



Amini Protests: Vowing for a New Commitment Between Society and State

Merve Çalhan*

Abstract

This article aims to contextualize Iran's recent protests, following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while in the custody of Iran's so-called morality police. The protests have amounted to be one of the most serious challenge to the regime's uninterrupted legitimacy. The protests have been recorded as the longest standing one compared to the White Wednesdays Movement. Protesters have taken over the streets across the country to stand up for requesting equal rights for women. The attempt has been argued by critics and academics as posing a serious security challenge to presence of Islamic Republic. This courageous experiment could spur more significant developments in Iran over the coming days and weeks and the protesters may pose a major challenge to Iran's entrenched leadership, however prediction of whether the survival of the government is at stake or not, is still very much debatable issue. In the article, distinctive features and reasons of Amini protests and the effects of launching dialogue channels among different segments of the society have been analyzed through main components of political process theory. In this framework of op-eds, reviews and reports which have been published in Iran national and international media platforms were interpreted.

Keywords: Uprisings, Social movements, Social media, Young population, Generation – Z.

* Ph.D., Independent Researcher, mervecalhan@yahoo.com, Kocaeli, Türkiye, ORCID: 0000-0002-7230-2441



Amini Protestoları: Devlet ve Toplum Arasında Yeni Bir Mutabakat Sözü

Merve Çalhan*

Öz

Bu makale, 22 yaşındaki Mahsa Amini'nin ahlak polisi tarafından yapılan sorgulaması esnasında ölümünün ardından gelişen olayları analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Protestolar, rejimin kesintisiz meşruiyetine en önemli tehdit olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Protestolar, Beyaz Çarşambalar hareketiyle kıyaslandığında, en uzun soluklu protesto hareketi olarak kayıtlara geçmiştir. Protestocular, kadınlara eşit hak talepleri için sokakları işgal etmişlerdir. Kalkışma yorumcular ve akademisyenler tarafından İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin varlığına önemli bir tehdit olarak tartışılmıştır. Bu cüretkar kalkışma denemesi önümüzdeki günlerde, İran'da daha kritik gelişmelere yol açabilir ve protestolar, İran'ın kemikleşmiş liderliğine önemli bir zorluk teşkil edebilir. Ancak, hükümetin devamlılığının tehdit altında olup olmadığı hala oldukça tartışılan bir konudur. Makalede, yaşanan protestoların belirleyici motifleri, protestonun sebepleri ve tecrübe edilen toplumsal hareket dalgasının toplumun farklı segmentleri arasındaki dialog kanallarının açılması üzerindeki etkisi politik süreç teorisinin temel bileşenleri üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, protestolarla ilgili İran ulusal basını ve uluslararası basında yer alan uzman yorumları, makale ve görüşler yorumlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsyanlar, Sosyal hareketler, Sosyal medya, Genç nüfus, Z – kuşağı.

* Dr., Bağımsız Araştırmacı, mervecalhan@yahoo.com, Kocaeli, Türkiye, ORCID: 0000-0002-7230-2441

1. Introduction

Iran's post-revolutionary history has been acknowledged by various protests, boycotts, civil disobedience, and freedom rides over the last 40 years caused by economic, political and environmental and other grievances. Widespread discontent arose from degrading women's rights, alleged corruption and youth unemployment rate higher than the world average, inflation, poor public service provision, and the state's delivery of resources to defend Bashar al Assad in Syria and supporting groups such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian militias rather than satisfying their own citizens. The street protests in Iran illustrated that its foreign policy aspect was rather unpopular in the eyes of public opinion. The Islamic Republic's financial support throughout the region was also a notable source of frustration (Juneau, 2008, p. 9). Smaller demonstrations have become a common pattern rooted in a large spectrum of concerns such as political, religious, ecological and social. Protestors include minorities, bazaaris, merchants, students, women and many others whose rhetoric frequently focuses on condemnation of revolution political elites and the supreme leader himself (Saidi, 2018).

In the early years of the Revolution, post-revolutionary power struggle led to street fighting and armed struggles following the mass execution of political prisoners in 1988. In the second decade of the Revolution, student protests erupted caused by economic grievance among economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Throughout Iranian history, two protest waves marked a prominent challenge to the regime's survival: The Green Movement (2009), Dey Protests (2017-2018), and the 2019 Protests. The Green Movement of 2009-2010 was marked as one of the greatest challenges to the regime authority since the 1980s led to resistance in many major cities (Niakooee, 2020, p. 1). Following the massive protests against the rigged election which led through the reelection of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, security forces attacked dissidents in the streets. It was evaluated as the first popular uprising after the revolution where women, religious communities, and secular groups from all walks of society participated in protests (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010, p. 79). According to Dabashi (2010, p. 12), the launching of widespread civil rights movements in 2009, even changed the moral map of the Middle East and disrupted the geopolitics of the region. As Dabashi (2020, p.

