

Where Are Iran's Protests Going in 2026?

written by Frieda Afary | January 8, 2026

The unrest is growing and now includes a Kurdish general strike and participation by the Baluch and Azeri ethnic minorities.

The latest wave of protests in Iran started on December 28, 2025 with a strike by Tehran bazar merchants/shopkeepers against the decline of the currency value and nationwide economic collapse. As of January 8, the Iranian human rights organization, HARANA reports that 285 protests have taken place in 92 cities in 27 of Iran's 31 states. At least 36 people including four children have been killed and 2075 have been arrested. (<https://www.radiozameh.com/874142>) After a violent assault on protesters by government forces in the Kurdish and Lur state of Ilam in Western Iran, the police brutally attacked a hospital where the injured people had been taken for treatment.

Other hospitals have been attacked as well. As of January 8, internet access for the general public has been cut off.

Up until January 8, the size and scope of the nationwide protests were still not as large as 2019 and 2022 which marked the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. However, the unrest has grown massively in the form of street protests and now also includes a Kurdish general strike and participation by the Baluch and Azeri ethnic minorities. Some claim that its size has now exceeded that of the Green movement in 2009. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg7y0579lp8o> and <https://www.radiozameh.com/874215>

A study of the slogans of the protests in the first 8 days <https://www.radiozameh.com/873896> has shown that unlike the 2019 and 2022 events that had a strong pro-democracy content and slogans defending women's rights, the latest wave has been focused mostly on negative slogans opposing the Iranian regime through its personifications such as Mullahs (clerics) and Ayatollah Khamenei, the "Supreme Leader." Few slogans identify the regime as a system. Monarchist slogans are also more widespread and call for the coming to power of Reza Pahlavi, the son of the dictator, King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who was deposed by the 1979 Revolution.

In various interviews during the past decade, Reza Pahlavi has stated in no uncertain terms that he would pardon members of the IRGC (Iran's military and largest capital owner) if they collaborate with him. (www.radiozameh.com/873450) Reza Pahlavi also has the backing of the U.S. Trump administration and the Netanyahu government in Israel that were involved in the destructive twelve-day war with the Iranian government in June 2025. Trump has stated that the U.S. is ready for another military intervention in Iran.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/02/world/middleeast/trump-iran-protests.html?searchResultPosition=1>

His administrations' recent invasion of Venezuela involved removing the dictator Maduro but keeping Venezuela's repressive regime intact. Similarly, he might make deals with the IRGC in Iran.

Public statements by various organizations of workers, Kurdish women, writers, university students and political prisoners have stated their opposition both to the Islamic Republic and to the return of monarchy as well as foreign military intervention. See <https://www.radiozameh.com/873877> and <https://www.radiozameh.com/874031>

In the words of Mohammad Reza Nikfar, Iranian philosopher and former editor of Zamaneh Media (<https://www.radiozamaneh.com/873869>), Iran is facing a dangerous situation in which the current form of tyranny might be replaced by a new form of tyranny. He calls on people not to succumb to hatred and thoughtlessness. It is essential to have an affirmative vision that is opposed both to the Islamic Republic and monarchy and any military intervention or any form of tyranny. Nikfar thus proposes an affirmative program with minimum demands based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The minimum demands which he proposes include freedom of speech press and assembly, freedom for political prisoners, an end to the death penalty, abolishing the mandatory hijab laws, abolishing discrimination against women and ethnic or religious minorities, gender equality, separating religion and state, removing the military's ties to the economy, creating anti-poverty programs, and democratizing the educational system. He also calls for taking a clear stand against Iran's nuclear program and its military interventions regionally and globally.

It remains to be seen whether all of these demands will be adopted and fought for by the Iranian civil society organizations.

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