

Antigovernment protests unite Iranians across lines of identity

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09/26/2022



A commemoration in Germany of those killed in the Iranian protests Credit: [Ideophagous](#)

Anna Johnson - [Widespread demonstrations in Iran](#) have led to civilian deaths, destruction, and general unrest. The catalyst of these anti-government protests is the death of an Iranian woman. Mahsa Amini died in police custody after being arrested by Iran's morality police for improper attire - a vague term that could mean anything from too form fitting clothing to hair showing from under a head scarf. The initial protests following her death were mainly organized and attended by women. Their complaints focused on the morality police and their increasingly hardline stances, but in the days since, the protests have expanded to include Iranians of many different identities protesting everything from government corruption to economic instability.

[Identity](#) is how people view the place in which they live or their sense of attachment to their "hometown." For many Iranians, identity is formed through ethnic and social attachments. Past protest movements targeting corrupt election systems and economic troubles have largely occurred along ethnic and social lines, with only one group actively participating in the demonstrations. The current protests, however, cut across lines of ethnicity and class and have united ethnic minority populations like the Kurds and Turks, as well as rich and poor Iranians. Outrage over Amini's arrest and subsequent death, fears of growing economic uncertainty and a loss of confidence in an aging and ailing government have pushed through

existing divides in Iranian identity, uniting them against a government they see as illegitimate.

These claims of illegitimacy are motivated by a lack of [ideological power](#) on the part of the Iranian government. Ideological power reinforces existing ideas of identity and motivates people to act within the accepted range of behavior for their identity group. For years, the Iranian government has relied on ideological power to reinforce traditional behaviors without the need for the exercise of force - painting those who act outside of these accepted ideological norms as radical. These protests further undermine that ideological power and, until the Iranian government can reclaim their legitimacy or suppress them through force, protests are likely to continue unless the historical conflicts among these distinct identity groups become more important than national reform.