

Anticlerical Rule Is on the Rise in Iran

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*The women-led anti-hejab movement that began after the death of **Mahsa Amini** on September 16, 2022, in Iran, is ongoing. Even though the street protests have subsided, many Iranian women defy to comply with wearing Islamic hejab in public.*

Nonetheless, the Islamic government is fighting to enforce hejab by various means, including closing stores that admit women without headscarves and preventing women without wearing hejab from entering metros and other public service places such as schools and universities.

The government has also installed cameras in various places to monitor hejab enforcement. The enforcement of Islamic hejab has led to many anticlerical protests throughout Iran. The government has dealt with people's protests by crackdowns, arrests, imprisonments, and executions. Consequently, a violent anticlerical wave has started in Iran.

Several clerics have been killed or injured in various places in Iran in the past few weeks. A senior Islamic cleric Abbas-Ali Suleimani was assassinated by a security guard on April 26, 2023, inside Bank Meli in Babolsar in the Mazandaran Province.

Suleimani had previously served for 17 years as the representative of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the province of Sistan-Baluchestan. This province has been the site of many anti-government protests in recent months. According to people who knew Suleimani, he was pro-gender separation in all public places. On the same day, a junior mullah was purposely run over by a car, and on April 29, another cleric was stabbed in the city of Qum. On April 30, Lieutenant Alireza Shahraki, the head of the Saravan District Awareness Police Department, was assassinated. On May 5, the body of a mullah, Ibrahim Fazel, who had been missing for four days, was dragged out of the water in the coastal village of Goldasht in the Province of Mazandaran. On May 7, a mullah was injured after a young man attacked him with a knife in Ahmedabad village of Saveh city in the Central province.

The clerical oligarchy has claimed that the anticlerical incidents have been instigated by the

reformists and celebrities inside Iran who are supported by the Western powers.

The pro-clerics daily newspaper Kayhan wrote: "These [terrors] and dozens of other examples are just a small part of the efforts of the pro-reform media or domestic-westernization process to complete the puzzle of the enemy in creating hatred in society and social disintegration of the country." [i]

In recent years, the ruling clerics' political base has shrunk tremendously. The Middle class is feeling resentment and has turned against the ruling clerics. The clerics and their family members have moved up to the wealthy upper class by accumulating wealth. They engage in rent-seeking activity under the guise of Islamic and anti-imperialist slogans. In contrast, the high rate of inflation has pushed down the middle class to become a part of the dispossessed underpaid laborer, and that has further intensified the anticlerical feelings.

The clerics opiate the masses with promises of rewards in another world after death. They preach to people to pray five times a day to be rewarded by God to go to heaven. Even so, most Iranians have turned against the ruling clergy, as they feel they have been deprived of basic living standards.

The young generation of Iranians does not listen to the clerics' superstitious preaching. Two Iranian political prisoners, Yousef Mehrdad and Sadrollah Fazeli Zari, who had managed a cable channel called "Critique of Superstition and Religion," were sentenced to death for the charges of "insulting the Prophet and religious sanctities," "promoting atheism," and "apostasy." They were hanged on May 8, 2023. Many other people have been executed on various charges. According to Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, there have been 798 executions in Iran since the beginning of 2022 to this date. [ii]

Ebrahim Raisi became president in a low-turnout election engineered by Khamenei. The results of Raisi's two years in office include the fastest decline in the national currency's value, the highest growth of money supply, the highest historical rate of inflation, and the biggest historical collapse of Tehran's stock indexes in a day.

The high rate of inflation has pushed down real wages, which has brought teachers and factory workers to the street to demand higher pay for their work. The country is struggling through the collapse of the nation's currency, the rial. President Raisi has used printed money borrowed from the Central Bank of Iran (Bank Markazi) to spend on promises he had made two years ago during his presidential campaign. Inflation and financial corruption caused by the clerical leadership and their cronies have intensified anticlerical feelings throughout Iran.

The Islamic regime in Iran has become a Shi'a dictatorship by reactionary clerics. The clerics' only concern is to remain in power. The Supreme Leader, **Ali Khamenei**, controls all three branches of the government directly or indirectly. The ruling clerics have used nepotism and marriage schemes to limit the important positions to themselves and their family members. For example, the current head of the parliament (Majles) **Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf** is a nephew of the Supreme Leader's wife. The Supreme Leader's daughter is married to the son of **Ayatollah Mohamad Golpayegani**, who is the chief of the Supreme Leader's office. The Supreme Leader's son **Mujtaba Khamenei** is married to a daughter of **Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel**, the former head of the parliament. President Ebrahim Raisi is the son-in-law of **Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda**, the Friday Prayer leader in Mashhad, the hometown of Khamenei. Alamolhoda is also the city's representative in the

Assembly of Experts.

On April 30, 2023, **Reza Fatemi Amin**, the minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade, was impeached in the parliament to be questioned for providing wrong statistics and prioritizing the interests of two major Iranian automobile companies. The minister was dismissed by the Majles due to the high prices of automobiles and rent-seeking corruption.

So far, the mullahs have not given up their enforcement of hejab, believing that yielding on that issue will open the door to other demands, and those could pave the way for ending the clerical rules, which they are unwilling to accept.

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Featured image: Raisi speaking at a presidential campaign rally in Tehran's Shahid Shiroudi Stadium (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

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