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Iranian Women's Movement: Political Opportunities and New Forces

By Hamid Sajadi¹

Abstract

The Iranian women's movement emerged and was sustained in an unprecedented way, although neither the movement's procedure nor the nature of the Iranian protesters' economic and social demands throughout the course of the previous ten years made its formation plausible. While unions have traditionally coordinated many Iranian protests, the present women's movement is non-union, has a national reach, and has been going strong for several months despite fierce government resistance. This study reviews the history and achievements of the women's protest movement in Iran since September 2022. In the past, women's activities have been severely constrained and suppressed by Iran's political-religious system, and feminist causes have never received the needed attention from intellectual institutions. Now, however, Iranian women have the chance to pursue their demands owing to the current confluence of women, artists, and students, along with generational changes and the advancement of new values. Additionally, the popularity of the civil resistance strategy in celebrities' and women's protests reduced violence typical in conflicts between protestors and state authorities. Further, the youth and students' intense feelings and passion led to a movement that was frank and responsive in expressing its demands. Two additional factors which led to the movement were the scattering of the leadership core which had a detrimental effect on the political system, and the individual protest behaviors of women and celebrities which boosted the possibility of individual activity and initiatives. Finally, the possibility of broadcasting the most recent news and events footage through online efforts of young people, students, and celebrities have also created maximum pressure for change. The political potential of the Iranian Women's Movement brought about by popular mobilization and support at the national and international levels is discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Women's Movement, Iran, Gender, Protest, Political Mobilization

Introduction

The Iranian women's movement has long focused on changing legislation, educating the public, empowering women, and opposing all forms of gender inequality and discrimination. The women's movement has consistently protested against Iran's laws that discriminate against women, including those governing inheritance, divorce, the legal age for criminal liability, the ineligibility for presidency, and the headscarf requirement. Up until a few years ago, the women's movement consisted of sporadic, little groups of 10 to 15 women. Activists were unable to attend meetings since they had poor access to public locations for holding their meetings and few resources for communicating with society. The most well-known women's movement activists were arrested, given harsh legal judgments, and in some cases even made to flee the country. The protest against inequality, injustice, and unfavorable conditions for women has frequently encountered pressure and the clash of police forces,

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despite the fact that this movement has never had political goals and its slogan is "change without regime change."²

Over the past few decades, the women's movement mobilized primarily through intimate and occasional secretive gatherings during International Women's Day. Twenty years after the initial demonstration against the mandatory hijab law on March 8, 1979, the first public rally of the Iranian women's movement took place in Tehran on International Women's Day in March 2000. International Women's Day was observed in the following years with smaller gatherings and events, including the Festival of the Women's Cultural Center at the Artists' House on March 8, 2001, the Laleh Park Gathering in Solidarity with Women in Warring Countries, and others. The year 2004 saw the opening of a photo exhibit and a seminar on the history of women and education; 2005 saw the announcement of the opening of a women's library; 2006 saw a celebration of International Women's Day in Student Park; 2007 saw a gathering of teachers and social activists in front of the Iranian Parliament; and 2009 saw the seasonal convergence of women in honor of International Women's Day to voice their demands during elections. Most recently, March 2019 saw a women's gathering in front of the Ministry of Labor. Perhaps more than any other time, women had the chance to voice out and justify their demands during the period of the presidential elections when a free speech environment had been established.

Following its resurgence on social media, the women's movement organized bigger public gatherings, launched campaigns against domestic and sexual abuse, and supported the repeal of discriminatory legislation. Women's protest behavior gradually expanded beyond the established framework and adapted several fresh ideas. The anti-*hijab* campaigns of "My Stealthy Freedom" (2014), "White Wednesdays" (2016), and "Girls of Enghelab Street" (2017) are well-known instances. However, the government has always responded harshly to these civil disobediences and protest tactics. Additionally, women's rights advocates who are based abroad have attempted to exert pressure on the Iranian government to alter its policies. They have accomplished this through reflecting the condition of gender inequality and discrimination in Iran in communications with other advocates, human rights organizations, and political figures on a global scale, as well as by highlighting the problems in the media.

