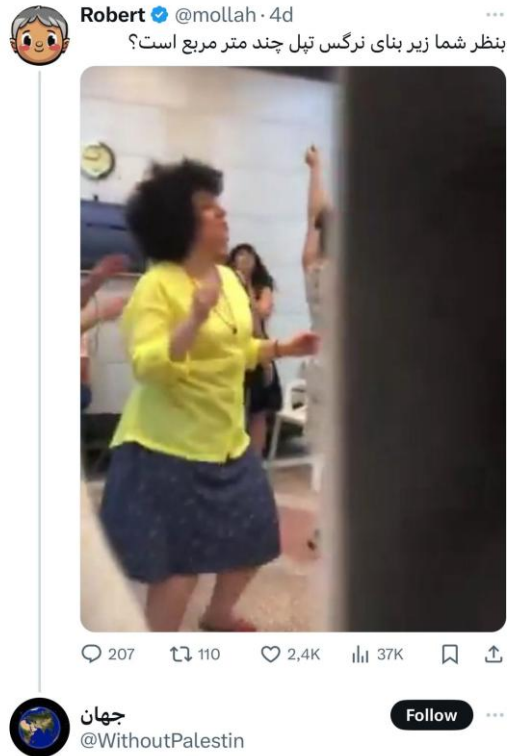


3. Hate Speech in the Digital Sphere

The digital sphere remains the most visible battleground for lesbophobia in Iran today. With offline spaces heavily policed, social media has become both a refuge and a weapon: a site where queer Iranians seek connection but are simultaneously exposed to harassment, smear

campaigns, and coordinated hate speech. Over the past year, online attacks against lesbian and bisexual women have become increasingly organized, with hate speech emerging not only from state-aligned actors but also from nationalist influencers and self-proclaimed “moral defenders.” The goal is consistent: to delegitimize women activists, deny the existence of queer Iranians, and frame lesbian identity as moral corruption or criminal deviance.

A related incident involves Narges Mohammadi, the imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate, whose image was widely circulated online in a short video showing her dancing and celebrating with other women. Although Mohammadi is not a lesbian, the footage became the target of degrading and defamatory commentary. One widely shared post mocked her body, asking, “*How many square meters is Narges Mohammadi’s foundation?*” — a Persian idiom implying ridicule of her physical appearance. Another user replied, “*I have a more important question—what would be the result if she (They mean, Nobel price winner, Nargess Mohammadi) and Shadi Amin had a child together?*” This pattern reflects a broader tendency in Iranian digital spaces to weaponize lesbophobia as a form of gendered punishment against successful or powerful women, framing their independence as moral corruption. Such rhetoric illustrates how sexualized slander functions not only to discredit queer women but to discipline any woman who challenges patriarchal norms.



من به سوال مهم تر دارم
حاصل جفت گیری این و شادی امین چی میشه بنظرت؟

[Translate post](#)

Over the past year, Shadi Amin, founder and Executive Director of 6Rang, has continued to be a primary target of state-sanctioned and diaspora-amplified hate speech. Her visibility as a lesbian activist and her long-standing advocacy for women’s and LGBTQ+ rights make her a frequent subject of misogynistic and sexualized defamation. Online attackers frequently mock her gender expression, using slurs such as “Mr. Amin” or comments like “it’s not clear what’s in her pants,” ridiculing her appearance with phrases such as “آغا و آقا” (“sir or Eunuch”) and labeling her “Neuter” or “sexually deviant.” These remarks are often charged with disgust, presenting queerness not only as moral corruption but as something [physically repulsive](#) or [contaminating](#). In one [post on X](#), Amin was falsely accused of coercing Iranian asylum seekers into sexual relations in exchange for protection or residency permits, an unfounded claim accompanied by graphic sexual insults. Other posts called her a “dirty leftist” and mocked her gender expression with deliberate misgendering, referring to her as “[Mr. Amin](#).” Such attacks are often paired with misogynistic tropes portraying lesbian activists as predatory and morally unrestrained.

These digital assaults reflect a broader intersection of lesbophobia and political propaganda. By portraying Amin and other queer advocates as threats to Iranian morality and sovereignty, attackers reinforce the regime’s narrative of queer identity as foreign infiltration.



a. Security-Driven and Lesbophobic Fabrication of Cases Against Imprisoned Women

A renewed wave of lesbophobic rhetoric surfaced this year in state-aligned digital networks, where queer identity was weaponized as a means to discredit imprisoned women's rights defenders. A [viral post](#) by a pro-regime commentator claimed that political prisoners Atena Daemi, Saba Kord Afshar, and Mojgan Keshavarz had "same-sex relations in prison," describing fabricated scenes of emotional intimacy, sexual acts, and even massages to humiliate them. . The post went further to suggest that these women "provided sexual services" to others, using slurs to frame lesbian relationships as moral depravity. 6Rang has not verified nor confirms the accuracy of these claims.

