



# ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Security Council

ISSUE Addressing the Instability in Iran

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## Introduction

Iran, formally known as the Islamic Republic of Iran, was known as Persia until 1935. It is situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Arab states of the Middle East. It holds a strategic position on the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, serving it with easy access to maritime trade routes. The country is rich in natural resources, namely oil, natural gas, coal, and a variety of metals. Economically speaking, there has been a recent massive inflation due to exchange rate depreciation, international sanctions, and investor uncertainty; increasing poverty. Iran's people and society are quite diverse, ethnicities include Persian, Azeri, Kurd, Lur, and Baloch along others. Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam, the constitution defines as the official state religion, dictates daily life, as the type of government is theocratic republic. The chief of state is Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei, the head of government is President Ebrahim Raisi. In September 2022, country-wide protest erupted over the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman who had been detained for inappropriate clothing by the religious police. The demonstration quickly evolved into calls for the ouster of the Supreme Leader and an end to the Islamic Republic. The government responded with harsh tools to counter the growing discontent and dissent of the people.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Theocratic republic:** type of government in which all laws and regulations are based on a religion, in the case of Iran, Islam. The official interpretation of the sharia system serves as a foundation to the structure of organization, with specific offices. Consequently, the legal system and governing of the country conforms to the principles and the requirements of the religion.

**Supreme Leader:** the head of state, holding the highest political and religious authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The role was established in the country's constitution in 1979, with the Assembly of Experts in charge of choosing and dismissing the Supreme Leader

(the office is held until death). Khamenei has held the position for more than three decades, the armed forces, judiciary and other key governmental organizations subject to him.

Morality police: also known as the Guidance Patrol, it is a part of the country's executive branch tasked with ensuring that citizens adhere to religious rules set by the government, especially concerning their dress and behavior.

Hijab: a head covering or headscarf worn by some Muslim women to cover their hair in public

## General Overview

The death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who fell victim to violent police brutality, has sparked unprecedented public outrage against the current regime of the country. The 22-year-old was arrested by the country's morality police for not wearing her hijab correctly and wearing 'inappropriate' clothing, the woman was then brutally beaten according to her family. Despite, the government denied any such accusations and maintained their claim of the woman's death having been due to an "underlying disease". This event shed light on the harsh regulations, the violent nature of the government, the neglect of minorities, the oppression of women, and the resulting economic crisis, among other things.

Iranians of all ages, ethnicities and genders have joined in the demonstrations but it is mainly younger generations that have taken the situation into their hands by voicing their opinion publicly. As of the start of October, the largest anti-regime protests since 2009 spread to more than a hundred of cities. Several countries, such as Türkiye, Afghanistan, and Iraq, within the international community have stood in solidarity with Iran, organizing protests to show compassion. Iranian women have been waving and burning their veils, shaving their heads in their objection to the state-imposed dress code, by which, in 1983, it became obligatory to wear hijabs, even requiring non-Muslim and non-citizen to cover their hair in public. Women in the west have been empathizing with their Iranian counterparts by cutting their hair in public protests, expressing their opinions on signs, and sharing awareness about the situation on social media platforms. The gender composition of protestors shows a shift as opposed to the 2009 protests, with more women brave to speak their truth, backed by male activists who have shown continuous support and empathy for the women's aims as well as bettering the general

situation that makes daily life in the country struck by conflicts and upheaval a struggle for the majority of Iranians.

The Iranian forces have become increasingly aggressive in their crackdowns on demonstrations, using police brutality and inhumane treatment of protestors, many times resulting in serious injuries, incarceration, or in the worst cases, death. In November, an official acknowledged that more than 300 people have been killed in the unrest surrounding nationwide protests, giving the first official word on casualties in two months. The credibility of this statement is questionable, as the ruling forces have not claimed responsibility for the victims, rather they have argued their innocence, blaming fictitious pre-existing medical conditions, suicide or other fabricated causes of death. At the same time, human rights organizations and trusted news agencies have reported significantly higher numbers. Yet the exact number of victims remains unknown, since families of victims are either terrified to speak out or the news do not circulate sufficiently in the state-controlled media outlets, thus estimates remain the next best option to get a feel for the significance of losses, as of 23 January, the death toll stands at 525. Among the victims, there is a considerable number of women, children, and adolescents.

The journalists who report the cases take on a huge risks, as the response from the government similar in nature to how it deals with protests, prison sentences, fines and travel bans are just some of the punishments the regime gives on charge of "propaganda and publishing lies", in brief, the freedom of speech is severely limited in the country. Since there is no private broadcast network in Iran, the internet is the "only place" where protesters can share their voice. The government is trying to counter the increased security forces by imposing telecommunications and internet restrictions, but the protesters have, nevertheless, demonstrated their capacity for good coordination and persistence. It is an effective tool that severely harms the ability of protesters to organise, communicate and inform the outside world, but it also carries a huge cost for the Iranian economy, businesses and public services.