Even though women in Iran have fought against the requirement of the *hijab* (headscarf) since it was first made mandatory by engaging in acts of civil disobedience and wearing an inadequate or so-called "Bad Hijab," the demand for optional *hijab* has only recently gained public attention through the launch of online campaigns (which was widely expressed in the "Girls of Enghelab Street" movement of 2017). With the arrest of over 35 activists and the imposition of harsh legal penalties, the government responded to this protest movement in the strongest possible terms.

Iranian women protested around the country in September 2022 when Mahsa Amini died in police detention for wearing a "poor hijab" at the time. The demonstrations started to hold the government accountable for Mahsa's murder, but they swiftly devolved into a major conflict. The demonstrations that began in September 2022 was regarded as the longest women's movement in Iran's contemporary history. The women's movement has never been this successful in maintaining this level of support and engagement over such a protracted period of time at the national and international levels. In contrast to past women's movements, men were also present with the women during the protests, and together, chanted the catchphrase "Woman, Life, Freedom."

² See these news reports: <https://rsf.org/en/press-freedom-violations-recounted-real-time-january-2019>, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mde130282011en.pdf>

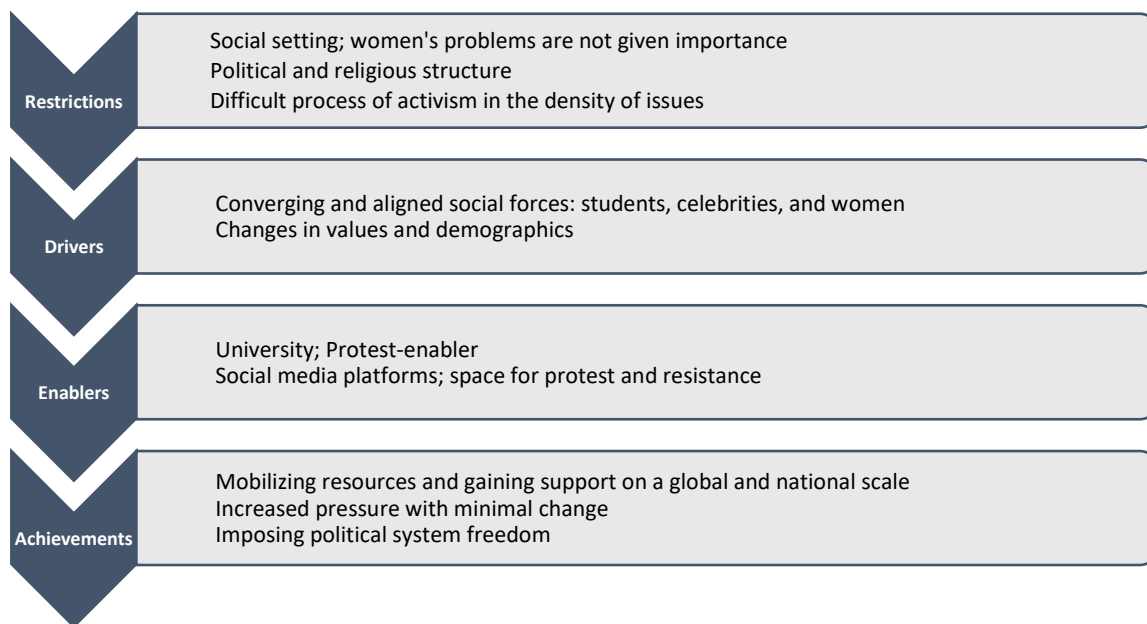
Methodology

Before discussing the development of the feminist movement in modern-day Iran, it is necessary to first identify the factors that hindered the feminist movement and gender justice and inhibited the mobilization of society around women's rights concerns in previous decades. Three sections—social background, political structure, and the movement's activity process—are used to describe the frameworks that restricted the women's movement in Iran. In the second section, two factors—social groups' ability to protest and the changes in demographic values—are used to explain the motivational forces behind the movement.

