

A Never-Ending Battle That Has Not Begun: Iranian Gender Equality

Women's rights have come a long way in most countries. Women have joined the workforce, earned the right to vote, and allowed into spaces that were previously male dominated. In Iran, modern day women are still facing the sexism that should have been resolved in the past centuries. Women are constantly underestimated and undervalued in Iranian society, a society built by men, for men. Because society fundamentally caters to men, women face disadvantages in almost all aspects of their lives. Sexism seeps into the workplace, into motherhood and into all places where women are present. Iranian women face extreme challenges and those who protest the unfair treatment of women are often silenced with force. While it may seem to those in progressive countries that issues surrounding women's rights and sexism are decreasing, countries like Iran still face extreme inequality gaps that harm women.

Although women in Iran have the right to vote, they are not properly represented in government. While it is technically legal for women to run for office in Iran, "the council typically rejects. . . women" candidates ("Iran: Freedom"). Thus, men dominate the political decisions in Iran, creating an unequal political system. In addition, the lack of female representation in politics allows for laws harmful to women to be created and upheld. Iranian women are subject to laws that dictate their clothing and harm their bodily autonomy. In 2022, Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, was arrested for not wearing a head scarf. Head scarfs in Iran have been mandatory for women since 1983. These rules are enforced by the "morality police", the same police force that arrested Amini. Amini was allegedly beat to death following her arrest. The unjust killing of the young woman sparked protests throughout Iran. Women "are burning their hijabs and cutting their hair short" in protest ("Why Iranian"). Because the laws surrounding hijabs in Iran are not clearly stated and subjective, Iranian police can often make

unjust and unwarranted arrests that ultimately harm women. Since men are not subject to similar laws that enforce a dress code, the rules surrounding hijabs are ultimately sexist. Thus, Iranian women are fundamentally disadvantaged due to misrepresentation in politics.

Furthermore, women are not as valued as men in Iran society. In court, women are discriminated and prejudiced against. When a female victim's family is owed compensation, they are paid "half that [would be] owed to the family of a male victim" ("Iran: Freedom"). Meaning that in the eyes of the law, Iranian women are seen as less than Iranian men. Moreover, male political leaders in Iran have long restricted access to safe abortions regardless of female opinion. Banning abortions does not stop abortions, it merely stops safe abortions. Women are forced to find places where abortions are "performed in unsafe conditions, and many women [have] died or suffered medical complications from the procedures" ("Abortion"). Despite how ineffective the bans on abortions are, male politicians continue to push for more control over the bodies and autonomy of women. Ultimately, women are inherently harmed by the Iranian political system; a system that favors men over women and unfairly restricts the rights of women.

Finally, women are disproportionately denied access to education in Iran when compared to their male counterparts. Iran already has a poor education system that is made even worse for female students. Students are only required to attend school for five years, however, if married, students are pardoned from this requirement. What causes the inequality between boys and girls is that girls can be married off "as young as the age of nine" ("Iran's Educational"). Thus, girls are more frequently deprived of their already small education. Moreover, boys and girls in Iran receive different educations. A girl's curriculum focuses more on arts and humanities while boys are taught science, math and technology. This difference in education leaves Iranian women at a disadvantage as they are not given as many opportunities as men to learn and be educated. Thus,

women are denied opportunities later in life that would require stronger educations than what they receive. By uplifting boys and putting down girls in school, this also creates and instills feelings of superiority into young Iranian boys. Because boys in Iran are falsely taught at such a young age that they are better than girls it creates a cycle of hierarchy and inequality between the genders. Ultimately, girls in Iran are set up for less success in comparison to boys due to the inequalities within the Iranian education system.

Regardless of how far other countries have come in terms of gender inequality, Iranian women still face an inherent disadvantage due to the perpetuation of misogyny and sexism within their country. To fix this inequality, change must be enacted at both the social and political level. Inequality in Iran will only begin to overturn when people of all genders are united in the fight for gender equality. Policies like those that dictate a woman's right to bodily autonomy must be overturned to reach equality in Iran. Likewise, Iranian women need to be allowed into politics. If women are involved in politics, it would help to slow such blatantly sexist laws and policies from being created and upheld. When men join the fight for women's rights, change will truly begin to be made. Iran has a long and grueling path to equality; however, change is possible with the help of new policies and social reform.

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