

“No Light, No Water, No Future”

A Look at Popular Protests in Iran

Foreign Affairs Committee

of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)

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This report offers a focused look into the growing wave of social protests in Iran, shedding light on the voices and actions of various segments of society — truck drivers, bakers, retirees, and other courageous citizens — who are standing up against systemic injustice and economic hardship. Their collective struggle reflects a broader demand for fundamental rights in the face of repression.

Beyond these social groups, the booklet also explores the activities of organized Resistance Units working to challenge the regime's authority and inspire change across the country. They are active in organizing anti-regime protests. Their efforts, often carried out under threat of severe punishment, speak to the deep-rooted resilience and determination of the Iranian people to put an end to the religious dictatorship. This report is intended to inform, amplify these voices, and foster solidarity with their cause.

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Chair,
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Introduction

In the spring of 2025, Iran stands at a crossroads. From the crowded streets of Tehran to the sun-scorched villages of Sistan-Baluchestan, a wave of protests has emerged across all 31 provinces, uniting bakers, truck drivers, retirees, farmers, students, and workers in a shared cry for justice. Sparked by crippling power outages, acute water shortages, runaway inflation, and systemic corruption, these uprisings are not mere complaints about poor governance but a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the clerical regime.

For over four decades, the mullahs have clung to power through repression, propaganda, and broken promises, but the Iranian people—pushed to the edge by economic collapse, environmental ruin, and institutional decay—have reached their limit. As long as the mullahs remain in power, these crises will fester, offering no hope for reform or progress. The protests, marked by extraordinary courage and unity, signal a nation on the brink of a transformative reckoning. Drawing on chronicles from January to May 2025, first-hand reports, protest slogans, and official confessions, this brief attempts to capture the depth of Iran's turmoil. The voices of ordinary Iranians—bakers dumping spoiled dough, truck drivers blocking roads, retirees demanding stolen pensions, and students rejecting humiliation—resound with a unified call for dignity and change.

The regime's response, a mix of denial, empty promises, escalating violence and the arrest of protesters, only deepens the divide between rulers and the people. As economic despair mounts and hope for reform fades, Iran's people are no longer pleading—they are demanding a new future and fundamental changes.

Summary Table: Major Protest Locations and Dates

City/Province	Date(s)	Nature of Protest & Scale
Nationwide (155 cities in all 31 provinces)	22 May to 2 June 2025 – The date of compilation of this report – Ongoing	Truck drivers' strike: Began in Bandar Abbas 19 May, rapidly expanded to 155 cities; paralyzed road transport, disrupted food/fuel supply, caused deserted highways, triggered solidarity from retirees, farmers, bakers.
Tehran	Jan–May 2025	Retirees, bakers, truckers, students, blackouts, water cuts
Mashhad	24 May 2025	Bakers' protest (met with tear gas), retirees, truckers
Shiraz	8 May 2025	Bakers' protest, agricultural losses, water crisis
Qazvin	6 May 2025	Bakers' protest, industrial losses
Nesim Shahr	22 May 2025	Bakers' protest, water shortages
Arak	13 May 2025	Bakers' protest, industrial workers
Kerman	May 2025	Bakers' protest

Bandar Abbas	18 May 2025	Start of truck drivers' strike
Isfahan	May 2025	Truckers, farmers, water crisis (drying of Zayandehrood river)
Sanandaj	May 2025	Truckers, students, regime violence
Ahvaz	May 2025	Truckers, retirees, industrial workers, water crisis
Kermanshah	May 2025	Truckers, retirees, regime violence
Bushehr	17 May 2025	Water crisis, protests over water prices
Chabahar	22 May 2025	Water crisis, women-led protests
Khonj/Kazeroon	23-24 May 2025	Farmers block roads, protest well shutdowns
Ilam, Sistan-Baluchestan	May 2025	Farmers, water crisis, regime repression
Tabriz	May 2025	Student sit-ins, blackouts
Zahedan	May 2025	Sanitation workers, executions, regime violence
Shahr-e Kord	May 2025	Workers, vendors, regime repression
Yazd	May 2025	Protests

Iran's Manufactured Poverty: How the Regime's Structure Fuels Economic Ruin

Iran, which has the world's third-largest oil reserves and second-largest gas reserves, has been crippled by poverty. This crisis is not accidental, but the deliberate result of a regime that has imposed corruption, repression, and military intervention outside Iran on the Iranian economy within the framework of fundamentalist ideology. The 2025 protests, spanning all 31 provinces, reflect a nation rejecting a system engineered to perpetuate economic despair.