Three categories and explanations best describe the societal backdrop that has compelled the women's movement to deal with several restrictions: 1) the society's immediate worries; 2) the current top interests of the elites and intellectuals; and 3) the serious problems facing Iranian women. The women's movement in Iran is constrained by the exclusion of women's demands from issues of priority in intellectual movements, society's passivity and lack of support due to a variety of economic and livelihood issues, and by the scope restriction of the movement's scope to minimal demands. The political structure is also described in two ways: first, by the government's limits on civil society, and second, by the laws' inherent religiosity, which lessens their capacity for change in response to environmental dynamics. Finally, explaining the strategies and process of the movement demonstrates how the nation's concentration of unsolved concerns creates a weight on the women's movement.

Even though the organization of the women's movement has faced a variety of new challenges, it is crucial to consider the question "how did the women's movement display such a powerful emergence?" or, in other words, "what stimuli did the women's movement have in Iranian society that caused an exponential growth in the transnational and intergenerational organization of the women's movement?". The answer to the question focuses on two significant factors: 1) the relationship between social groupings' ability to protest and 2) changes in demographics and values. The phrase "girls' movement" may be a more apt title to illustrate the changes taking place in Iran. These elements illustrate and provide an explanation for the development of the movement as a conflict between society and the state. The universities and online social media have also assisted in the latest movement's demonstrations in the meantime.

Figure 1: Progression of Women's Movement from Restrictions to Mobilization



The protest movement gave Iranian society priceless political chances, which were made possible in large part by the strong public mobilization of social and important forces. Contrary to earlier movements, the current women's movement created change in its environment through a shouting protest instead of asking for change through formal procedures or seeking permission to hold a rally. The movement mostly succeeded in applying pressure on the government rather than making significant changes in policies. Finally, the movement has requested priority for its social demands and instructed the system on how to grant women their freedom.

Restrictive Structures and their Effects on the Iranian Women's Movement

The problems facing women's movements in developing nations are numerous. Many scholars in this field note the common idea of political exclusion (Banaszak et al. 2003; Chappell 2003). Contextual, structural, and procedural issues are three categories into which the restrictions on the women's movement in Iran might be placed. Each idea is described below.

Contextual Factors: Downplaying Women's Issues

It has typically been less likely for political and social organizations to come together and show solidarity with the women's movement when women's concerns have been pushed down to a low position on the political currents' priority list or after other crucial topics.

Intellectual movements in particular underestimate women's concerns. Iranian intellectuals generally have two major objectives: "offering a contemporary understanding of religion" and "realizing modernity in society" (Naraghi, 1998; Alavi Tabar, 2000). In other words, Iranian intellectuals have delayed any claims in favor of women by arguing that these rights can only be achieved via changes to the structure of the government and the development of the rule of law. Given this strategy, political organizations and women's rights activists in Iran frequently contest the importance of women's concerns, particularly their opposition to the *hijab's* imposition. Because of this, Iranian intellectuals have been less supportive of the women's movement.

Living in Iran has been overshadowed by several natural and human-made crises, such as drought, unemployment, inflation, cost of housing, and bankruptcy of financial institutions, the effects of which have touched the lives of millions of people and seriously jeopardized their way of life and economy. This has led to passivity and a lack of community solidarity. As a result, the people's gatherings and demonstrations have frequently been focused on the economy. Such protests may clearly be seen in the countrywide demonstrations of January 2018 and November 2019, as well as the ongoing demonstrations of workers and educators in recent years. In actuality, rather than calling for civic and political reforms, the protestors in the anti-government demonstrations over the past ten years are protesting the intolerable economic conditions.

