

The Hijab Dilemma: Anti-Hijab Protests in Iran and the Emerging Voices of Change

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Abstract

The hijab, a headscarf that covers a woman's hair, is considered a symbol of modesty and religious piety in Islam. However, in Iran, it has been imposed as a compulsory dress code for all women in public since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The anti-hijab protests in Iran are part of a larger movement aimed at challenging the Islamic Republic's restrictive policies and demanding greater personal freedoms, especially for women. Despite the government's efforts to suppress these protests, Iranian women continue to push for change and defy the mandatory hijab. Nevertheless, the authorities have responded with a heavy-handed approach, arresting and prosecuting protesters. The anti-hijab protests in Iran are part of a broader struggle for women's rights and personal freedoms, and that they signal an important shift in the public discourse around the hijab and its meaning in contemporary Iranian society. The article examines the motivations of the protesters and the different strategies they use to challenge the status quo, from individual acts of defiance to collective campaigns. The paper also discusses the role of social media in amplifying the voices of the protesters and creating a space for open debate and dissent.

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Introduction

The generation that born in Iran post the 1979 revolution has a strong desire to evaluate their current situation and compare it with life in other countries, through foreign films, music and what's on the Internet. A girl belongs to such generation, always explores the reasons for cultural differences with the rest of the world. In addition, her lifestyle as a girl in Iran is characterized by enduring many conflicts and

restrictions. The Iranian girl in particular has always been under the pressure and fear of having to cover up on a daily basis. A few years after the 1979 revolution, Iranian women were forced to accept the mandatory niqab as an integral part of their attire (Zaheer, October 08, 2022). Today, almost 43 years later, she is still being arrested for her inadequate veil, which the government calls a bad hijab. Today, Iranian women use the media (bypassing the filtering in internet services available in Iran) to present their desired looks and diaries. The objectives of the article are to analyze her 43 years of mandatory hijab experience.

During the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a large number of women voluntarily chose to wear a veil or headscarf as a sign of their support for Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology and their disapproval of the Shah's regime (BBC, February 08, 2019). The first announcement came in a speech by Khomeini in 1979, a month after his return to Iran, he urged women to wear veils. The next day, on International Women's Day, women demonstrated and demanded equal rights and freedom of clothing. It should be noted that during the Shah's reign, the hijab was optional (BBC, February 08, 2019). However, after the revolution, the veil gradually became a public law, supported by the Islamic faith. Initially, women who did not wear hijab to properly cover their hair and body, as defined and prescribed by Islamic Sharia, were denied the right to enter public facilities and establishments. Hijab was made compulsory in 1984. Women who refuse to wear the mandatory hijab are punished. In the past 30 years, hijab has never been mentioned as an important issue or as an issue that would have led to protests or campaigns.

Veil (Niqab) and Islam

The concept of the veil in Islam is complex and has been subject to various interpretations throughout history. Some scholars suggest that the Quranic verses related to the veil refer to the significance of modesty and privacy for both men and women, while others interpret these verses as specifically mandating the wearing of a headscarf or face veil for women. The Quranic verse most commonly cited in relation to the veil is Surah An-Nur 24:31, which instructs women to "draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex" (Quran, 24:31, Sahih International).

Islamic scholars interpret this verse differently, with some interpreting it as requiring women to cover their hair and bodies in public, while others argue that the verse is more about modest behavior and the avoidance of attention-grabbing clothing. In addition to the Quranic verses, there are also hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) that emphasize the importance of modest dress and behavior for both men and women.

The practice of veiling or covering is commonly associated with the idea of modesty and privacy. The Quran instructs both men and women to dress modestly and to lower their gaze in the presence of the opposite gender as a way of preserving their own dignity and respecting the dignity of others. The specific form of veiling or covering that is commonly associated with Islam varies among different cultures and regions. Examples of garments that Muslim women may wear to cover their hair, face, or body in public include the niqab, burqa, and hijab.

While some Muslim scholars interpret certain verses in the Quran and Hadith as requiring women to cover their hair and/or face in public, there are also differing opinions among scholars on this issue, with some arguing that the Quranic injunctions on modesty can be fulfilled through other means, such as loose clothing or a headscarf that covers the hair. Ultimately, the decision to wear a veil or other form of covering is a personal choice for Muslim women and is influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural norms, family traditions, religious beliefs, and personal preferences. While some women choose to wear a veil as an expression of their faith, others do not feel that it is necessary or appropriate in their particular circumstances.