12) told, the Green Movement based on the obvious democratic will of a nation showed that sociological landscape of political protest in Iran and global perception of the Middle East is evolving. “As a major cosmopolis, Tehran is now the ground zero of a civil rights movement that will leave no Muslim or Arab country” (Dabashi, 2020, p. 13).

The anti-regime Dey Protests that occurred between December 2017 – January 2018 were spotted as the largest demonstration wave since the Green Movement. Nevertheless, the Dey Protests were distinguished from Green Movement due to the fact that the Dey was not organized and systemized and the protests targeted the regime’s fundamental principles and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. While the factions of the Green Movement were largely dwelling on city centers and urban population groups; the factions of the Day Protests came from rural areas and smaller cities. Whereas the Green Movement was an open call to reform the regime’s policies, the Dey Protests aimed at toppling the regime. Both of the movements did not threaten the regime’s survival; however, they have altered the way of protests and opened a new page for the Iranian regime components and society (Saidi & Amir, 2018, p. 1).

Protestors’ main motivations have been based on toppling down the regime components since 2017, rather than focusing on economic stability. In November 2019 a new protest wave erupted in Iran sparked by skyrocketing of fuel prices. According to Fathollah-Nejad (2020, p. 1), the ferment of the 2019 protests had the same pattern of the Dey Protests.

Even though the protests of November, 2019 were evaluated as the bloodiest ones stemmed from pervasive economic dissatisfaction among lower and middle class, slogans eventually targeted the entire ruling system and political elite of the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, 2019 Protests, the number of protestors hit 200.000 which was recorded almost five-fold increase compared to the Dey Protests (Fathollah-Nejad, 2020, p. 4). Nevertheless, public’s growing disappointment with the regime has grown due to the fact that the regime is still unable to wipe out any problem completely that fuels popular discontent. Taking into consideration of three protest waves; the public’s growing disappointment has grown based on the regime’s lack of dealing with any problem completely that fuel popular discontent. While the state’s security apparatus resorts to extreme unproportional force, there is a soaring feature of radicalization

among protesters. Compared to protests erupted in 2017 and 2019, recent protests erupted by Mahsa Amini's custodial death in Tehran; slogans of protesters directed at the coercive apparatus of the regime. As the methods of protesters are evolving over the last four decades, new forms of protest have emerged where the protests' rapid dispersion on different geographies occurred through social media instruments.

Each historical stage faced a specific form of social movement whereas every social structure reveals its unique form of movement (Fadaee, 2012, p. 3). From 1997, a set of political and social reforms were expanded and Iranian society requested for new reforms targeted at the cultural and social landscape of Iran such as modernization of everyday social life, mainstreaming of gender equality and practical accession to social media instruments. Growing demands for reforms contributed to the outbreak of protests. "While protests in Iran are not new, the number and breadth of protests today are significant compared to previous years" (Jones & Newlee, 2019, s. 1)

In light of Iran's contemporary social movement agenda, the paper asks four main questions: What are the distinctive features of Amini protests? What types of grievances have led to recent protests? Do the Amini protests represent a noteworthy challenge to the regime future? Do the Amini protests succeed in initiating dialogue among Iran's different social segments and generations? The proposed research questions were analyzed through the components of political process theory which seems like the best fit in describing the new protest wave in Iran. Due to the fact of the presence of few studies analyzing newly emerged social movements, I intend to compare Amini protests with contemporary social movements belonging to twentieth century.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Theory

McAdam (1982, p. 40-41) argues through political process theory that the structure of political opportunities and mobilizing structures are major determinants of political protests. In order for a political protest to be labeled as a successful collective action is related to the course of movement activity. Political process theory (PPT) outlines five key

components that determine the success or failure of a social movement: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, protest cycles and contentious repertoires (Crossman, 2021). *Political opportunities* affect the course of mass mobilization whether it would be repressed or might succeed vis a vis the emerging vulnerabilities driven by the political exclusion of fragile social groups such as women, children and different ethnic groups. Political opportunities give direction to people's collective judgment about mass mobilization activity (Tarrow, 1996, p. 53). "*Mobilizing structures* refer to the already existing organizations (political or otherwise) that are present among the community that wants change. These organizations serve as mobilizing structures for a social movement by providing membership, leadership, and communication and social networks to the budding movement" (Crossman, 2021).