Lastly, activists of the women's movement have been forced to lower their expectations for change to a bare minimum. Iran's present economic situation affecting livelihood, particularly uneven and unjust pay, highlight how severely disadvantaged women are. In the same occupational categories, women make significantly less money on average than men do. The majority of working women are employed in non-specialized, low-paying fields like agriculture, textile manufacturing, tailoring, carpet weaving, education, health, and social work; just 3.2% of women (as of 2011) hold specialist, high-ranking positions. The production industry employs 23.1% of working women, most of whom work in modestly sized workshops and are frequently exempt from labor rules (Statistical Center of Iran, 2022). Their salaries and working conditions are set by their employer's whim, and they are denied access to insurance

and medical care. Additionally, 12,500,000 married women are unemployed (Statistical Center of Iran, 2022). As a result, the activists have mostly concentrated on protecting the fundamental rights of women. For instance, they have worked to change production-related laws and policies in favor of women or stop the firing of women employees (who were usually the first to be faced with layoffs).

In conclusion, there is less opportunity to support the women's movement and push for their demands in the public domain due to the silence of intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike, as well as the challenging economic circumstances of the nation. This pushback has been especially pronounced in the Iranian women's cultural battle against the *hijab* legislation, which violates their personal freedoms and rights and serves as a justification for violence against women.

Restrictive Political and Religious Structures

Iran's political system, like other governments, has imposed restrictions on the civil sphere in a variety of ways, including restrictive legislation, zealous enforcement of the law by government agencies, and purposeful use of derogatory language to demonize and stigmatize movement campaigns (Ibezim-Ohaeri, 2017). Governments have also employed harsh penalties and legal action to restrain and frighten women's movement activists. Threats, prosecution, and the passage of legislation restricting the operations of non-governmental organizations, such as those working for women's rights, may be used to achieve this (Van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012). In the case of Iran, some aspects of the political system that limit women's rights activists include the legislative framework, the rigidity of discriminatory laws, many of which are of a religious nature, and the police's role in institutionalizing and enforcing religious laws through the establishment and patrolling of "Moral Security Police." The judicial system and the official media have also been impediments to human rights and women's rights activists by preventing clear communication about the movement.

The political system's religious foundation and power structure have both placed several restrictions on the Iranian women's movement. Since Islamic norms and values play a significant role in Iran's introduction of women's rights, this normative perspective focuses on what women should and should not do (Sajadi, 2021). In reality, the women's movement in Iran has been at odds with strict religious beliefs which resist change and reform. The biggest burden on women in society has been laws concerning dress, which serves as a sign of the Iranian government's commitment to Islam and a distinction between it and other political systems due to its emphasis on jurisprudence. Reza Shah, the father of the last monarch of Iran (1925–1941), fought hard against the *hijab* in an effort to modernize Iran. So when the Islamic Republic of Iran was first established, it was important to change the rules of women's attire as a sign of the Islamization of society in addition to crafting legislation for women's issues with an emphasis on Islamic jurisprudence. Women's demonstrations in Iran have historically centered on these injustices. The right to divorce, blood money,³ child custody, inheritance, the criminal minimum age, and polygamy are a few more laws that are viewed as biased in favor of men. In addition, there is a glaring legislative void for the suppression of violence against women.

The Burden of Unsolved Concerns on the Women's Movement

Iran faces several difficulties in the social, economic, and political spheres today. Problems have accumulated over time because of the inability to solve them. When a social

³ Blood Money (*Diya*) in Islamic law is the financial compensation paid to the victim or heirs of a victim in the cases of murder, bodily harm, or property damage by mistake. *Diya* compensation rates have historically varied based on the gender and religion of the victim (Tavana, 2014).

group in this situation discovers that they have a voice in the public domain, other marginalized or prejudiced groups join them, and as a result, the demonstrations soon take on a sharp and radical shape. Women's demonstrations have often received the least leniency and the greatest violence from the authorities.

The expectations of the protesting community often weigh down the demonstrations of women when they rise against gender-related concerns, such as inadequate sentences in domestic abuse, femicide cases, or the apathy of law enforcement in situations of persecution, harassment, or sexual assault. Meanwhile, the demands of the Iranian women's movement have always been deepened, expanded, and mixed by various groups including the diaspora protesters who are free from Iran's contextual constraints. Similarly, activists within virtual spaces compete with one another for the most intense confrontation with the government, and some activists overburden the protests with both legitimate and illegitimate demands.