Two pillars sustain Iran's economic ruin: systematic encroachment of state and public assets, dominated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Supreme Leader's networks, as well as lavish spending on repression, proxy wars, and nuclear ambitions. These are not flaws but foundational to the regime's survival, rendering reform impossible without its collapse.

The IRGC's Economic Stranglehold

The IRGC and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's conglomerates control more than half of Iran's GDP., stifling legitimate businesses and funnelling wealth to a loyal elite. Entities like Setad Ejraiye Farmane Hazrate Emam (Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam), with assets worth over \$95 billion per a 2013 Reuters investigation, dominate sectors ranging from

telecommunications to oil, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, steel, cement, and construction. Private enterprises face extortion or forced sell-offs, crushed by regime-affiliated actors¹.

This is not the only example: other very large economic trusts such as the Khatam Base, the Mostazafan Foundation, the Martyr Foundation, and Astan Quds Razavi² are all under the control of the Revolutionary Guards or Khamenei, dominating the Iranian economy.

There are many other conglomerates that are heavily involved in all spheres of Iranian economy, most of which are controlled by the IRGC. A book, “The Rise of the Revolutionary Guards Financial Empire³,” published by the US Representative Office of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in March 2017, names these entities and when and how they gradually took control of every form of economic activity in Iran.

In parallel with this accumulation of wealth, a structural corruption is taking place in Iran ensuring elite loyalty while plundering national wealth. Scandals like the \$2.6 billion Bank Melli fraud in 2011 and the \$2.7 billion embezzlement by IRGC-linked tycoon Babak Zanjani in 2016 expose the scale of theft. In 2023, Iran’s judiciary reported 18,000 corruption cases, likely understating the true extent. Then there was the famous Debsh Tea embezzlement amounting to 3.7 billion dollars.⁴ As a Tehran retiree protested on 13 May 2025, “They’ve stolen the oil fund and left us destitute!” — a cry echoing across Iran’s darkened cities, where resources are diverted to IRGC-linked cryptocurrency mining, leaving communities without power.

Corruption and Cryptocurrency: The IRGC’s Role

At the heart of Iran’s crises lies systemic corruption, which has taken on new dimensions in recent years with the mining of digital currencies linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). A 2019 report by the regime’s Strategic Research Institute noted that each Bitcoin consumes 2,150 kilowatt-hours of electricity, equivalent to 20 barrels of oil. With Bitcoin prices at \$100,000 in 2025, these operations—95% of which are unlicensed, according to *Borna News* in January 2025—have drained megawatts from the grid, plunging cities like Yazd, Kerman, and Khuzestan into darkness. Protesters in Yazd chanted, “Crypto for the Guards, Blackouts for the People!” A baker in Ahvaz remarked, “The lights never go out at the military barracks.” The profits, funnelled abroad or to military projects, underscore the regime’s priorities: power and wealth for the elite, poverty and darkness for the people⁵.

This “Bitcoin Mafia” Operating Under the Support of Khamenei and the IRGC, is just one facet of the regime’s corruption. Pension funds have been embezzled, workers have not been paid, and water has been diverted to industries controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), leaving many parts of Iran without water. The mullahs’ focus on maintaining their influence abroad,

¹ Amir Taghati, “Iran’s Economy Worsening in Light of Increasing Monopolization,” NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 20 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/economy/irans-economy-worsening-in-light-of-increasing-monopolization/>

² Staff Writer, “The Role of Astan-e Quds Razavi, a Key ‘Religious Foundation’ in Iranian Regime’s Terrorism, Extremist Policies, And Recruitment of Western Spies,” NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 8 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/publications/special-reports/the-role-of-astan-e-quds-razavi-a-key-religious-foundation-in-iranian-regime-s-terrorism-extremist-policies-and-recruitment-of-western-spies/>

³ IRAN: The Rise of the Revolutionary Guards’ Financial Empire: How the Supreme Leader and the IRGC Rob the People to Fund International Terror, U.S. Representative Office, NCRI, 2017. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/IRAN-Revolutionary-Financial-Supreme-International-ebook/dp/B073WLKZJQ>

⁴ Mansoureh Galestan, “Record 3.7 Billion Embezzlement Scandal Shakes Iran’s Tea Industry, Revealing Deep Corruption and Production Consequences,” NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 6 December 2023. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/economy/record-3-7b-embezzlement-scandal-shakes-irans-tea-industry-revealing-deep-corruption-and-production-consequences/>

⁵ Shahriar Kia, “Bitcoin Mining in Iran, IRGC Operations and the Power Grid Crisis,” NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 26 May 2025. Available at: https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/publications/special-reports/bitcoin-mining-in-iran-irgc-operations-and-the-power-grid-crisis/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

funding Hezbollah, the Houthis, proxy militias, and nuclear development has devastated Iran's infrastructure and frustrated its people.

