



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN IRAN?

AND WHY IT MATTERS.

Iranian protesters display the historic Lion and Sun flag, which served as the national emblem before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

DID YOU KNOW?

A FACT SHEET | International Centre For Sustainability
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After the 1979 revolution, Iran became an Islamic Republic in which real power lies with unelected religious leaders. The Supreme Leader, currently Ali Khamenei, holds ultimate authority over the state and can override elected institutions.

Religion is written into Iran's laws and enforced by courts, police, and security forces, giving the state-wide control over public and private life. These laws sharply restrict dissent, protest, and freedom of expression, with women, students, and journalists particularly affected. Compulsory hijab laws punish women for "improper" dress, while journalists risk detention or prosecution for critical reporting.

Since 1979, repeated protests have been met with violence and repression.

1999

Student protests over press freedom were violently crushed.

2009

The Green Movement was suppressed following disputed elections.

2019

Fuel price protests triggered an internet shutdown and over 300 deaths.

2022-2023

The "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests followed the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in custody, with at least 469 people, including children, killed.

SO WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

The 2025–2026 protests in Iran reflect nationwide unrest driven by long-standing grievances. These include **political repression, lack of accountability, stricter enforcement of hijab laws following the 2022 "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests, and worsening social and economic conditions.**

Economic pressure is a key driver. High inflation, rising living costs, and the collapse of the national currency have severely affected daily life. In 1979, one US dollar was worth about 70 Iranian rials. By early 2026, it was worth roughly 1.4 million rials, representing a loss of value of around 20,000 times over four decades.

The current protests began on 28 December after the rial fell to a record low, initially involving shopkeepers before spreading as students and others joined.

Demands quickly expanded beyond economic relief to calls for broader political change.



Within a week, by 7 January and before the communication ban, protests had expanded to at least 46 cities. According to Human Rights Activists in Iran, they had spread to 188 cities by 19 January.

Map of protests in Iran, 7 to 8 January 2026 Recorded protests are divided between three confidence levels: low (1/brown), medium (2/orange) and high (3/green).

HOW DID AUTHORITIES RESPOND?

Framing and warning: In early January 2026, officials drew a distinction between “protesters” and “rioters,” with the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, saying the state would engage with protesters while warning that “rioters should be put in their place.”

Communications shutdown: On 8 January 2026, authorities imposed a near-total internet and telecommunications blackout across Iran, restricting communication, independent reporting, and public visibility, as in the 2019 and 2022 protests.

Security escalation: Security forces expanded deployments nationwide, using lethal force, mass arrests, and coordinated raids to suppress protests.

The situation in Iran reflects systemic human rights violations, including restrictions on women’s rights and freedom of expression. People have been arrested, imprisoned, killed, or executed for resisting state authority. These actions violate internationally recognised human rights and cannot be justified by politics or culture.

Iranian society has repeatedly mobilised in response, often at profound human cost. When international attention fades, violations risk being ignored or normalised, and repression deepens. Silence allows those responsible to evade justice, leaving communities with enduring trauma, further diminished rights, and narrowing pathways to meaningful reform.



HOW TO STAY ENGAGED:

Check out one of these UK organisations focused on Iran and Human Rights:



THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS BEYOND THIS

Since 2022, and increasingly during the 2025–2026 protests in Iran, authorities have carried out systematic violations of internationally recognised human rights, including the right to life, protection from arbitrary detention, freedom of expression and assembly, and due process.

Press Freedom and Media Control

As of 20 January 2026, journalists have been warned not to report on nationwide protests, facing threats of arrest, heavy sentences, and retaliation against family members.

Women's Rights

Iran's compulsory hijab laws enforce state control over women's bodies. A proposed “Hijab and Chastity” law would introduce heavy fines, prison sentences of up to 10 years, and potentially the death penalty under charges such as “corruption on earth.”

Women and girls were targeted during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests, including cases of torture, sexual violence, and abuse in detention.

Violence, Executions, and the Cost of Resistance

Executions are used to intimidate the public during unrest. According to Human Rights Activists in Iran, at least 2,063 people were executed between January 2025 and January 2026, a 119% increase on the previous year.