While these allegations are baseless, their purpose is clear: to strip women activists of dignity and depict their resistance as perversion. As 6Rang's research team notes, such narratives are not isolated incidents but part of a broader strategy of *sexualized defamation*, a recurring state tactic against politically active women. In these cases, lesbophobia becomes a political weapon: it delegitimizes dissent by portraying women's solidarity as sexual deviance, reinforcing patriarchal and heteronormative control even behind prison walls.

b. Targeting Gender Nonconforming Women

Beyond activists, ordinary women perceived as "non-straight" or gender nonconforming have become targets of harassment in Iranian digital spaces. A [Turkish-Iranian blogger](#) faced thousands of abusive comments on Instagram because of her short hair and style of dress, with users demanding that she "prove" she was a woman. Another case involved [DJ Sani](#), an Ahvazi artist repeatedly attacked online over her appearance and voice. Though she has never publicly identified as lesbian, commenters frequently speculate about her gender identity, accusing her of "wanting to be a man" or "pretending to be masculine."

A further example is the case of [Niloufar](#), an Iranian lesbian whose family has known affiliations with state institutions, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). After fleeing Iran and speaking publicly about the abuse she faced by her father, she reported facing repeated threats online, from her family, and alleged government bots. In another instance, she spoke about an experience she had in the workplace in Tehran. A former employer mocked her sexuality with degrading comments, telling her to "look at [his] 24 centimeters so that [her] lesbianism would fall off." Such incidents illustrate the pervasive violence and humiliation faced by Iranian lesbian women, where lesbophobia continues to manifest through both personal and institutional channels of control.

These incidents reveal how rigid gender norms continue to police even the smallest deviations from heteronormativity. For many Iranian women, simply existing outside traditional expectations of femininity is enough to invite lesbophobic scrutiny. The harassment directed at influencers and public figures mirrors the broader cultural anxiety



surrounding women’s autonomy and the persistent effort to reimpose patriarchal control through public humiliation.

4. Consequences: Fear, Silence, and lack of visibility

The cumulative effect of these intersecting forms of repression, legal, social, and digital, has been the systematic silencing of Iran’s lesbian community. In 2024- 2025, 6Rang’s monitoring observed a visible decline in online and offline expressions of identity among queer women. Fewer individuals dared to post photos with the rainbow flag, join online campaigns, or participate in public discussions related to gender and sexuality. Even within trusted circles, the fear of digital exposure has led to self-censorship and the withdrawal of many from community spaces. Some have developed persistent anxiety and trauma as a result of cyberattacks and verbal violence, choosing isolation as a means of protection, while others have experienced severe strain and breakdown in their personal relationships.

This silence reflects not indifference but exhaustion. Iranian lesbians and bisexual women navigate an environment where visibility is synonymous with vulnerability. The threat of “outing” online can lead to family rejection, loss of employment, arrest, or physical violence. The amplification of such hate speech coincides with a noticeable decline in LGBTQ+ representation and discourse within Persian-language media. Outlets such as BBC Persian and Iran International, which once provided limited but meaningful coverage of LGBTQ+ issues, have drastically reduced interviews and expert commentary on these topics. In 2024–2025, 6Rang identified only three media appearances addressing LGBTQ+ rights while for example in 2021 there were dozens of instances of coverage. This absence reflects a growing climate of fear. The cost of speaking about sexuality, whether as a journalist, activist, or ordinary citizen, has become too high.

The chilling effect extends beyond individuals to institutions. Local media outlets and international Persian-language broadcasters have drastically reduced coverage of LGBTQ+ topics, fearing state retaliation or loss of audience. Many have reverted to earlier patterns of work that exclude or minimize queer issues, while funder sensitivities have further contributed to this silence. Widespread homophobia among staff within these outlets has compounded the problem, reinforcing editorial bias and exclusion. Even within human rights organizations, this silence is visible. The resulting withdrawal has created a vacuum of information, reinforcing the false perception that queer Iranians are a marginal or non-existent community.

5. Conclusion and Call to Action

The past year has seen a tightening of Iran’s gender apartheid system, extending its reach into the digital sphere and silencing the already fragile visibility of lesbian and queer women. Criminalization under the Islamic Penal Code, compounded by far-right rhetoric and online hate campaigns, has turned lesbian identity into both a moral and political target. The spread

of state-aligned disinformation and the normalization of lesbophobic language in popular discourse reinforce a climate where abuse, harassment, and violence occur with impunity.

6Rang’s documentation highlights how this environment produces not only fear but also isolation: driving many lesbians into secrecy and self-erasure. The near-total absence of queer representation in Persian-language media underscores the success of this silencing campaign, where invisibility has become both a survival strategy and a form of erasure. Yet, within this darkness, Iranian lesbians continue to resist: through coded expression, mutual care, and the transnational solidarity networks that keep their voices alive.

As 6Rang’s advocacy demonstrates, visibility is both dangerous and necessary. Every act of documentation, every testimony, and every image preserved is a defiance of enforced invisibility. In a landscape designed to erase them, Iranian lesbians continue to insist on their existence, transforming survival itself into a form of resistance. Yet this struggle unfolds in an increasingly hostile digital environment. The Islamic Republic’s cyber army—openly acknowledged by officials such as former ICT Minister [Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi](#), who recently described the use of hired individuals and bots to manipulate online discourse—actively works to distort narratives. Combined with the global rise of right-wing movements, these dynamics intensify the pressures faced by LGBTQ+ Iranians, specifically lesbians, making their continued visibility both online and offline an act of resistance with profound courage.