Wealth Squandered on Militarism

The regime's ideological priorities drain Iran's wealth further. Experts estimate over \$2,000 billion has been spent on its nuclear programme since the 1980s. This pursuit, defying sanctions, prioritises geopolitical posturing over public welfare. At the regional level, Iran has provided financial assistance to proxies such as Hezbollah (\$700 million per year, according to U.S. estimates) and the Assad regime in Syria (\$50 billion as of 2021, according to the regime's internal documents), at the expense of ignoring urgent domestic needs⁶.

Domestically, the Basij militia and security forces, mobilised against protests like those in Mashhad in May 2025, consume vast resources. The 2022–2023 protests saw 100,000 security personnel deployed, backed by surveillance and prisons, while schools and hospitals crumble. On 6 May 2025, the head of the regime's judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, admitted that the regime arrested more than 90,000 students during those protests. This misallocation fuels the economic despair driving truck drivers, bakers, and farmers to protest.

A Regime's Deadlock

The ruling theocracy cannot reform without dismantling itself. The IRGC's economic empire secures its power, while nuclear ambitions and proxy wars define its anti-Western identity. Abandoning either would unravel the regime. Energy Minister Ali Abadi's admission on 14 May 2025 of no new power investments in three years, while megawatts feed IRGC crypto operations, underscores this neglect.

The Iranian people's chants— "Bread, dignity, freedom!" in Mashhad, "The enemy is right here, they lie when they say it's America" in Kermanshah—demand systemic change. As long as the theocracy prioritises elite enrichment over public welfare, poverty will persist. The only path to prosperity is uprooting this regime, empowering Iranians to reclaim their nation's future.

The Electricity Crisis: A Nation Left in the Dark

Iran's electricity crisis has become a stark symbol of the regime's neglect and mismanagement. By February 2025, over 70% of the country was grappling with unannounced blackouts that lasted hours, sometimes days, disrupting every facet of life⁷. Schools, hospitals, courts, and banks were forced to shut down, plunging communities into chaos. In southern provinces like Hormozgan, Khuzestan, and Bushehr, where temperatures routinely exceed 50°C, the absence of electricity meant no fans, no air conditioning, and no respite from the heat. Industrial zones, from Qazvin to Arak, reported catastrophic losses as machinery failed and production ground to a halt. The state-run newspaper Donya-e-Eqtasad⁸ reported on 6 May 2025 that daily economic losses reached 80 trillion rials (approximately \$1.96 billion), with the regime's Chamber of Commerce estimating that

⁶ Hamid Enayat, "At the Heart of Nuclear Negotiations, a Troubling Revelation," Jewish Journal, 30 May 2025. Available at: https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/381834/at-the-heart-of-nuclear-negotiations-a-troubling-revelation/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁷ "Disruption of Electricity in Iran, the Government Reported Rise in Power Outages in Homes," BBC Farsi, 13 May 2025. Available in Farsi at: Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/cwynx1ollgwo>

⁸ Energy, p. 7, 16 May 2025, Available in Farsi at: <https://donya-e-eqtasad.com/tags/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B1%DA%98%DB%8C/?page=7>

\$9.8 billion is needed to address a 20,000-megawatt shortfall and \$25.2 billion to repair the crumbling grid.

The damages of this accident are heartbreaking for workers, toilers and the weaker classes. In Shiraz, on 8 May 2025, a baker, driven to despair by repeated power cuts, dumped his spoiled dough outside the local electricity office, declaring, “Dear electricity administration, this is the mess you’ve created for us. What are we supposed to do with your incompetence?” In Gonabad, on the same day, a fish farm owner recorded the loss of two tonnes of fish, lamenting, “All these fish are dead because of no electricity. We have a motor, but no SMS warns us of outages. This is our loss!” In Qazvin, an industrial worker described the financial devastation caused by power fluctuations: “Three times today, the power went out and came back. All our sheets—each worth 60 million rials—are ruined. Our CNC machines are broken. We’re exhausted.” The lack of communication about scheduled outages has left businesses vulnerable, amplifying economic damage and fuelling public anger.

