Language

After the 'Green Movement' in Iran, opposing the dominance of the Shia clerics and their Revolutionary Guards over the parliamentary system, was brutally crushed by the security services in 2009-10, major protests were for a while quelled. Although the revolutionary wave of 2011 across the Arab world stimulated some expressions of dissent in Iran, widespread popular unrest across much of the country did not erupt until December 2017-January 2018. These protests were a prelude to the extensive demonstrations in most parts of the country in November 2019, which were primarily a response to increasing economic hardship. This unrest was due partly to the re-imposition of international economic sanctions, after President Trump destroyed the nuclear deal negotiated under Obama. As a result, the Iranian government announced a further cut in economic subsidies and a rise in fuel prices in mid-November 2019. Other reasons for demonstrating included anger at corruption and desire for political change. Protests occurred in 29 of the 31 provinces in Iran and an estimated 100 cities, and included ethnic Arabs and Kurds from border provinces. The social composition of the 2019 upsurge was broader than in 2017-18, but students, workers and the poor were dominant. The regime responded ruthlessly, and shot hundreds of protesters.

Iran is sometimes mentioned in the context of a 'Second Arab Spring', and some protesters in November 2019 did express solidarity with those in Iraq and Lebanon resisting the role of Iran in their internal politics. However, popular anger erupted onto the streets primarily in response to Iranian issues, as in January 2020, when mass protests occurred over the accidental shooting down of a Ukrainian passenger jet by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards.

The references below cover the 2017-18 protests, November 2019 and January 2020, but also include some analysis of the background of the regime created after 1979, the Green Revolution and its aftermath.

[Iran: More than 100 protesters Believed to be Killed as Top Officials Give Green Light to Crush Protests](#) *[1]*, Amnesty International, 2019

Amnesty issued this early condemnation of regime violence against 'verified video footage', eyewitness reports and other information on the 'excessive and often lethal force' used to crush largely peaceful protests in over 100 cities. Amnesty also notes the role of security forces in seizing the bodies of the dead, or compelling relatives to bury protesters without an autopsy, as well as the internet shutdown imposed by the regime.

See also: Human Rights Watch, 'Iran: No Justice for Bloody Clampdown', 25 February, 2020, pp. 18.

https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/iran-no-justice-bloody-crackdown [2]

This lengthy report, written after the mass demonstrations had been crushed, provides information about protests, and the authorities' response, in different provinces. It also indicates the difficulty of getting precise figures for deaths (estimated at a minimum of 304) and imprisonments (about 7,000 according to one member of parliament), given the closing down of the internet and regime threats to families.

Beauchamp, Zack, [The Massive New Protests in Iran Explained](#) *[3]*, Vox, 03/01/2018,

Report on how small group protests in Iran's second largest city, Mashhad, in December 2017 rapidly grew into major demonstrations reported in most provinces across Iran, with crowds often demanding an end to the dominance of senior clerics and the Revolutionary Guard. Beauchamp notes that protests on specifically economic issues, the responsibility of the parliamentary leader President Rouhani, could be acceptable to the religious leaders, but a direct challenge to their own dominance was not.

Ehsani, Kaveh ; Keshavarzian, Arang, [The Moral Economy of the Iranian Protests](#) *[4]*, Jacobin Magazine, 2018

The authors start from the 2017-18 protests, significant for their 'geographical scope and range of grievances', but emphasize that local unrest linked to a range of economic grievances has been frequent - especially since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 - and largely ignored by western media. They consider why the goal of social justice, central to 1979, has not been achieved and the change in policy after 1988 towards 'commercial priorities and top-down policy making'.

Golkar, Saeid, Protests and Regime Suppression in Post-Revolutionary Iran *[5]*, Policy Notes PN85, Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2020

Golkar examiines the November 2019 upsurge of protests, comparing it with 2017-18. He also analyzes the regime responses, its investment in new technologies for its security forces, but also attempts in 2020 to improve welfare for the poor.

Mohseni, Ebrahim ; Gallagher, Nancy ; Ramsey, Clay, Iranian Public Opinion after the Protests *[6]*, School of Public Policy, Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, 2018, pp. 44

Interesting survey of Iraian public opinion after the 2017-18 protests. The survey covers a wide range of economic and political issues, including Iran's foreign policy. The findings show that many see Iran's economy as worsening, but blame inefficiency and corruption more than international sanctions. The survey also indicates that a majority of the respondents disagree with criticism of the regime and or of strictness in enforcing Islamic laws, and also support the police response to protests. However, a majority does not endorse harsh punishment for peaceful protesters. For a summary of the findings see: https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/21088 [7]

Parsa, Misagh, Democracy in Iran: Why It Failed and How It Might Succeed *[8]*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 406

An analysis of the theocratic regime installed in 1979 and the problems facing the country, including corruption and cronyism, deep economic inequality and a brain drain of professionals. The author discusses the potential of the Green Revolution and its suppression, considers whether there is any scope to reform the regime from within, and concludes that the best hope is another revolution.

See also: Boroumand, Ladan, 'Iran's Exclusionary Republic', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 29 no. 2. (April 2018), pp. 406.

This review of the 2016 book *Democracy in Iran* (see below) begins by commenting on the mass demonstrations that broke out in late December 2017 across 72 cities, calling for regime change, and how they were suppressed (48 killed and 4,792 arrests). Boroumand asks how 'recurrent explosions of popular anger in the Islamic Republic can be explained, and how the most recent protests related to the strong majority vote for the moderate President Rouhani six months earlier. She then turns to the book as a helpful analysis of developments since 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini came to power.

Links
[1] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2019/iran-more-100-protesters-believed-be-killed-top-officials-give-green-light-crush [2] https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/iran-no-justice-bloody-crackdown [3] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2018/massive-new-protests-iran-explained [4] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-

item/2018/moral-economy-iranian-protests [5] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/protests-and-regime-suppression-post-revolutionary-iran [6] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2018/iranian-public-opinion-after-protests [7] https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/21088 [8] https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2016/democracy-iran-why-it-failed-and-how-it-might-succeed