Impossible Conversation

The Iranian women's movement has frequently failed to create channels of communication with the government and parliament in order to amend laws that discriminate against women and protect them. Women have expressed their unhappiness in a variety of ways, but they have had the least backing from the major political parties and sectors of civil society, and the governments have brutally responded to them in place of making real reforms (Islamic Parliament Research Center, 1997).

The realization of the demands of the women's movement has been hampered by several factors, including a society that has underemphasized women's issues; a structure that is inflexible in regard to women's rights; and the accumulation of unresolved issues that have greatly increased the cost of the protests, even though the women's movement has always been a civil movement rather than a political opposition. The following are some additional elements that have decreased the likelihood of dialogue and increased the potential for conflict and protest behaviors in Iran: the perception of women's issues as taboo; the lack of social support; the representation of women's clothing as key to the Islamic nature of the government; the slim chance that the legal system will adapt to the local conditions; and the failure to establish channels for expressing demands in the absence of the right to do so (Hosseinkhah, 2018).

Having explained the restraining factors described above and given the fact that women's protests have historically been marginalized in Iranian politics, the question of how the Iranian women's movement in 2022 was able to overcome such barriers is raised. In other words, how did the women's movement develop to take such a powerful shape? New stimuli and energies are found and described in this work to answer this query.

New Energizing Forces in the Women's Movement

In Iran, movements headed by women are not unusual; in fact, Iranian women have a long history of demonstrations. However, the contemporary movement and its organization unequivocally demonstrate that fresh energy has poured into the women's movement. There are other indications of this extraordinary progress, such as the fact that in 2022, the women's movement has made the struggle against Iran's *hijab* law a priority, despite repeated objections from political parties. Finally, it has demonstrated a distinct type of protest in which gendered politics and politics based on religion have been effectively challenged.

The convergence of the protest ability of social groupings around the topic of women is crucial for discovering fresh and ardent forces behind the Iranian women's movement. In other words, the women's movement has become significantly stronger as a result of its connections with celebrities and students, who have a history of showing a high potential for convergence with other social groupings. Examples of this coalition include solidarity of well-known actresses as they removed their *hijabs* and expressed support for the cause on online

social networks, the first appearance of uncovered Iranian women athletes competing in international competitions, artists showing their support by singing protest songs, and numerous celebrities expressing support on their individual Instagram accounts. The Iranian government's policies frequently give rise to opposing groups whose voices go unheard. Women, youth, and celebrities are the most visible marginalized and ignored groups in terms of cultural and social policy. The connection points based on each group's capability and preferred method of protest behavior are shown in the following figure:

Figure 2: Social Groupings' Preferred Method of Protest and Capabilities

Capacities Groups	Movement	Civil Resistance	Emotional Response	Individual Protest	Creativity and Activity in Social Media
Women	*	*		*	*
Celebrities		*		*	*
Students	*		*		*
Youth		*	*		*

The nature of the movement's tactics of resistance and protest has significantly changed as a result of the active participation of a sizable group of women, particularly the younger generation, in the digital sphere. In reality, women's protest actions in Iran have now evolved beyond small groups of 10 to 15 protesters and into major online campaigns with participants from many cities and even nations. On this basis, the movement has accomplished the following developments, listed in Figure 3, thanks to the convergence of women, students, celebrities, and all young people and teenagers.

Figure 3: Components of Protest Groups' Convergence

Linking points	Linked protest groups	Achievements
Movement capacity	Students and women	Facilitated the protestors' conduct
Civil resistance	Celebrities and women	Decreased protest violence and permitted the mobilization of forces
Emotional and passionate behavior	Youth and students	Made the demands clear and forceful in their manifestation
Individual protest behavior	Women and celebrities	Enhanced the potential for individual activism and initiatives, and dispersed the leadership cores
Online campaigns	Women, young people, students, celebrities	Facilitated widespread news transmission and expanded opportunities for active engagement outside of physical boundaries

Resistance and Protest on Social Media Platforms

Participation in protests has benefited greatly from and been made easier using digital social media. Despite efforts to restrict democratic areas and increased government surveillance of online places, digital mobilization and organizing continue to take place (Buyse, 2018). Social movements in unstable and post-conflict situations have made extensive use of social media, including Twitter hashtags (Earle, 2011). Not only have platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter made it easier to share information, but they have also served as centers for organizing protests and gatherings of supporters.