The regime’s response has been woefully inadequate, bordering on insulting. The authorities urged the citizens to join a “25-degree campaign⁹” to lower air conditioner settings. The public’s response was one of bitter sarcasm: “We don’t even have electricity—how do we adjust air conditioners?” The blackouts have become a rallying cry, a symbol of a regime more concerned with foreign proxy wars and illicit profiteering than the well-being of its people. In Tehran’s Pardis district, nighttime chants of “Death to Khamenei!” echoed through darkened streets, while in Kermanshah, protesters declared, “The enemy is right here—they lie when they say it’s America!” The electricity crisis has laid bare the mullahs’ priorities: while ordinary Iranians suffer, vast amounts of power are diverted to IRGC-linked cryptocurrency mining operations, which consume megawatts to fund the regime’s sanction-evading schemes and foreign militias.

Water Shortage: The Defiance of a Thirsty Nation

Compounding the electricity crisis is a water shortage so severe it has turned cities into deserts and villages into battlegrounds. Power outages have disabled water pumping stations, leaving communities dependent on costly tanker deliveries or manual collection. In Bushehr, on 17 May 2025, a protester filmed a confrontation with authorities, shouting, “They want to sell water for 7 to 10 million rials per tanker. My kids need water!” In Chabahar, on 22 May, a man pleaded with officials, “Do you have a sister, a mother? This woman came to you for help!” The desperation is palpable, with women and children bearing the brunt of



Queuing with their water tanks

⁹ Statement No. 1 by Ministry of Energy, Urging Customers to Keep the Heat at 35 Celsius, 22 April 2025. Available in Farsi at: <https://barghnews.com/fa/news/62167/>

the crisis as they queue for hours under the scorching sun, often facing violence from security forces.

Farmers, whose livelihoods depend on water, have been pushed to breaking point. In Khonj and Kazeroon, on 23 and 24 May 2025, farmers blocked roads to protest the shutdown of 377 agricultural wells, accusing the regime of diverting water to industrial and military projects controlled by the IRGC. In Isfahan, the Zayandeh Rud riverbed lies dry, a stark symbol of decades of mismanagement. Protesters chanted, “No to water theft!” and “The regime is the drought!” as they faced arrests and beatings. In Nesim Shahr, a baker described the absurdity of carrying water in buckets to make dough: “Since yesterday, we’ve had no water. Mr. Governor, Mr. Mayor, what is this situation? Should I close my bakery?”



Little girl running with her small tank of water

The regime’s own officials have acknowledged the crisis’s severity. On 14 May 2025, Energy Minister Abadi warned that cities like Shiraz, Ahvaz, and Karaj face “total collapse” of water and electricity supplies, referencing the 2020 Khuzestan water crisis as a cautionary tale. Yet, instead of solutions, the regime has offered only repression. In Ilam and Sistan-Baluchestan, farmers were arrested, and in Bushehr, women and children were trampled in water queues. The water crisis has become a microcosm of the mullahs’ failure: while they prioritise their cronies and military projects, ordinary Iranians are left to fight for the most necessity of life.

The Bread Line: Bakers’ Revolt Against Ruin

Bread is the lifeblood of Iran, a staple that sustains millions. Yet, the nation’s bakers have been driven to revolt by the dual crises of power and water shortages. Frequent blackouts ruin dough, while hyperinflation, substandard flour, and punitive fines have pushed many bakeries to the brink of bankruptcy. They are also protesting the cutting of subsidies, rising flour prices and a digital baker control system. In Qazvin, on 6 May 2025, a baker lamented, “Three hours without power.



Every day, I throw out 20 sacks of dough into the desert. Who will pay for our losses?” In Mashhad, on 24 May, bakers faced tear gas and pepper spray as they protested, chanting, “Enough with empty promises, our tables are empty!” A woman confronted a security officer, shouting, “Why are you hitting the kids?” The regime’s brutality drew condemnation from Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, who stated



on 24 May, “The vileness of Khamenei’s regime is evident in its use of tear gas against hardworking bakers. I salute their courage in Mashhad, Shahin Shahr, Borujerd, Kerman, and Arak.”

In Sanandaj, bakers protested rising costs, with one declaring, “The price of yeast has tripled, and we have no water or electricity. This is the people’s quota being wasted!” In Jekigur, a baker pleaded, “The flour is bad, the power is out, and the company doesn’t respond. On Judgment Day, you’ll have to answer for this!” These The small-business owners, asking only for basic utilities and fair resources, have faced fines, beatings, and arrests. Their defiance reflects a broader truth: under the mullahs, even the most essential trades are unsustainable, as the regime prioritises its own enrichment over the needs of its people.

