

Iran: Islamic Law, Recent Protests, & Their Effects

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Iran has been in recent headlines due to an outburst of protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman who was arrested by the morality police for violating the country's laws on hijab and modesty. The protests are striking with ferocity and a rare feminist nature we've never seen before in the middle east. People are fed up and Amini's murder has sparked an outpour of frustration towards the Islamic Republic, women's rights, and their limits on freedom. But, protestors in Iran (and across the world) have begun to burn the headscarf, formally known as the hijab, as a symbol for the movement, which has caused many mixed reactions from the Muslim community.

When something so sacred starts to be attacked by westernized nations and its people, it further propagates this stereotype that Islam is oppressive towards women and keeps them in subordinate positions. We have to understand that the problem here isn't Islam, it's regimes controlled by men that use Islamic law in their favor to control and oppress their people, especially women. It feels as though there's a westernized standard to what freedom looks like, one which opposes Islamic law, but it's not Islamic ideals on modesty and hijab that's an issue, it's institutions that use Islamic law to terrorize and oppress women for their own gain. Iranian women aren't fighting to be free from Islam, they're fighting to free themselves from an oppressive regime that exploits women and Islamic law.

History of Islam in Iran and Hijab in Islam

The connection between Islam and Iran is quite complex. Islam was brought to Iran by Arab conquest in 650 AD, and over the centuries, Islam has played an aberrant role in the nation-state ever since. Iranians hold on very strongly to their pre-Islamic roots and achievements through themes like nationalism, secularism, religion, and revolution. So, what are hijab and modesty in Islam? And how have those beliefs been misused under the Iranian regime?

As Muslims, we believe that our true purpose in life is to worship God according to his instructions revealed in the Holy Quran and through the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Hijab is a form of modesty that instructs women to cover their hair, and contrary to popular belief, men in Islam have hijab as well. Not the garment you're thinking about, but a sense of modesty within their actions, speech, and character, which oftentimes gets forgotten about within the patriarchal systems they control. Wearing hijab is a personal and independent decision that comes from a sincere yearning to please God.

The Iranian government has taken control of something so beautiful and turned it into something that goes directly against Islamic belief, force. This concept of forcing women to wear hijab isn't based on any Islamic teachings, if a woman is forced to cover, then it's quite simply contrary to Islamic principles and rather, due to cultural pressure.



Online presence

The presence of political climate in Iran has a stronghold in online spaces like Tik Tok and Instagram. I found more biased reports on Instagram, while on Tik Tok, there were more opinionated stances that blamed Islam for the issues in Iran and for denying women rights. I say this with concern because white creators that are posting with such a negative sentiment come from a place mentioning Islam and modesty being the issue. It's shocking to see this when oftentimes they don't belong to this identity, they're simply speaking from ignorance. They talk about an issue with little to no knowledge about the history of colonialism in the middle east that has disenfranchised governments that once were stable. Once again, the issue isn't Islam, but when creators use dangerous language it can perpetuate the idea that anyone wearing a hijab is an extremist, oppressed, or is seeking freedom. Wearing the hijab or choosing to cover your body shouldn't be seen as backward or "compromising your freedom."

There's no question that Iran needs to change their government and address its corrupt leaders that take advantage of women and its citizens on a daily basis. Additionally, western nations and their privileged people with no link to Islam need to stop dragging the hijab and modesty in ways that influence western superiority - this demonstrates Islamophobia. Wearing a hijab means choosing to allow who can see you, now how liberating is that?