The majority of the Iranian women's movement is made up of the younger generation, who are quite skilled at using digital networks and have proven their capacity for disseminating news and video of events widely, encouraging participation, and organizing forces. As a result, the movement has progressed from promoting individual awareness to encouraging collective awareness and eventually to promoting group action for change. Their excellent capacity to function in virtual networks has allowed them to generate a lot of material, which has had major influence and reach. Furthermore, the women's movement has acquired a lot of support because it has been able to articulate its demands and goals via poetry, art, and music.

In contrast to the traditional and institutionalized means of organizing demonstrations up to this point, younger activists have embraced digital platforms for online mobilization and flexible modes of organizing without the need to raise money. Thanks to this adaptable organizing approach, younger activists have a bigger online presence and therefore greater impact. The women's movement is making a determined drive to avoid government-controlled and tightly restricted traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television) by using social media to convey demands and requests.

According to studies (Chu, 2018; Jain, 2020; Şener, 2021) these platforms can aid movements in spreading their messages, appealing to a larger audience, and increasing their visibility and solidarity on a worldwide scale. Because social media can accurately portray protestors' activities, they now have a strong feeling of social cohesiveness as well as a voice and identity that are uniquely their own. Additionally, displaying pictures of police violence doubled the amount of public fury.

Using the power of social media to inform a global audience by documenting protests, portraying police brutality and violations of the human rights of protestors, as well as connecting with social activists around the world, the activists of this movement were able to generate public outrage and support as well as to prompt the eventual policy changes. Due to the ideological nature of the political system, changes in this area have been reflected more in the government's strategies and programs than in the laws themselves. For instance, the rules regarding *hijab* remain the same, but the entity in charge of enforcing the *hijab* was abolished. In other words, women's voices could no longer be ignored.

To achieve their demands, social movements utilize communication and their social relations to exert pressure on the government and use the media to express their demands, as well as gather allies and public support (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). In fact, social mobilization is an opportunity for political reforms, and this opportunity was provided for Iranian women by the nationwide protests. The voice of the Iranian women's movement was amplified at the worldwide level in large part thanks to the active women who had been able to forge communication linkages with women's rights activists over the course of decades of living in various countries. Even though there has been a lot of pressure, the process of changing and reforming has been more seriously disrupted, which has resulted in only minimal political changes. For instance, the penalty for failing to wear the required *hijab* was changed from direct confrontation and arrest to monetary penalties and loss of civic rights including the ability to access the Internet.

University: A Facilitator for the Protest Movement in a Securitized Environment

The intensification and growth of the protest movements in Iran are a result of the political system's inability to address core grievances as well as its inability to enact change through the accepted and customary political channels. The previous absence of any openly expressed protest activity was a result of the tight community atmosphere. The only location where a protest gathering could possibly form was on a university campus. As a result, the university has served as a suitable location for protests with a sizable youth presence, mostly young women. The majority of the recent protests were staged in colleges since university

students (over 3 million) make up a sizable segment of Iran's youthful population (Statistical Center of Iran, 2022). Undergraduate and postgraduate students in the age range of 19 to 23 protested by staging marches, sit-ins, and demonstrations at almost 200 institutions.

The sheer volume of student demonstrations speaks to the students' powerful potential for dissent. Age, higher education, and the high level of participation in modern societies, on the one hand, and a feeling of failure to live up to rising expectations, a lack of hope for the future, and a sharp decline in public trust, on the other hand, determine the capacity of the student movement and protest behavior. Additionally, protesting students regularly leave the school to join other demonstrating groups in the neighboring streets due to the institutions' locations, primarily in downtown, which intensifies the demonstrations.