The Varied Practices and Influences of Veil Wearing

The practice of veil wearing varies greatly across cultures and is influenced by a variety of factors, including religious, social, and political beliefs (Ahmed, 2015; Grewal, 2017; Haeri, 2018). In some cultures, such as in many Muslim-majority countries, wearing a veil (hijab) is seen as a religious obligation for women. The veil is seen as a symbol of modesty and piety, and is believed to protect women from unwanted male attention. In some cases, the wearing of a veil may be mandated by law, as in Iran (Khomeini, 2010).

In other cultures, such as in some parts of India and Africa, the wearing of a veil may be associated with traditional cultural practices or customs, rather than a religious obligation (Khandelwal, 2016; Oyewumi, 1997). In Western cultures, the wearing of a veil is less common, although it may still be worn by some religious groups, such as Catholic nuns (Brouwer, 2012).

Religious beliefs are also a significant cultural factor in the use of the veil. For example, in Islam, the veil is seen as a requirement for women's modesty and is mandatory in many Muslim countries. The Quran instructs Muslim women to dress modestly and cover their heads and bodies, and many Muslim women interpret this as requiring the wearing of a headscarf or veil. The veil is seen as a symbol of piety, modesty, and submission to God, and is believed to protect women from unwanted male attention. In some Muslim countries, the wearing of a veil may be mandated by law (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009).

In Christianity, the wearing of a veil by women has traditionally been associated with religious devotion, particularly in Catholicism. Nuns often wear veils as a symbol of their commitment to God and their renunciation of the world. In some Christian weddings, the bride may also wear a veil as a symbol of her purity and modesty (Brouwer, 2012).

In Judaism, the wearing of a head covering by women is a religious tradition. Married Orthodox Jewish women may wear a headscarf or wig to cover their hair, as a sign of modesty and respect for their husbands (Lerner, 2016). Political and social factors can also influence the use of the veil. In some societies, the veil has been banned or restricted as a way to promote secularism or women's rights. In others, the veil has been used as a symbol of resistance against oppressive regimes or cultural imperialism (Grewal, 2017).

In some Muslim-majority countries, the wearing of a veil has become a political issue, with some governments banning or restricting it, while others mandate it. In Iran, for example, the wearing of a veil (hijab) for women is mandatory, and those who refuse to wear it may face legal and social consequences.

In other countries, such as France, the wearing of a full-face veil (burqa) in public places has been banned, with supporters arguing that it is necessary for security and social integration (Bowen, 2012).

In some cases, the wearing of a veil may also be used as a political statement or act of resistance. For example, in the Arab Spring protests of 2011, women in some Muslim countries wore veils as a way to demonstrate their opposition to authoritarian regimes and demand greater rights and freedoms (Grewal, 2017).

The Veil as a Complex Choice in Muslim Women

Muslim women's decision to wear the veil is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of personal, cultural, and societal factors. Some women may choose to wear the veil as a religious or cultural practice, while others may not see it as necessary or may even consider it contrary to their beliefs. The practice of wearing the veil is not a monolithic view, and there is a diversity of attitudes towards it within modern Muslim societies.

In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, the veil is mandated by law, and women who do not wear it in public may face legal penalties. This has sparked debates and legal challenges in other countries, such as France and Turkey, regarding the allowance of the veil in certain public spaces or government institutions. On the other hand, in some Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh, women are allowed to wear the veil without any legal or social consequences, and it is viewed as a way of expressing their religious identity.

Some Muslims believe that wearing the veil, including the niqab, is a religious obligation and a symbol of modesty and piety. Others view it as a cultural practice rather than a religious obligation and believe that women should have the right to choose whether or not to wear it. Some Muslim women choose to wear the veil as a form of empowerment and resistance against discrimination and Islamophobia, as it allows them to assert their agency and challenge stereotypes. In fact, the veil is a topic of ongoing debate and controversy, with different perspectives on its significance and meaning. It is essential to acknowledge that the decision to wear the veil or not is a personal choice that should be respected, and women should have the freedom to choose what they wear without fear of persecution or discrimination.