Truck Drivers: A Nationwide Strike for Dignity

On May 22, 2025, Iranian truck drivers began a nationwide strike that quickly spread to 155 cities in all 31 provinces, demanding fair tariffs, adequate fuel, affordable repairs, and proper insurance¹⁰. The movement, which began in Bandar Abbas, swiftly spread to major hubs including Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Sanandaj, Ahvaz, and Kermanshah. Drivers blocked roads and rallied with unified chants of “One pain, one voice!” In Ahvaz, on 25 May, a driver declared, “I’ll keep my truck here until the last day. I’m protesting to support all drivers in Iran.” Similarly, in Fasa, another driver voiced frustration: “The commission takes our money but provides no services. Our roads are unsafe, our fuel is insufficient, and no one listens.”



The banner reads:

Protest Rally of Drivers and Truckers in Zarand, Kerman

In protest against low fares, high expenses, and vehicle depreciation

We demand that base fares be set according to a "ton-per-kilometer" rate

The strike, which entered its 11th consecutive day until 1 June 2025, expanded to include new cities such as Marivan, Anzali, Asman Abadi (Ilam), and Kahak (Qom). Key transit highways, including Bandar Abbas–Shiraz, Mashhad, Arak, Qazvin, and Shahreza, stood deserted, as evidenced by videos circulating widely. The drivers’ slogans were bold and defiant, resonating in cities like Zabol, Ahar, and Zahedan: “The driver is awake, despising both the Shah and the Sheikh!” and “Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the Leader!” In Mashhad, a driver reflected on their plight: “We thought trucking meant wealth, but all we got was misery. We’re forced to bribe police and navigate broken roads. Nothing is left for us.” In Sanandaj, on 23 May, drivers blocked roads, with one proclaiming, “Look, there’s no space left to park. Ninety percent of these trucks have cargo, but we’ve stopped. Bravo to Sanandaj’s honour!”

The regime’s response has been marked by repression, including arrests, threats to revoke licences, and accusations of “foreign agitation.” In Isfahan, Hormozgan, Fars, Kermanshah, Gilan-e Gharb, Ardabil, and Khuzestan, several drivers were detained, prompting demands for their immediate release. The IRGC in Khuzestan arrested individuals filming the strike in Bandar Imam, while Kamran Mirhaji, the prosecutor of Fars Province, warned of “serious action” against those

¹⁰ “Unprecedented Strike by Truck Drivers Enters Sixth Day,” Radio Farda, 27 May 2025. Available in Farsi at https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-strike/33424787.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

disrupting truck activity, threatening to impound vehicles and cancel fuel cards (Mehr News Agency, 28 May). The General Directorate of Roads and Road Transport of Yazd Province issued a notice mandating that all transport fleet vehicles report to the terminal by 10:00 AM on 31 May for loading, or face suspension of services.

Fearing the strike's expansion, the regime deployed a convoy of IRGC trucks labelled "Convoy for the Transport of Essential Goods for Tehran Province" to mitigate disruptions. However, the drivers' resolve remains unshaken. They have rejected promises from officials, such as Reza Rostami of the Chamber of Commerce and the head of the parliamentary construction committee, to review freight rates, insurance, and fuel issues by the end of Khordad (21 June), dismissing these as ploys to undermine the strike.



The strike has garnered widespread support, with small truck owners in Neyshabur joining the protest and solidarity statements issued by retirees, teachers, oil workers, women, nurses, child rights advocates, and anti-execution activists. This broad backing underscores the strike's resonance with the broader demands of Iran's working population. Fatemeh Mohajerani, spokesperson for Masoud Pezeshkian, acknowledged the strike on 28 May, stating, "A report on the truckers' strike was presented, and it was emphasised that the government has a duty to respond to the needs of all citizens" (IRNA, 28 May 2025). Yet, such assurances have done little to quell the drivers' determination.

The state-run newspaper Donya-ye-Eqtasad noted on 29 May 2025: "The truckers' strike is not just a stoppage by a single trade group, but a warning bell for the entire road-based supply chain—the main artery of Iran's economy. For an economy where over 90% of goods are transported via road freight, the strike is not merely a professional dispute, but a symptom of institutional dysfunction. If the wheels of transportation stop, the wheels of industry will also come to a halt." This strike is more than a labour dispute; it is a strategic stand for dignity, exposing the regime's inability to meet the needs of a critical sector that keeps the nation moving.

