



Why the Islamic Republic Will Likely Survive the Current Crisis.

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The brutally suppressed demonstrations in the streets of Iranian cities have sparked enthusiasm and hope among many analysts that they mark the beginning of the end of the Shia fundamentalist regime that has ruled Iran since 1979. The purpose of the following analysis is to demonstrate that such hopes are at the very least premature – and in many respects simply lack solid foundations.

Although anti-government protests in Iran, especially in the capital Tehran, have a long tradition, the causes of the current wave are fundamentally different. For the first time, the main trigger has been the catastrophic economic situation of the country, caused on one hand by American and European sanctions, and on the other by the disastrous economic policies of the government – leading to hyperinflation and drastic devaluation of the national currency against the US dollar¹. The authorities' response was limited to introducing social handouts – allowing the purchase of basic foodstuffs at prices affordable to most citizens². This, however, could not prevent the collapse of small local businesses (bazaar shops and the wholesalers supplying them), which in practice has resulted in the impoverishment of small entrepreneurs and rising unemployment. People facing hunger and poverty took to the streets to express their opposition to the tragic economic situation. The authorities reacted in the traditional way: with virtually unlimited violence, including live fire against demonstrators. For the first time, some protesters responded with armed resistance. The US President threatened Tehran

with military interventions should the conflicts escalate³. Political slogans began to appear only at a later stage of the protests and essentially boil down to demands for “a change of power”. This last aspect deserves deeper reflection.

In Iran ruled by an Islamic regime there is no organised political opposition, because all attempts to create one have been – and continue to be – crushed in the bud by the state security services. Consequently, there are neither structures nor – even more importantly – any leader or group of leaders who could personify opposition to the rule of religious radicals.

Previous demonstrations were triggered by the persecution of specific social groups (women, national minorities – especially Kurds). They also remained limited in geographical scope: mainly Tehran, sometimes other large cities. Their character was therefore primarily “class-based” and/or ethnic, usually mobilising only representatives of the social elite or those aspiring to it (students). It was never possible to turn the protests into a genuinely mass movement on a scale that would overwhelm the repressive capacity of the state security apparatus. Above all, the regime still possesses strong religious-legal legitimacy flowing from the authority of the Supreme Leader – Ayatollah Khamenei – and the supporting body of other ayatollahs. Any form of protest is therefore framed by the authorities as an act of blasphemy or outright religious apostasy⁴.

Another factor strengthening the position of the state in the eyes of society is the powerful Iranian patriotism rooted in nearly 3,000 years of continuous Persian-Iranian statehood. This has been heavily exploited in state propaganda since the very beginning of the Islamic Revolution,

¹Al Jazeera, "Iran's currency drops to record low against dollar as tensions soar", January 27, 2026

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/27/irans-currency-drops-to-record-low-against-dollar-as-tensions>

²Al Jazeera, "Why is Iran's economy failing, prompting deadly protests?", January 16, 2026

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/1/16/why-is-irans-economy-failing-prompting-deadly-protests>

³Reuters, "Trump weighs Iran strikes to inspire renewed protests, sources say", January 29, 2026

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/trump-weighs-iran-strikes-inspire-renewed-protests-sources-say-2026-01-29/>

⁴The Guardian, "‘We want the mullahs gone’: economic crisis sparks biggest protests in Iran since 2022", December 31, 2025



built around slogans of struggle against Western (American) neocolonialism, which can be summarised as: “neither East nor West – only the Islamic Revolution”. This worldview is closely linked to Shia theology, which is founded on the sense of eternal persecution (first by the Sunni majority in the Muslim world, later by Western – especially Anglo-Saxon, but also Russian/Soviet – colonial powers) and the associated cult of martyrdom (which makes society relatively resilient even to very heavy human losses in defence of the faith and the system based on it). Another central pillar of Iranian state ideology is (according to some researchers – the most important one) anti-Israel sentiment (in official propaganda the USA is called the “Great Satan” and Israel the “Little Satan”). So far the regime has successfully used these factors to rally the majority of society – especially the provincial population – around itself. Previous protest waves never managed to attract a large enough number of participants for the regime’s police and security forces to be unable to suppress them – including through openly applied violence⁵.