Framing processes are a cultural toolkits to frame the main purpose of movement groups. The role of media instruments is vital in shaping the frame process. Framing leads to laying out protestors' tactics and tools to raise awareness among the general public about the key concerns of the movement (McAdam, 1996, p. 338). The *Protest cycle* describes the time span when the protest wave hits the top as a functional tool to consolidate the solidarity of protestors. The more the protests linger, the more the effects of the protests penetrate through the society (Crossman, 2021).

Contentious repertoires, which refers to the set of means through which the movement makes its claims. These typically include strikes, demonstrations (protests), and petitions. According to political social theory, when all of these elements are present, it is possible that a social movement will be able to make changes within the existing political system that will reflect the desired outcome (Crossman, 2021, parag. 7).

Movements were thought to be responsive to sudden, dramatic disruption in people's lives which motivated them to restore social and psychological order through collective action. Destabilization of existing power relations evolved through political process model of social movements (McAdam & H. Sewell, 2001, p. 91).

2.2. Methodology

In the essay, sources of data were derived from the arguments from essays, discussions, newspaper op-eds & headlines, conventional and unconventional media instruments and social media platforms. The essay output was based on content analysis to identify focus and communication trends of protestors, think-tanks and institutions. As this paper is case-driven, I will not discuss the whole social movement theories. I explored the features of recent Amini protests vis-à-vis previous Iranian protests which have been sparked in a sporadic occurrence in recent years (green movement, dey protests, 2019 protests and Amini protests) from the lenses of political process theory. In addition, the paper analyzes the reactions of Z-generation protestors and their growing relations with social media platforms.

3. Complexities and New Trends in Iran Protests

There have been wide range of protests in Iran's history caused by multiple reasons such as political, economic, environmental and other distresses. "Since the late 2017, there have been hundreds of protests per month led by a range of networks from shopkeepers to students to truckers" (Jones & Newlee, 2019, s. 1-2). Over the years of post-revolutionary Iran history, the characteristic of protestors has changed whereas neoliberal policies affect people from different strata of society. Following the neo-liberal policy shifts since the early 1990s, protests over economic grievances have been triggered primarily by the working class employed in lower-tier occupations. Since Iran's refusal to freeze its uranium enrichment program, additional economic sanctions were approved by the European Union and the United States. Even though deepening economic pressures has relatively little impact on Iran's nuclear enrichment programme, they have a serious effect on Iran's crumbling economy (Habibi, 2008, p. 1). Iran's sluggish economy and troubled currency reaching low rates against the US dollar debilitated the purchasing power of citizens. Due to the dismal economic situation, the regime's accountability progressively has weakened. Retrogressive economic situation has an appearing impact on the fragile segments of the society who are increasingly play a pro-active role in a bid defiance state legitimacy (Saidi & Amir, 2018, p. 1).

Existing political gridlocks and economic crisis, has cultivated new dynamics where the lower strata of the society are increasingly disenfranchised from the state (Saffari, n.d.). Iran experienced series of popular uprisings that took place in the large cities between 1976s-1990s which were largely dismissed because they seemed insignificant compared with the Revolution. In the first decade of the revolution, Iran took a significant number of measures to form a more equitable society with extensive anti-poverty programs acted as a welfare state. In the late 1980s, Iran experienced a gradual shift away from its egalitarian commitments towards an economic liberalization such as privatization of state-owned factories and demolishing ghetto neighbourhoods that sheltered disadvantageous population groups. The unemployed poor, rural migrants, slum dwellers and middle-class jobless groups resorted to collective action to demand work (Bayat, 1997, p. 53-54). Bayat argues in his book called "Street Politics" methodological insights into collective actions of disadvantaged population groups and reveals survival politics of poor during the years of 1997-93. He offers solid empirical data on collective actions of grass-roots activities, local organizations, workers' unions and unemployed poor living in the outskirts of cities and towns and how they make meaningful changes through everyday actions. As Bayat stated in his book on contrary to political elites, ordinary social communities (migrants, urban poors, women, unemployed young people, etc.) are tend to constitute an unofficial political theory; therefore, those ordinary people could possibly create major social transformations and be a provoking factor of a revolution (Bayat, 2008, p. 63). In fact, they make up informal part of civil society as they define their public space based on their reactions to the plight. The political turmoil and social mobilization of Iran's revolutionary upheaval; laid bare street politics; nevertheless, street politics did not start with the revolutionary Iran. They are rather product of repressive political environment. Bayat also refutes the popular belief the poors in developing world, are often atomized and non-ideological. According to Bayat (2008), defensive mobilization of the poor to resist oppressive measure of a regime could pave the way for prerogatives of dominant groups in society. Moreover, it was accepted that rural Iran and economically fragile urban populations residing in southern part of Tehran still consolidating the regime power. During the Green Movement many analysts stressed on the movement belongs to middle and upper class undertaking, so rural and

disadvantageous population groups have took side with regime, protests occurred in December 2017 symbolizing a drastic shift from this alleged argument (Abdoh-Tabrizi, 2018, parag. 2 and 13).