Retirees: Stolen Pensions, Broken Promises

Retirees, particularly from the telecommunications and oil sectors, have taken to the streets weekly in over 20 cities¹¹, demanding payment of pensions destroyed by inflation and corruption. In Ahvaz, on 13 May 2025, they chanted, "They've stolen the oil fund and left us destitute!" In Kermanshah, on 20 May, retirees shouted, "(Imam) Hossein is their slogan but lies and



Retirees' sit-in

¹¹ Mahmoud Hakamian, "The Escalation of Protests in Iran Against Looting and Corruption Amidst a Severe Economic Crisis," The People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran, 3 March 2025. Available at: https://english.mojahedin.org/news/the-escalation-of-protests-in-iran-against-looting-and-corruption-amidst-a-severe-economic-crisis/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

theft are their actions!” In Tehran, telecommunications retirees protested, declaring, “The majority shareholders have eaten our rights!” Their persistence, despite facing riot police and official silence, underscores their desperation. One former oil worker in Rasht said, “This isn’t just about money. It’s about being erased. We gave our lives to this country, and now we’re left with nothing.”

Joining bakers and truck drivers, retirees have formed a coalition of the forgotten, their weekly marches a testament to their refusal to be silenced. Their protests highlight a profound moral failure: a regime that once promised social justice now leaves its most vulnerable citizens to rummage through bins for survival, while billions are funnelled to the IRGC and foreign proxies.

Farmers and Workers: A Fight for Survival

Farmers, grappling with dried-up wells and ruined crops, have resorted to road blockades to demand relief. In Kazeroon, on 24 May 2025, a farmer stated, “No one is here to help us, not even the governor.” In Seyfabad Khonj, on 23 May, farmers protested, saying, “We’re striking because we have no water or electricity.” In Zahedan, sanitation workers, unpaid for months, cried out, “My child needs formula, but I can’t afford it. What have we done wrong?” The regime’s Deputy Health Minister reported on 14 May 2025 that 10,000 workers die annually due to workplace accidents—a figure that is ten times higher than previous estimates and highlights conditions similar to slaughterhouses in worker environments.¹²



One of the placards reads: *We don’t want an incompetent manager!*

In Shahr-e Kord, workers and vendors resisted bulldozers sent to clear their stalls, chanting, “All have become corrupt!” In Ahvaz and Arak, industrial workers protested power cuts that damaged machinery, declaring, “We’ve had enough!” These labourers, the backbone of Iran’s economy, are demanding not wealth but survival. Their protests, met with violence and arrests, reflect a growing defiance against a regime that prioritises its cronies over the needs of its people.

University Students: Rejecting Humiliation

Iranian university students increasingly participate in 2025 protests. From Tehran’s Beheshti University to institutions in Tabriz, Mashhad, and Isfahan, students have joined forces with bakers, truck drivers, and retirees, rejecting a regime that offers them no future beyond subservience or exile. Sparked by power outages, water shortages, and deepening repression, their protests represent not spontaneous outbursts but a sustained repudiation of a regime that betrays their hopes.

On 4 May 2025, female students at Beheshti University chanted, “The student will die but will not accept humiliation!” —a slogan echoing across campuses since 1999. Students’ grievances span both immediate hardship and structural repression. Widespread electricity cuts have disrupted teaching

¹² Mansoureh Galestan, “Iran Protests: Bakers and Drivers Ignite Nationwide Demonstrations Amid Economic Collapse,” NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 24 May 2025. Available at: https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-protests/iran-protests-bakers-and-drivers-ignite-nationwide-demonstrations-amid-economic-collapse/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

and research, forcing universities to cancel classes or operate in darkness. In Tabriz, students reported studying by candlelight, with one declaring, “We’re denied electricity, water, and hope. Is this the future they promised?” Meanwhile, dormitories in cities like Shiraz and Ahvaz suffer severe water shortages and unsanitary conditions.

Universities, once hubs of critical thought, now operate under the shadow of Basij and morality police, who monitor speech, enforce hijab laws, and expel dissenters. In early May, Mashhad students staged a sit-in, criticising a system that rewards IRGC loyalty over academic merit. Though some slogans are difficult to confirm, protesters have voiced strong opposition to the regime’s militarised priorities.

Acts of defiance have multiplied. In Isfahan, students reportedly blocked campus entrances on 15 May to protest power cuts and surveillance. Security forces responded with tear gas and arrests. Yet protests endured, with chants like “We will not die in silence!” In Tehran, a video from 18 May showed a female student confronting Basij enforcers, stating, “You can’t scare us anymore. We’re fighting for our lives!” The footage went viral, galvanising broader resistance.

The regime responded with denials and crackdowns. Officials dismissed the protests as “foreign-orchestrated,” a claim met with defiant rebuttals like “The enemy is right here—they lie when they say it’s America!” In May 2025, reports indicated that over 200 students were arrested during nationwide protests. Human rights organizations have previously documented that detainees in Iran often face torture and are coerced into making forced confession.

