

*This is an excerpt from 'Report on the Iranian Protests' by Justin Angelo, December 2022*

The recent protests in Iran have shown an incredible mobilization amongst the populace. While the Iranian Regime currently holds the monopoly on violence and has yet to face a true institutional challenge to its rule, in the field of political violence and terrorism, several key pieces are working in the movement's favor. Additionally, many of the strategies and motivating factors behind political violence are fueling the protests without turning them violent, making this (as of now) a non-violent mass movement posing a significant challenge to the Regime.

A key aspect of this movement lies in the fact that gender disparities between men and women, especially among young people, seem nonexistent. With the protest fueled by women, it is crucial for it to gain the support of Iranian men, and through the months of organization, it seems it has successfully done that—a departure from previous movements and violent organizations. In Berko and Erez's 'Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism,' they explain that most Arab society movements have suppressed women with their weak status in society which is "... aggravated by male supremacy and the patriarchal power structure of Arab families that justifies inequality between men and women, and enables male family members to control women..." While this may have excluded one-half of the population in Palestine, the Iranian protests are engaging men and women in their fight for political and social change. Through the absence of an embedded patriarchal power structure in this movement, women can lead the movement while working together with men, engaging a larger population. This idea is also reinforced by the importance of family when someone makes the decision to engage in terrorism and political violence. Through interviews with individuals in the Middle East, researchers have found that families can encourage or enable people to engage in terrorism, with family being a significant contributor to their decision. King, in 'Normative Support for Terrorism,' says that "... some detainees described their families as overtly encouraging... while others described their families as providing more implicit reinforcement. [...] families seemed to provide some type of normative support" (404). When combining the absence of patriarchal power structures in the movement with the influence of family, it becomes clear that there is likely a high degree of support within families for the movement, or at the very least, an absence of disagreement. On the lowest level—personal and family—people are being supported and encouraged to protest, making this a decentralized movement based on some degree of consensus amongst Iranians.

On a macro level, this movement is just as formidable as it is on an individual level. Hoffer, in his book, 'The True Believer,' explains that mass movements allow people who feel ineffectual and alone to feel empowered when they join with others—emboldening everyone. They no longer have an individual choice—what they do is part of a larger movement that elevates itself from any one person, and that is what is happening in Iran. For decades Iran has seen protests, but none have lasted as long or have seen as much popular support. As the protest continues, more and more people who once saw themselves as unable to promote change will buy into it. Additionally, as Iranian officials have made vague promises of reform, should any of that come to fruition, protesters will see this movement as a vehicle to achieve what they viewed as unachievable just a year ago.