The History and Controversy of Veil-Wearing in Iran

Veil-wearing has a long and complex history in Iran, dating back to ancient times (Mottahedeh, 2000). After the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century, the use of the veil became more widespread among Iranian women as a religious and cultural practice. The wearing of veils by women was initially a sign of nobility and social status, with the practice becoming more widespread during the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century. The veil was seen as a way to demonstrate piety and modesty, and to protect women from unwanted attention from men.

Throughout Iranian history, the use of the veil has been subject to political and cultural changes. During the Pahlavi dynasty in the 20th century, the government attempted to modernize Iran and promote Westernization, which included discouraging the use of veils by women. In 1936, Reza Shah issued a

decree banning the use of veils in public places, which was met with opposition from religious leaders and some segments of the population (Abrahamian, 2008).

Post Islamic Revolution in 1979, however, the wearing of the veil was again mandated by law, as part of the new Islamic government's efforts to enforce conservative Islamic values and promote gender segregation (Kamali, 2013). Women were required to cover their hair and wear loose-fitting clothing in public, and those who refused to do so could face legal and social consequences.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement in Iran of women protesting against the mandatory wearing of the veil, with some choosing to remove it in public as a form of civil disobedience (Aghaie, 2019). This movement has been met with backlash from conservative groups and the government, which continues to enforce strict dress codes for women.

The movement gained momentum in 2017 when a woman named Vida Movahed was photographed standing on a utility box in Tehran, waving her hijab on a stick as a sign of protest (BBC News, 2019). The protests have been met with a harsh response from the Iranian government, with many women being arrested and sentenced to prison or flogging. Despite this, the movement has continued to grow, with more and more women speaking out against the mandatory hijab and demanding greater freedoms and equality.

Iran's Clerical Class and the Veil

For the clerical class in Iran, the veil is considered to be a fundamental requirement of Islamic dress for women (Talaie & Golestaneh, 2021). They believe that it is a religious obligation for Muslim women to wear the hijab in public, and they have played a key role in promoting the mandatory wearing of the veil in Iran.

During and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the clerical class played a central role in shaping Iran's dress codes for women (Paidar, 1995). They sought to enforce conservative Islamic values in Iranian society, and they believed that the mandatory wearing of the hijab was a necessary step in achieving this goal. Today, many members of the clerical class in Iran continue to advocate for the mandatory wearing of the hijab, and they see it as an important tool for promoting Islamic values and preserving the country's cultural and religious identity. However, there are also some members of the clerical class who believe that the mandatory hijab is too restrictive and that women should be given more freedom to choose what they wear (Golnaz, 2019). The veil has a complex relationship with Iran's clerical class, with some members advocating for its mandatory wearing as a key aspect of Islamic identity, while others are critical of its restrictive nature and advocate for more freedom for women in choosing what they wear. The protests against the mandatory wearing of the hijab in Iran have.

Veil from Personal Choice to Enforced Compulsion

The traditional veil, known as the hijab, has been a part of Iranian culture and dress for centuries. It was historically a personal choice for women, and there was no legal requirement for women to wear it in public spaces (Ahmadi & Rahman, 2016). However, after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the veil was enforced as a compulsory dress code for women in Iran. The enforced compulsory veil is a more restrictive form of dress code that requires women to cover their hair and neck completely, as well as wear loose clothing that covers the body from the neck down to the ankles (Kian, 2018).

The traditional veil in Iran is often made of lightweight fabric, and covers the head and neck while leaving the face exposed. It is typically worn with loose, flowing clothing that covers the body from the neck down. The traditional veil is often colorful and adorned with intricate patterns and embroidery, and is considered to be a symbol of modesty and piety (Kian, 2018).

The Roots of Controversy and Anti-Hijab Protests

The enforced compulsory veil has been a source of controversy in Iran, with many women and human rights activists arguing that it is a form of oppression and a violation of women's rights (Yazdani, 2021). Some have criticized the government's enforcement of the veil, arguing that it infringes on women's personal freedoms and autonomy. The issue of compulsory hijab in Iran has been a source of controversy for many years, and has been the subject of debate and protest within the country (Yazdani, 2021).