It has been four years since Shirin Ebadi who was awarded Nobel Peace Prize interpreted the 2018 protests as the end of the Islamic Republic. She emphasized the demise of the regime even it may take many years (Edabi, 2018). Based on Axworthy's (2013) arguments stated in his book which guides through recent Iranian history from 1979 Islamic Revolution to the 2009 Green Movement; the fragile legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, along with economic sanctions has led the regime into a major stalemate; nevertheless, this does not mean that regime's imminent breakdown is only a matter of time. Besides, state and society relations are standing on a knife edge since the 19th century. Being deprived of political leadership and relatively weak social alignment of political, ethnic and cultural groups belonging to different segments of the society, the country is unable to consolidate itself against the state. According to Jones and Newlee (2019), protests led to regime change rarely in Iran history; however, unlike previous protests erupted due to the local issues; Amini protestors were motivated to demand a whole regime change rather than limiting themselves to palliative reform agenda. In the following sessions, the contours of recent protests will be discussed through the main components of political process theory.

4. Political Opportunities: Amini Protests as a Women's Stance against Regime's Legitimacy

Political opportunities as a key component of PPT have been discussed through the fragile position of Iranian women and their soaring demands in the society. Consistent demands of women belongs to new generation in the democratization of the political sphere played a significant role from the very beginning of the protests. Women's demands were considered as a solid political opportunity and leverage effect to evaluate the movement as a challenge for the ruling elite of Iran.

Iranian people protested cultural, religious and other concerns throughout history. Women of Iran has arisen as an outspoken actor to raise their voices in a bid against government's far-reaching surveillance tools (Malekpou, 2021). As Malekpou (2021, p. 24) stated, "women slowly become the heroes

of contemporary Iranian reformist movement by removing their hijab, refusing to be made object of the male desire”. Though protests against the hijab have spurred the streets in a sporadic manner to oppose Iran’s law requiring women to wear the hijab since the 1979 Revolution, only one case represented potential flashpoint as a headscarf protest called “White Wednesdays”¹. Then campaign using the hashtag #MyCameraIsMyWeapon instigates women to film and share their public vision without compulsory hijab while singing and dancing in public spaces. Women who participated White Wednesday movement, shot videos while walking on the streets and posted it on social media instruments (Tafakori, 2021). White Wednesdays campaign has not only been triggered as a popular demand to take off hijab in public spaces but also the movement has been manipulated by digital media instruments and succeeded in revealing the gaze of surveillance and policing of women’s clothing. Nevertheless, though hijab is a very much debated issue as women’s right to choose their public appearance, phenomenon also carries emblematic elements that brings into question popular discourses on female bodies and women’s role in the family and society from a broader specturum (Akbari, 2021, p. 184).

It has been four years since the protests that took place in 2017/18 and Amini’s protests raged out of control provoking the whole country with a consensus over anti-regime slogans in 2022. Having been accused of violating Iran’s strict hijab rules Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman was arrested by morality police on 13th September 2022. It was alleged that Amini was killed in custody three days later due to the fact that she was beaten in the detention van. Amini’s death led up to ubiquitous protests in multiple cities around the country which were described as the most serious uprising to Iran’s ruling revolutionary elite. Women launched a campaign against the government by taking off their hijabs, wearing white colors, dancing and singing in streets and redefining their traditional identity patterns through social media channels. Protests were even reverberated in Europe and hundereds of people gathered in European cities to give support the protestors in Iran and chanted “women, life and freedom” and carried photographs of Mahsa Amini to denounce

¹ “White Wednesdays” (WW) is a campaign name against compulsory hijab which has provoked women to wear white hijab/ scarf every wednesday to show their unity against wearing compulsory hijab (Basmehchi, 2019).