Changes in Values and Demographics

According to Tilly (1995), when attempting to understand political conflicts, it is crucial to refer to changes in the population, the economy, and the political landscape. Therefore, the recent protest movement of Iranian women can be adequately explained by changes in Iran's demographics and cultural values, as well as the country's constrained political and social landscape. The population of Iran is younger due to rapid demographic changes and a rising birth rate (Statistical Center of Iran, 2016). Also contributing to value shifts and a widening generation gap in Iran are the country's rapid urbanization, political and social revolutions, rising use of new communication technologies, rising educational standards (Rabiei, 2001), and the expansion of cross-cultural interactions. The traditional woman's role in the Iranian patriarchal family is becoming less desirable because of this process, especially among educated and employed women, which ultimately has a significant impact on society's institutions and women's morale (Azad Armaki, 2007, 139; Hajli, 2007, 282).

The conflict between roles and expectations that results from this transformation has been resolved in the family environment by the parents of the younger generation. According to a national survey (Javadi Yeganel et al., 2016), discriminatory political laws have had less of an impact on families, and gender segregation and patriarchal politics have less of a presence in Iranian households. Children have been raised free from the discriminatory approach in official politics by parents who have the least faith in discriminatory laws. In the family and neighborhood, girls and boys have both grown up free and independent despite the political system's gender-segregation approach. In other words, a family's educational environment is structured differently from the formal educational system (Javadi Yeganeh et al., 2016).

In fact, a comparison of what occurs in the family and society with what the government and politics have planned for their agenda in regard to women and girls reveals that politics is lagging behind society. Fragile environments are the result of this formal and informal duality.

Despite playing a significant role at home, young girls and women are overlooked by the political system. The contemporary Iranian women's movement is a conflict between the political system and society, or, to put it another way, a conflict between the private and public spheres. These contrasts and dualities can be used to describe the current women's movement in Iran. The youthful generation, unlike their parents, does not comprehend the existence of the private and public realms; therefore, for them, protesting is a continuation of the free life they have been living at home. This is another reason why there have been numerous demonstrations in colleges, high schools, and other institutions.

The younger generations do not wait or hunt for an opportunity to protest, in contrast to their parents and grandparents who used to claim their rights through an official permit, which was usually unsuccessful. The new generations merely declare their rights now and tell the political system what they wish to wear in public.

Beyond the women's movement, which campaigned against discriminatory legislation, unjust judgments, and the inactivity or legal loopholes in the protection of women, activists

raised by these generational shifts and value advancements are now acting. As the driving force behind recent collective and protest movements in Iran, young men and young women today have a significant impact on how society is built. This generation has encountered a high, black wall of politics in its pursuit of freedom—a political system that dictates their attire through the *hijab* legislation, restricts women's interactions with men through gender segregation, and, in essence, does not accept their freedom and vitality in society. Anything outside of the religious framework is denied when it comes to women in Iran's official domain. As opposed to other movements, the current Iranian women's movement is based on the politics of life, and its catchphrase, "Woman, Life, Freedom," conveys this demand well.

The death of Mahsa in September 2022 was an event that gave this generation the chance to speak with one voice. It also neutralized all political efforts to control clothing, establish regulations for all guilds involved in the clothing and cosmetics industries, and create thousands of pages of clothing-related bylaws, instructions, and court decisions. The announcement of the priority to protest against Iran's compulsory *hijab* has really been the clearest message of this generation's protest movement. They have also imposed this requirement by symbolically removing the *hijab* and headscarf in public settings.

The Iranian women's movement in 2022 runs counter to the movements of women and human rights activists, who have frequently been the elite social groups and activists in this field, as well as the maternal frameworks used by women's movements in Africa and Latin America (Oriola, 2021), and it also runs counter to the efforts of the movement of mothers of political prisoners in Kenya to have their sons released by the government during multi-party struggles (Worthington, 2001). Most of the public's sympathy and support has gone to young women, particularly support from men, students, and celebrities. Additionally, they advocate for change together with the freedom of their presence, in contrast to the earlier Iranian women's movement, which mostly supported and sought change and reform without altering the government.