There is no evidence to support the claim that anti-hijab protests in Iran are part of a foreign conspiracy. In fact, the protests are largely driven by Iranian women themselves, who are calling for greater freedom and autonomy in choosing what they wear (Kian, 2018). The root of the problem behind anti-hijab protests in Iran is a complex issue that has its roots in Iranian society, culture and politics (Ahmadi & Rahman, 2016).

Analysis of the Societal, Cultural, and Political Factors

The root of the problem behind anti-hijab protests in Iran is a complex issue that has its roots in Iranian society, culture, and politics.

- 1) One key factor is the strict dress code enforced by the Iranian government, which requires women to wear the hijab in public spaces. This dress code applies to all women, including non-Muslims and foreigners, and is enforced by the country's morality police (Ahmadi & Rahman, 2016). In recent years, there have been widespread protests and calls for change among Iranian women who believe that the compulsory hijab is a form of oppression and a violation of their human rights (Yazdani, 2021).
- 2) Another factor is the broader political and social context in Iran, which is characterized by a restrictive and authoritarian government, limited freedom of speech and assembly, and a lack of opportunities for women in many areas of public life (Kian, 2018). This context has created a

climate of frustration and dissent among many Iranians, particularly young people and women. The compulsory hijab has also been a factor in broader debates about gender, politics, and religion in Iran, reflecting broader tensions within Iranian society over issues of gender, religion and politics (Yazdani, 2021).

The traditional veil in Iran was historically a personal choice, while the enforced compulsory veil is a stricter dress code that is legally enforced by the government. The enforced compulsory veil has been a source of controversy in Iran, with many women and human rights activists arguing that it is a form of oppression and a violation of women's rights. The issue of compulsory hijab in Iran is a complex and multifaceted issue that reflects broader tensions within Iranian society over issues of gender, religion and politics. The root of the problem behind anti-hijab protests in Iran is a complex issue that is shaped by a range of factors, including the strict dress code.

The Current Anti-Hijab Wave in Iran

The recent public protests in Iran have been sparked by the killing of a 22-year-old woman named Mehsa Amini who was allegedly violating the country's public veiling laws. This is just one of many complaints by the Iranian people, who are becoming increasingly discontent with their government. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, believes that violent repression is necessary to force protesters to retreat. He has also ordered a crackdown on the "anti-Hijab" movement, which has separated minorities who oppose the compulsory hijab from the majority who support it (Zaheer, October 08, 2022). Women are leading the current wave of protests and finding creative ways to challenge the government, and the protests are expressing broader grievances within Iranian society that will not be easily eradicated. The protests have spread beyond the usual suspects, with traders and shoppers protesting in Tehran's market, showing solidarity with the girls and women who were killed by security forces during the 1979 revolution (Hodfar, 2008, p. 03). This situation has created new and controversial fault lines in society and challenged the Islamic Republic's strict socio-religious beliefs and their permanence.

The protests in Iran are part of a broader movement of women in the Middle East who are fighting against the objectification of their bodies. Women in Saudi Arabia have also launched a "niqab under my foot" movement to protest the conservative Islamic dress code imposed on them in 2018. These anti-hijab protests are dominated by women's revolt against the objectification of their bodies. Women want to free themselves from the hijab because it limits their role in modern society to that of a mere object (Verma, February 09, 2022; Barras, Selby, & Arian, 2022, p. 313).

These protests have been successful in the past, and women's rights and civil rights activists are calling on citizens, including men, to resist the compulsory wearing of the headscarf. The protests are expressing broader grievances within Iranian society that will not be easily eradicated. Women are leading the way and finding creative ways to challenge the government, and the protests are showing solidarity with those who have been killed by security forces (Robinson, November 17, 2022).

Conclusion

In recent years, there have been several protests in Iran against the mandatory wearing of the hijab, which is a headscarf worn by some Muslim women as a symbol of modesty and religious observance. These protests have been led by women who oppose the government's requirement that they cover their heads in public spaces. The Iranian government has responded to these protests with a mixture of repression and accommodation. In some cases, protesters have been arrested and charged with crimes such as "inciting corruption and prostitution". At the same time, the government has also made some concessions, such as allowing women to wear looser headscarves and more colorful clothing. The government's response to the anti-hijab protests reflects the ongoing tension between the conservative religious establishment and more liberal,

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