Iran regime (Goulimaki, 2022). Small-scale, widespread protests makes it difficult for the government to stop them. Thousands of regime dissidents have been rallying in demonstrations and women are burning their hijabs, cutting their hair in the streets and tearing down the portraits of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. As the protests fired up, Iranian authorities shut down internet access in order to cut the connections among protesters by shutting off mobile data and disrupting popular social media platforms. Government of Iran aimed at preventing their citizens from accessing and disseminating information via internet; however, young Iranians send voice memos explaining the main motivation of their persistent participation in rapid growing protests (Strzyżyńska, 2022). In addition, students were sentenced to prison, workers went on strikes and large number of journalists and activists have been arrested.

Based on a verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Iran; two of the protesters sentenced to death on the charge of enmity against God, terrorizing people and provoking people to pour into the streets. People were taken into custody for publishing calls for protests on the internet (Human Rights Activists News Agency [HRANA], 2022a). President Ebrahim Raisi condemned the nationwide protests and denounced that they were sparked by Iran's foreign enemies. Raisi also vowed to deal decisively with protestors by calling them a pawn opposing the country's security and tranquility. Based on the arguments of the report called "Iran's Shift toward More Oppressive Government", Iran has become a more authoritarian and repressive state where security forces have built an increasingly sophisticated surveillance state to suppress domestic dissent (Carl, 2021).

5. Mobilizing Structures and Contentious Repertoires: Notable Features of the Protests

Adoption of resounding iconic slogans (such as "down with the oppressor, whether it is a Shah or a Rahbar" and "women, life and freedom") and re-definition of woman dress code in the public sphere through passive resistance served as mobilizing structures. Mass demonstrations and protests refer to contentious repertoires through which the movement makes its claims. The protests featured a variety of creative acts of rebellion

such as burning hijabs and cutting of hair were performed both by women and men. These acts were used to draw attention to international media instruments and to pressure the government to push for launching a reform agenda. The way the protestors mobilized national and international public opinion through social networks was notable in spreading protests across Iran to 80 cities and internationally. Mobilizing structures and contentious repertoires of the protest has been successful in bringing attention to the issues of women rights, and in raising awareness of the need for change. They have also been successful in bringing together and inspiring people from different backgrounds, nationality and ethnicity to act together for a common purpose.

Mobilizing structures have been novel in two aspects: (i) according to reports of mainstream commentators, Iranians from all age groups, ethnic origins and genders have joined in the uprisings but it is mainly younger generations² that have taken to the streets particularly those known as Generation Z (Dagres, 2022; Emirates Policy Center, 2022; Ershad, 2022; Saric, 2022; Teller, 2022; Turani, 2022; Wright, 2022) (ii) Slogans chanted during the protests were initially stimulated by women's rights and freedoms activists in a bid to challenge structural features of the Islamic Republic.

Slogans were analyzed in order to provide insights into protestors' main motivation axes. In previous protests, slogans converged socio-economic and political demands and rather heterogenous. For instance, socio-economic demands fighting back against corruption, unemployment, and income gap were emblematic at 2017/2018 Protests (Fathollah-Nejad, 2020, p. 9). However, in Amini's protests slogans target the ruling elite of Iran as a main challenge to freedom. Iranwire consolidated the popular slogans chanted at demonstrations: "Our Disgrace is Our Incompetent Leader" [*Nangeh Ma, Rahbar-e Aldang-e Ma*]; "Our Disgrace is Our Incompetent Basij" [*Nangeh Ma, Basiji Aldang-e Ma*]; "Undignified Basiji, You are Our ISIS" [*Basiji Bi-Gheirat, Daesh Ma Shomaei*]; "Disgraceful, Disgraceful, Disgraceful" [*Bi-Sharaf, Bi-Sharaf, Bi-Sharaf*]; "Woman, Life, Freedom" [*Zan, Zandegi, Azadi*]; "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom"

² Iran has a population of 86,709,959 million with a yearly growth rate %1, 3 based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. According to the same resources, median age of Iran's population is 32, 0 (Worldometer, 2022).