The current protests superficially appear to have greater chances of success because the economic crisis affects the overwhelming majority of Iranian citizens⁶. Nevertheless, several key factors still prevent society from consolidating around a new vision of the state:

1. Complete absence of formalised leadership – and especially the lack of any leader or group of leaders who could personify the protesters’ demands.
2. Absence of even the most general program of political or economic reform that the demonstrators could demand. There is not even a set of broad slogans.

Despite some protesters using pre-revolutionary symbolism (the lion and sun), it is difficult to claim that all or even most of the demonstrators are monarchists. Three generations have already grown up in Iran with no

living memory of the Shah’s rule. Knowledge about that period comes either from official (negative) propaganda, from highly diverse family narratives (the monarchy was never a time of democracy, freedom or universal prosperity), or from people’s own imaginations. Moreover, the restoration of the monarchy is seriously hampered by the explicit support for Reza Pahlavi’s return expressed by the United States – and especially by Israel⁷. This stance gives the Islamic regime an easy propaganda tool: the traditional narrative that Washington and Tel Aviv seek to destroy and colonise Iran and seize its resources.

In this way even many Iranians who dislike the present regime are faced with a choice: an oppressive but “native” government, or an “American-Israeli puppet Shah”. For many, the first option may appear to be the less evil. Any American military intervention would not only deepen this dramatic dilemma – and given the strength of Iranian patriotism, many potential regime opponents would likely rally behind it in such a case⁸.

Furthermore, the would-be pretender to the throne has spent his entire adult life in exile and has never been a real actor on the domestic political scene or the genuine leader of any opposition milieu. In the public consciousness he functions mainly as a “symbol of the old times” – good for some, very bad for others. He cannot suddenly become a unifying figure, especially since he has not presented any vision of the state that could serve as a credible alternative to the current regime⁹.

Despite more than 3,000 years of continuous statehood, Iran has practically no democratic or republican tradition (apart from the short-lived government of Prime Minister Mossadegh, overthrown jointly by American and British intelligence). Therefore, the slogan of “bringing democracy to Iran” is an empty phrase for most Iranians – especially since no organised opposition group possesses any concrete program describing what such a “new state” should look like. The conditions created by the quasi-

⁵Al Jazeera, “What we know about the protests sweeping Iran”, January 12, 2026 — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/12/what-we-know-about-the-protests-sweeping-iran>

⁶The New York Times, “Inside Iran’s Protests: How a Plunging Currency Set Off Wide Unrest”, January 10, 2026 — <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/10/world/europe/iran-protests-economy-currency-collapse.html>

⁷Britannica, “2026 Iranian Protests”, February 2026 — <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iranian-Protests>

⁸Britannica, “2026 Iranian Protests”, February 2026 — <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iranian-Protests>

⁹Britannica, “2026 Iranian Protests”, February 2026 — <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iranian-Protests>



totalitarian theocratic state make any real public debate about political or economic alternatives to the present authorities impossible. There are also no public figures who could credibly represent alternative projects – unlike the situation at the beginning of the 1979 anti-monarchist revolution, which only later (through the elimination of political competitors) transformed into an Islamic revolution.

The development of the situation in Iran may have various implications for the international environment. Maintaining the regime in its current form – and thus the economic embargo – will force Tehran to increase arms sales (e.g. drones and production technology) to both state and non-state actors (terrorist and criminal organisations with sufficient funds)¹⁰.

This will obviously destabilise international relations and the internal situation in Iran's immediate neighbourhood, forcing greater naval activity by states capable of preventing long-range arms trade. On the other hand, Iran's financial crisis already means serious problems for organisations previously sponsored by Tehran, such as Hamas and Hezbollah – which certainly serves the interests of Israel and the United States. It is difficult, however, to unequivocally state whether, in the final balance, the level of regional and international security – dependent on the international arms trade – will not decline compared to the previous state.

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