Students have joined a growing coalition of protestors demanding systemic change. Slogans such as “Bread, dignity, freedom!” and “Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the Leader!” reflect a collective rejection of both monarchy and theocracy. As one Tehran student put it on 22 May: “We’re not just fighting for electricity. We’re fighting for a future where we can breathe.” In the face of repression, this generation of students is proving to be the regime’s most determined adversary.¹³

The Regime’s Response: Brutality and Denial

The regime’s response to the protests has been a toxic mix of denial, hollow promises, and escalating violence. Fatemeh Mohajerani, spokesperson for President Masoud Pezeshkian, admitted on 13 May 2025 a 20,000-megawatt shortfall but urged citizens to conserve energy, a suggestion met with scorn¹⁴. MPs have been more candid: MP Ahmad Jabari said, “The repeated power outages have exhausted the people of Hormozgan. Why should the people pay for the Ministry’s incompetence?” MP Mojtaba Zareie described provinces like Bushehr and Khuzestan as “hell” due to outages, while MP Kamal Hosseinpour lamented, “Farmers no longer complain about outages because they’ve given up. All they want is a schedule, and even that we can’t provide.”

Yet, instead of solutions, the regime deploys repression. In Mashhad, on 24 May 2025, security forces used tear gas and pepper spray against bakers. In Shahr-e Kord, municipal forces bulldozed vendors’ stalls, prompting outrage. In Sanandaj, truck drivers faced arrests, yet their strike held firm. In Ahvaz, bulldozers cleared protest sites, but chants of “We are not afraid!” persisted. The regime’s execution rate has surged, with over 160 reported in May alone, a desperate attempt to

¹³ “Iran Protests Weekly: Nationwide Trucker Strike Shakes Regime, Bakers & Retirees Rise Up,” People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran, 1 June 2025, YouTube Video. Available at: https://youtu.be/EqCfLLir_Tg

¹⁴ Government Spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani: “The Country is Facing a Shortage of 20,000 Megawatts of Electricity,” Khabarban, Available in Farsi at: https://44626313.khabarban.com/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

instil fear. But fear is losing its grip on a population that has lost faith in the mullahs' ability to govern.

Resistance Units: Catalyst for Nationwide Protests

The People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK) Resistance Units¹⁵, as the only opposition with a national network in the cities of Iran's 31 provinces, form a dynamic, decentralised network of activists operating covertly across Iran, serving as both a spark and a sustaining force for nationwide protests against the regime's authoritarian rule.

Comprising agile cells, these units are primarily composed of young, educated individuals—often teenagers and young adults, with women playing a prominent leadership role. Despite their qualifications, they face systemic exclusion, denied opportunities and a future under the current regime. Their bold actions, ranging from symbolic acts of defiance to coordinated support for broader social movements, have made them a cornerstone of Iran's pro-democracy struggle, igniting and prolonging protests that challenge the regime's grip on power.

Expanding and Sustaining a Nationwide Uprising

The Resistance Units have proven adept at catalysing large-scale protests, transforming local grievances into nationwide movements. During the 2022 uprising sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, they played a pivotal role in ensuring protests spread rapidly to over 280 cities¹⁶. From the Caspian Sea to Baluchistan, their coordinated efforts amplified unified slogans, turning scattered discontent into a cohesive national outcry. By distributing anti-regime messages, organising flash protests, and leveraging their mobility to ignite demonstrations in new towns and cities, the Resistance Units prevented the regime from swiftly quelling the unrest. Their strategic interventions sustained the uprising for several months, as new protesters stepped in to replace those arrested, keeping the momentum alive.

Their actions extend beyond spontaneous protests, as they actively target symbols of regime oppression to galvanise public dissent. For instance, in recent weeks Resistance Units have carried out audacious attacks, including three explosions at a Basij militia base in Tehran, and the firebombing of a Basij base in Mashhad. In Khash, they attacked a Basij base suppressing women with Molotov cocktails, while in Tehran, Ilam, and Birjand, they set fire to regime banners featuring images of Khomeini and Khamenei. These acts of defiance, documented through videos and images, inspire broader participation and signal the regime's vulnerability, encouraging ordinary citizens to join the struggle.

