



REVOLUTION OF THE HEADSCARF

How Women's Protests are Challenging Iran

Iran has been governed by an Islamic dictatorship since 1979. Now the death of a woman at the hands of the religious "morality police" has sparked protests that seem only to be growing. Could a women's revolution finally bring down the ayatollahs?

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A Little History

The current Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 after a revolution to end the rule of the shahs, the Iranian monarchs.

The revolution involved groups from all across Iranian society (some of which, including the Islamist groups, probably had secret American and British backing).

(1) _____ With the support of the army, and against the will of most Iranians, an Islamic leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, established a "government based on the Sharia", or Islamic law.

The rule of the ayatollahs (Khomeini and his successor Khamenei) has been oppressive and socially conservative. Women have been particularly oppressed. Before the revolution, Khomeini had argued

for women's rights across society. (2) _____ After he took power, he imposed strict rules limiting women's freedoms.

The Morality Police

Several of the world's Islamic states (including Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Malaysia and Iran) have religious police who control public obedience to Shariah. In Iran, this role used to be carried out by volunteer forces called *basij*. (3) _____

The morality police patrol public areas looking for women who they say are inappropriately dressed, which can mean

anything from wearing makeup or showing too much hair to wearing western fashions. (4) ____ They can be very violent, attacking and beating women in the street or at the police station.

Their Bloody Hands

On 13th September 2022, Mahsa Amini was arrested by Iran's morality police for wearing "inappropriate hijab". She fell into a coma at a police station and died at a hospital three days later. The morality police claimed that the healthy 22-year-old had had a "sudden heart attack". Her mother said otherwise: according to her, Mahsa was beaten to death.

The day that Mahsa died, members of the public started gathering in protest outside the hospital. (5) ____ Passing drivers beeped their horns in support.

Mahsa was buried in her hometown of Saqqez, in Kurdistan province, the next day. (6) ____ Women took their headscarves off in protest and shouted "death to the dictator". From there, the protests spread rapidly.

Let the Headscarves Burn

In Sanandaj, a town of half a million people in north-western Iran, a group of women staged a sit-in in the city centre, facing down the police. (7) ____ This time, police attacked the crowd using riot

batons (the heavy sticks used by police) and water-cannons, but failed to clear the streets. In nearby Divandarreh, a small town, security forces fired gunshots into protesters, hitting at least ten people.

The next Monday, videos showed dozens of towns and cities joining the protests. In central Tehran, protesters chanted "justice, liberty, no to mandatory hijab" as they joined hands to form a human chain to stop riot police. (8) ____ When one woman burned hers standing on top of a car, the police tried to take her down – and several nearby men fought them off.

Unity is Strength

Video after video emerged showing similar scenes across the country over the next few days and nights. A woman without a headscarf standing on top of a police car shouting "we don't want the Islamic Republic" as another police car burned behind her. (9) ____ Protesters pulling down pictures of the ayatollahs from the town hall.

Iran has seen periods of protest before. As the days pass and the protests grow, this one is beginning to feel different, perhaps because social media is helping people to see that this is a movement and not just a few isolated demonstrations. There's a sense of unity.

The State in Motion

The Iranian authorities are not blind to this. At the time of writing, they have shut down nearly all internet access across the country, hoping to stop the spread of videos and social media posts – and hoping to lock out the world's media.

So what will happen? This is a dynamic situation, and by the time you read this, everything may have changed. The protests may be crushed in a new wave of oppression and tyranny. (10) ____ Or maybe – just maybe – the time has come for the ayatollahs to fall in a Revolution of the Headscarves.

W If you want to learn more about life in Iran after the Islamic revolution, try reading the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. You can read a Bridge article about it [here](#).

TASK

Ten sentences have been removed from the text. Choose the best sentence from the list below to fit each numbered gap. There are two sentences you will not use

- A Since 2005, however, there have been official forces called the Guidance Patrols, nicknamed the morality police.
- B The following day, the crowd of protesters was even larger.
- C The morality police said that arrests had been made but that no one had been hurt.
- D This won him a lot of support from liberal Muslims and even secular (non-religious) political groups.
- E Her funeral turned into a scene of large protests, which the police attacked violently.
- F Women burned their headscarves.
- G They also operate undercover, wearing ordinary clothes so that people do not know who they are.
- H As darkness set in that evening, they took to the streets of Tehran.
- I The government may back down and offer to reform or abolish the hated morality police.
- J Already the protests have claimed several lives.
- K In the end, however, a single man ended up seizing control.
- L Another woman helping protesters to escape from police by letting them through her house.



Both in Iran and across the world, Muslim and Iranian women have been cutting their hair as a further form of public protest.