[*Azadi, Azadi, Azadi*]; “We Don’t Want the Islamic Republic” [*Jomhouri Eslami, Ne Mikhahim, Ne Mikhahim*] (Iranwire, 2022). “Woman, life, freedom,” as a women-led uprising’s defining chant has been front in the ongoing protests has become a symbol of the Amini protests. In addition, these chants acquainted with a recent revitalization of secularist demands driven by demographic trends (generation who born after the revolution). As protests are sweping Iran, Tony Blair Insitute conducted a research bu combining network of contacts on the ground which aims at showing trends and opinions of Iranian people on central subjects such as compulsory hijab, political motivations and Western interference in Iran. According to research, dissidents’ secular demands are not solely focused on the compulsory hijab; rather they are directed against ruling system of the Islamic Republic as a whole institutional mechanism. Iranians objecting to compulsory cloth patterns; also are longing for a regime change which might be enabled through reconstruction of a secular state system. Based on polling results, all social groups regardless of their age in Iran are unified in their opposition to the cumpulsory hijab. “78 per cent of Iranians aged between 20 and 29, 68 percent between 30 and 49, and 74 percent aged over 50 are against the mandatory imposition of the hijab” (Aarabi & Shelley, 2022, p. 10).

The compulsory hijab is much more than a piece of cloth in the Islamic Republic; it represents a central pillar of the regime and is the most visible manifestation and symbol of the Islamist ideology – one that is central to its existence. Both the clerical regime and the people of Iran consider the compulsory hijab fundamental to the Islamic Republic. It is for this precise reason that. What we are seeing on the streets today is a continuation of this sentiment, but on a larger scale. All the signs indicate that the protest trend in Iran will continue on its upward trajectory. An overwhelming majority of the Iranian people do not agree with the compulsory imposition of the hijab (Aarabi & Shelley, 2022, p. 21).

Throughout the protests, international mainstream media photographed women waving their headscarves in the air and even cutting their own hair in protests. Images of Iranian women wearing off their hijabs have circulated through international media, are emblematic in recent protests. A great number of women coming out into the streets and men also raised

their voices demanding freedom and calling for women's right. The picture of an Iranian man shaving his head during the demonstrations has become an iconic photograph circulating through both conventional and unconventional media (Cannetti, 2022).

The identity of protestors took to the streets were various and protests were successful to embrace urban elite, high school students, women, workers, marginalized communities and merchants. One of the main characteristics that spotted in the protests has been the sporadic support of the bazaar, merchants, trade unions, and workers. While the protests of bazaar merchants located on northwestern and southeastern regions; Tehran bazaar elites went out on strikes which was quite unusual due to the fact of the government's deep ties with bazaar merchants (HRANA, 2022b). Moreover, even protestors from Europe's cities rallied for Mahsa Amini and women's right. Thousands of people gathered in European capital cities to show solidarity with the protestors (Euronews, 2022). Masha Amini's death has evolved her as a symbol of disobedience against established order (Aarabi & Shelley, 2022).

One of the main characteristics that was spotted in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests has been the sporadic support of the bazaar, merchants, trade unions, and workers. While the protests of bazaar merchants located in northwestern and southeastern regions; Tehran bazaar elites went out on strikes which were quite unusual due to the fact of the government's deep ties with bazaar merchants (HRANA, 2022b). Moreover, even protestors from Europe's cities rallied for Mahsa Amini and women's right. Thousands of people gathered in European capital cities to show solidarity with the protestors (Euronews, 2022). Masha Amini's death has evolved her as a symbol of disobedience against established order (Aarabi & Shelley, 2022).

While protests are sweeping through the country in an unprecedented move, various protestor groups took to the stage from different strata of the society. Sit-in protests in Iranian universities grew and students in different levels of education, from elementary to high school, also participated in protests.

Just three weeks after the death of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, numerous news reports of students (mostly girls) joining the protests were published along with related photos and videos from schools. This added an entirely new dimension to the Iran protests. [...] students have given these protests a new lease on life. The students' protests led to the arrest of dozens of children and the escalation of conflicts between parents and school officials. The young students in cities such as Tehran, Sanandaj, Karaj, Ardabil, Zahedan, Tabriz, Bukan, Saqqez, Kermanshah, Marivan, Shiraz, Shahinshahr, Mashhad, and Quds made schools a hub of protests by writing slogans on the class boards, by tearing off the photos of the current and former leaders of the Islamic Republic from the first pages of textbooks, removing their headscarves and in some cases setting them on fire, sitting-in and not appearing in class, or chanting protest anthems and slogans in school buildings and in the surrounding streets (HRANA, 2022b, p. 36-37).

6. Framing Process: Role of Social Media in Protests

The paper found that social media instruments can be used to frame the movement in a variety of ways. For example, they can be used to create a narrative around the movement, to create a sense of urgency, to create a sense of solidarity and to create a sense of identity. Amini's protests have achieved a dynamic with social media platforms where social solidarity has flourished within cyberspace. As the protests intensified, Iranian authorities cut off internet access to prevent protestors to stay in touch. During the protests, multiple outages affecting mobile networks were reported. Moreover, Iran also ramped up its internet censorship by blocking encrypted DNS services (Basso et al., 2022). Iran was also blocked access to Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger. According to OONI (2022) data on the testing of social media instruments, between August to December in Iran was observed increased blocking of whatsapp application.