Conclusion: Protest and Political Opportunities

Most protests take place when governmental policies conflict with the needs of the populace. This may result in an immediate need for change, and protesting is one way to make this change. The formation and emergence of the full-scale women's protest movement in 2022 created a precious political opportunity for Iranian women. In the meantime, thanks to the convergence and alignment of various social forces, the women's movement has created pressure for policy change. Students and women have demonstrated in a movement-like manner that is ongoing. Additionally, the youth and students' emotional and passionate behavior made the women's movement distinct and clear. Furthermore, women and celebrities' individual protest behavior has rendered the political system incapable of handling them separately. Finally, the high content production capacity of young people, students, and celebrities on virtual networks has contributed to this movement the most.

By adopting a social and practical strategy with the motto "women, life, and freedom" and an emphasis on the freedom of women to dress as they wish, this campaign stood out in contrast to earlier efforts that aimed to modify the laws in favor of women through legal action. This movement attracted people from elite and lower-class areas, the city's center and periphery, schools and colleges, and crossed gender, ethnic, religious, economic, and social divides. In response to the question of whether women's social unrest has been able to lead to concessions from the government, it should be stated that although the women's protest movement in Iran is not a new movement, there have been many lessons learned from the experience of the protest movement sparked in September 2022.

First off, the women's movement in 2022 was able to survive longer and perhaps even achieve some of its laudable successes thanks to its disciplined and nonviolent tactics. While

attempts to modify legislation through the traditional route have been less effective, the current Iranian women's movement put the most pressure on politicians through social mobilization. The movement's most notable achievement because of this pressure is the formal dissolution of the "Morality Police" as the only enforcer of the *hijab* legislation in public spaces. Despite not altering the law, the political system rendered the "Morality Police" ineffective, making the *hijab* law a dead law. This outcome is largely attributable to the prominence of women in this movement, which despite the protests' widespread nature, significantly decreased the level of violence used by demonstrators.

This movement has been able to garner the most support at the national and international levels and, as a result, impose the highest cost on politics thanks to the participation of young women, teenagers, and celebrities. Women's centrality in the movement and the formulation of demands under the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" have led to its national expansion and made women the center of its solidarity. Sympathy for women in the movement was nationwide, involving the backing of the artistic, sporting, celebrity and university communities, the strong support of men, and the involvement of people of all ages. International legal institutions and other governments expressed their support for Iranian women, denounced the government's violent response to the protesters, took on political sponsorship of many of the detained protesters, and finally expelled Iran from The Commission on the Status of Women in the United Nations. All this national and international support is an indication of the mobilization power of Iranian women. Additionally, this movement was made widely known through the use of modern media, particularly the Twitter hashtag. In particular, in fragile and conflict-affected environments, where external actors also play a significant role in pressuring governments to act, internationalizing issues is a crucial strategy for women's movements. The 2022 women's movement in Iran, in a nutshell, forced women's freedom on the political system.

In this movement, the leadership of girls has played a crucial role in mobilizing and continuing the protests, in contrast to what Celayne Heaton Shrestha and Ramesh Adhikari (2010) have stated regarding the significance of the presence of elite leaders in Nepali movement protests and sit-ins as a main strategy. In order to successfully meet demands in a non-democratic political system, a broad coalition of the needs of the populace and various social groups in the society must be formed. In other words, the protesters must engage in conversation and identify shared objectives in order for the movement to accurately represent the feelings as well as the needs of the general public. The only way the protest movement can force the government to engage in conversation and give in to their demands is in this way.

The recent women's movement in Iran has amply demonstrated that the cause of women's rights alone would not lead to success. The women's movement requires a wide coalition with society. Students, celebrities, and young people are the best candidates for this alliance. In terms of culture, these groups are most similar to the women's movement, and women make up half of their groups. This coalition also needs to operate on a worldwide scale; it has to be backed and encouraged by celebrities, sportsmen, artists, and other influencers who compel legislators and political leaders to support the movement and alter laws and regulations accordingly.

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