Apart from fatalities, thousands of protestors have been detained in the past few months. The authorities have not shied away from sentencing protestors to the death penalty. 4 protestors have been executed and hundreds of others are on death row, fearing their lives amidst the political instability that poses and impending threat to the general population of the country. Generally, anyone that threatens or directly defies the regime is targeted by the arrests and could possibly face a harsh convictions, children are no exception to this, there are more than a hundred of those detained under 18. Several segments of the society have already spoken

out. Fueled by outrage, oil workers in Khuzestan province have called a strike and left their offices in an effort to step up against the violent regime and express their disapproval of the current situation. Crowds of traders in Tehran, the capital city, have shut down their stalls, unwilling continue labor to show respect to protestors and themselves take part in expressing their discontent with the government. Such actions, in addition to their social value, are also significant in terms of their impact on the economy, with potentially serious consequences. In terms of economy, the 2010s were Iran's lost decade. Iran's per capita GDP went from \$7,800 in 2011 to \$2,300 in 2020. Economic sanctions have significantly harmed the Iranian economy, especially, the U.S. reimposition of economic sanctions after the 2018 withdrawal from the nuclear deal, and have made life difficult for Iranian citizens across all social classes, this has compounded anger, as many have fallen into poverty or out of their comfortable middle-class lifestyle as a result of the economic decline.

It is important to highlight that Iran has had other recent mass protests and uprisings in recent years that did not result in changes to the country's fundamentalist religious government, but some scholars and analysts are now saying that due to its widespread and sustained nature, the current uprising could be different. The youth, who are at the forefront of the protest movement, are generally more liberal, more globally connected, and less devout. They anticipate to enjoy a similar quality of life when comparing their lives to those of other young people, particularly those in the West. The existing policies do not meet their expectations. One of the things that make young people so frustrated is this discrepancy between expectations and real experience. The Rouhani administration (2013-2021) tried to take less strict policies toward women and the youth, however, conservative candidate Ebrahim Raisi won the 2021 election, and the restrictive cultural policies were resumed. On the contrary, the society has taken a shift towards globalization, religion takes up less of people's life as opposed to the past and a general progressive approach can be clearly seen. This change in priorities does not align with the governance of Khamenei and Raisi, which is what ignites unrest and sparks discontent, expressed in protests, that the regime is unfit to control without extreme and unreasonable measures against its own citizens. The situation has reached international recognition and many are concerned for the wellbeing of Iranians and condemn the violent repercussions they face for protesting. In the 2022 Qatar World Cup, the Iranian team refused to sing their anthem as a way to express their support for the ongoing anti-governmental civilian protests back at home.

## Major Parties Involved

**Islamic Republic of Iran:** self-explanatory

**Kurdistan Region:** Iran's ongoing protests may mean a further unraveling of Iran-KRI relations, which have been deteriorating since Kurdistan's independence referendum in 2017

**Iraq:** the relations between the two countries have been fragile and at times volatile since their armed conflict between 1980 and 1988, the Iran-Iraq War, despite, the countries are reported to have a strong official relationship and significant influence on each other

**People's Republic of China:** being its top trade partner, China has developed a friendly economic and strategic partnership with the Iran, the countries share a history of cultural, political, and economic exchanges

**United States of America:** once allies, the US and Iran have seen tensions escalate multiple times in the last 4 decades since the Iranian Revolutions, since 1980, the two have had no formal diplomatic relations

+ **several others**

## Timeline of Events

**1979** – Iranian Revolution, formally marks the end of Iran's historical monarchy

**24 October 1979** – The Constitution of Iran is created, it is later ratified on 3 December, 1979

**April 1983** – Wearing a headscarf in public becomes obligatory for all women in Iran

**4 June 1989** – Ali Khamenei is appointed Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts, succeeding after Ruhollah Khomeini, as the second one to serve as head of state in Iran

**2013 election** – Defeating Tehran mayor and 4 other candidates, Hassan Rouhani is elected for president, the second highest-ranking office in Iran

**2017 election** – Rouhani is re-elected for a second term until 2021

**3 August 2021** – Former Head of Judiciary (2019-21), Ebrahim Raisi, assumes his role as president after winning the 2021 election

**September 16 2022** – Mahsa Amini dies in a coma, having suffered blows to the head and limbs by the country's morality police

**September 2022 up until now** – Civil unrest and protests against the government begin in September, since, hundreds have been killed, thousands injured, and many more detained or arrested

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