Based on a 2017 study conducted by the government-funded Statistical Center of Iran. The survey laid out at least %73 of Iranian households was heavily censored (Article 19 , 2020). Especially after the Green Movement, social media instruments played an important role in sparking a flare-up of protests in the country; therefore, the state significantly expanded its capabilities by operating the Cyberspace Police (or FATA) in 2011,

promoting facial recognition technology, banning popular social media tools (such as Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram), and consolidating state-controlled internet (G. Jones & Newlee, 2019).

Based on results of a polling data conducted by Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA), 73.6% of Iranians over 18 years of age are frequent users of social media instruments. Even though the popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are routinely blocked in and have heavily restricted internet access overall (ISPA, 2021). Getting frustrated by internet shutdowns, so called “generation-z” as introduced as a major driving force of the protests, shot Tiktok and YouTube videos to circulate their demands globally (Bizaer, 2022; Bozorgmehr, 2022; Ghobadi, 2022; Rafizadeh, 2022; Tharoor, 2022).

As Kahraman mentioned (2020, p. 116), young generation mostly use their electronic devices to communicate with friends and family and they obtain information and form their opinions via social media instruments. They are eager to express themselves on-line social media platforms where Iran’s government has dealt with the internet with an iron fist by blocking the most visited web sites, social media and messaging application tools (Dagres, 2022). Prevalance of the mass protests via social media instruments was analyzed along with a total disillusionment of young Iranian population groups who are frustrated by long process of negotiations and economic isolation accompanied by decades of economic mismanagement. Amini’s young protestors hold the Iranian ruling elite responsible for degrading domestic socio-economic conditions in Iran. Moreover, this generation also experienced a COVID-19 pandemic and how Iranian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei initially banned import of pandemic vaccines despite Iran have the largest numbers of confirmed cases of pandemic in the Middle East (Jackson, 2021; Jafari, 2021; Dagres, 2022). Even though supreme leader Khamenei is eager to indoctrinate Iran’s youth with various regime organs; propaganda instruments of the regime are not effective enough to persuade young population groups. Moreover, the state’s political trajectory is not promising to launch extensive socio-economic reforms needed to meet the soaring demands of dissatisfied population groups. Iranian youths are disappointed in the Iranian Shiism³ professed by the regime and

³ Iranian Shi’ism is introduced as the guardian of oppressed (*mustazaf*) population groups dominated in Iran’s foreign policy discourse (Karaoğlu, 2022, p. 198).

traditional clergy and it might be interpreted that numbers of manipulated or marginalized Iranian youth are rising based on the widespread protests occurring almost every year.

7. Protest Cycle: Long Time Span of the Protest Wave

The protest cycle is a process of mobilization, organization, and consolidation of the protest movement. The protest cycle begins with mobilization, which is the process of gathering people to join the protest. Following the death of Masha Amini, the first protests were held in Saqez, in Kurdistan, at Amini's funeral. Protests rapidly spread to Iranian cities and universities across the country. Amini's death has sparked widespread protests for over 100 days. While the numbers are uncertain, activists report that at least 19,200 people have been detained and 516 protesters killed (House of Commons Library, 2023, p. 4). The protests have been met with a heavy-handed response from the Iranian government, with reports of security forces using live ammunition, tear gas, and water cannons to disperse protesters (The Guardian, 2022).

As of January 2023; a fragile stalemate has emerged since the protests began in September, 2022. Widespread protests have largely been replaced by smaller, more localized demonstrations. These protests are often organized by local activists in small groups scattered around Tehran and other cities with little coordination (Rasmussen, 2023). The stalemate has been maintained by a combination of factors. On the one hand, the regime has been able to rely on its security forces to contain the protests and prevent them from escalating. On the other hand, the protesters have been able to maintain their momentum by continuing to organize and mobilize various social protests both in Iran and around the world. The stalemate between the regime and the protesters is a situation in which neither side is able to overwhelm the other. The relative decline in the number of protests does not necessarily mean that the revolutionary process has come to an end. It is possible that the revolutionary process is simply in a period of relative calm, and that the number of protests will increase again in the future (Japan Times, 2023). People are now using more creative and decentralized tactics to express their dissent using digital platforms to organize protests and share information. Amini protests marked as a

turning point in Iran's social movement history due to the fact that social media has become a powerful tool for activists to spread their message and organize protests.

8. Conclusion

In the paper, Amini protests were evaluated from the components of PPT in order to decide on whether the protests were successful or not. Five key components of the theory were analyzed based on distinctive features of the protests. Women's demands were considered as a solid *political opportunity* and leverage effect to evaluate the movement as a challenge for the ruling elite of Iran. Re-definition of the dress code of women in public sphere through passive resistance and concrete support from all social strata of the society has been marked as *mobilizing structures* in manipulating the protestors. Unlike previous protests, the protestors' main source of motivation is neither economic nor an alleged fraud such as in the 2009 presidential elections. The protestors' main slogans concentrate on human dignity and freedom. Mass demonstrations and protests refer to *contentious repertoires* through which the movement makes its claims. The protests featured a variety of creative acts of rebellion such as burning hijabs and cutting of hair were performed both by women and men. The people from all levels of society are increasingly dissociated themselves from the regime apparatus in the Aminis's protests. The uprising has amounted to be one of the most serious challenge to the regime's uninterrupted legitimacy since the revolution and has been labelled as the largest protest wave in the regime's history. The paper found that social media instruments constituted one of the strongest part of the *framing process*. Amini's protests have achieved a dynamic with social media platforms where social solidarity has flourished within cyberspace. Even though the government cracked down on the use of internet; Amini protests were able to leverage social media to communicate and to create a sense of solidarity. Following the protests started over, mass social media campaigns have been launched to take a solid stance in advocating women's right to public spaces by frequently posting videos of women strolling without hijab and burning their hijab as a symbolic gesture of longing for freedom. The most frequent theme in the videos is the commentary on dominant discourses on women bodies, the way their appearance in public space and freedoms. Although

hijab-related protests—including videos of women taking off their hijab in public spaces, their confrontation with morality police and authorities' crackdown on activists, specific coverage of resistance movements such as bazaar merchants, student groups, workers' union and men comprises a considerable part of the news covered by international media. Furthermore, even men have joined women in their struggle against equality and young population from all walks of life who are desperate about their future have joined protests sweeping cities and villages. The role of social media consists in disseminating of women's claims to both national and international terrains as a functional tool of solidarity. Internet has allowed the protestors to spread their voices including freedoms and the liberation female body and advance their rights and equality.

The protest cycle begins with mobilization, which is the process of gathering people to join the protest. The protests have been recorded as the longest standing one compared to the White Wednesdays Movement which encouraged women to wear white scarves and post their photos on social media platforms. Protests remain scattered through the country but have evolved into a more persistent and inclusive manner over time. It seems that Iranian authorities were not sufficiently prepared to evade the permeating feature of the protests.

The protests were novel for two aspects: On one side of the spectrum, while protestors in earlier protests such as Dey demonstrations and gasoline protests belonged to core part of the regime's support base including lower, lower-middle and working classes; the protestors of Amini's unrest belongs to different communities and socioeconomic strata. Unlike previous protests, the protestors' main source of motivation is neither economic nor an alleged fraud such as in the 2009 presidential elections. The protestors' main slogans concentrate on human dignity and freedom. On the other side of the spectrum, though the protests have swept all parts of the society, protestors belong to the generation-z were in the front lines. Many young protestors under the age of twenty-five who are avowedly alien to the mindset of the regime political and religious elite took the streets.

The protests have been successful in bringing attention to the issues of women rights, and in raising awareness of the need for change. They have also been successful in bringing together people from different backgrounds and perspectives to protest together for a common cause. Furthermore,

the protests also have established a communication channel among social groups from various ethnic, gender, religious identities and generations. As sociologist Saeed Madani said “one would not able to imagine any future for Iran that does not bear the mark of the Mahsa movement” (Sinaae, 2023, parag. 5). The nationwide uprising is alive, though the manner through which people are expressing their dissent has transformed due to the authorities’ lethal crackdown during the fall. They have changed the narrative that the Islamic Republic has imposed over several decades regarding who Iranians are and what they want.

Iran’s latest wave of street protests have been argued by critics and academics as they pose a serious security challenge to presence of Islamic Republic, even though the protests are nothing new in Iran. According to Dabashi (2010), in the shade of sporadic uprising, the future of the Islamic Republic was neither dark nor promising. The protests could hava a potential for spurring fundemantal change or not is not sure. This courageous experiment could spur more significant developments in Iran over the coming days and weeks and the protesters may pose a major challenge to Iran’s entrenched leadership, however prediction of the survival of the government whether is at stake or not is still very much debatable issue.

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