Beyond sparking protests, the Resistance Units provide critical support to sustain and amplify social movements, such as the truck drivers' strike that has paralysed more than 155 cities across all 31 provinces in May 2025. In response to the regime's violent crackdown on striking truckers and bakers, the Resistance Units launched a series of retaliatory actions. They conducted 15 targeted operations, including explosions at Basij bases in Tehran and Mashhad and the destruction of a Basij intelligence guidepost in Hamedan. In Khash and Goujan, they firebombed Basij bases while in

¹⁵ PMOI Resistance Units, People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, Available at: <https://english.mojahedin.org/pmoi-resistance-units/>

¹⁶ Matin Karim, "How PMOI Resistance Units Are Shaping Iran's Democratic Future," People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, 1 August 2024. Available at: <https://english.mojahedin.org/article/how-pmoi-resistance-units-are-shaping-irans-democratic-future/>

Kerman, they torched a Basij student unit. These actions not only disrupted the regime's repressive apparatus but also boosted the morale of striking workers, reinforcing their resolve¹⁷.

The Resistance Units also engage in grassroots mobilisation, amplifying the voices of protesters through media and propaganda. In cities like Ahvaz, they recorded videos of idle truck terminals and police threats, while in Tehran, they painted anti-regime slogans on the walls of the Khayaran terminal. In Sanandaj, they burned banners of Khamenei, and in Mashhad, they circulated audio messages with hashtags like to rally public support. Night-time leaflet distributions in Bandar Abbas and protest songs in Shiraz further sustained the momentum of the truckers' strike, ensuring it remained a focal point of national resistance.

Targeted Repression, Enduring Resistance

The regime's harsh response underscores the existential threat posed by the Resistance Units. As of April 2023, over 3,600 members had been imprisoned or reported missing since the 2022 uprising began, reflecting the regime's relentless efforts to dismantle the network through arrests, judicial intimidation, and extrajudicial measures. Despite this, the Resistance Units remain resilient, operating under a tightly controlled surveillance state. Their ability to document human rights abuses, distribute subversive materials, and coordinate protests in cities like Kermanshah and Tabriz demonstrates their organisational sophistication and unwavering commitment.

The Resistance Units' enduring defiance is a testament to the unbreakable spirit of Iran's younger generation. By acting as both a catalyst for protests and a backbone for their continuation, they have transformed isolated acts of resistance into a sustained national movement. Their actions expose the regime's institutional dysfunction and inspire hope for a democratic future, making the Resistance Units an indispensable force in Iran's struggle for freedom.¹⁸

A Unified Call for Systemic Change

The protests of 2025 are not isolated grievances but a unified demand for systemic change. Slogans like "Bread, dignity, freedom!" in Mashhad, "We will not die in silence!" in Tehran, and "The enemy is right here—they lie when they say it's America!" in Kermanshah reflect a rejection of the regime's propaganda and a demand for accountability. In Darab, on 10 May 2025, a woman declared, "We have a patient on oxygen. If you can't solve our problems, resign!" In Arak's Kheyrabad Industrial Zone, workers protested power cuts, chanting, "All have become corrupt!" The unity of bakers, truckers, retirees, farmers, students, and workers signals a movement that transcends class, geography, and background, bound by a shared resolve to end the mullahs' tyranny.

The horizontal structure of these protests is remarkable. They emerge wherever injustice is felt. Truck drivers chant "One pain, one voice!" alongside retirees demanding their rights. Farmers march with bakers, shouting, "We've had enough!" Students support sanitation workers, proclaiming, "We won't accept humiliation!" This solidarity suggests the potential for a broader confrontation, as the structural conditions—economic despair, institutional decay, generational betrayal, and environmental catastrophe—intensify. Inflation remains above 40%, youth

¹⁷ Matin Karim, "PMOI Resistance Units in Tehran Confront Regime's 'Electricity Thieves' Amidst Deepening Power Crisis," People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, 15 May 2025. Available at: <https://english.mojahedin.org/news/pmoi-resistance-units-in-tehran-confront-regimes-electricity-thieves-amidst-deepening-power-crisis/>

¹⁸ How PMOI Resistance Units Are Shaping Iran's Future," People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran," September 2024, Available at: <https://youtu.be/rRLIn46qhfA?list=PLqrxnz6Vvh4ofgnFH5xr8onA5-f2lBlby>

unemployment is staggering, the power grid is outdated, and water tables are collapsing. The regime's strategy offers no hope, only more repression and corruption.

Conclusion

The clerical regime's iron grip is on the verge of collapse, its legitimacy eroded by decades of corruption, repression, and gross mismanagement. The spring of 2025 has laid bare the regime's failures, as power outages plunge cities into darkness, water shortages turn villages into wastelands, and economic ruin strips millions of their dignity. From Tehran's bustling streets to the parched fields of Sistan-Baluchestan, a diverse coalition of bakers, truck drivers, retirees, farmers, students, and workers has risen in defiance, united by a shared demand for justice and a future free from the mullahs' tyranny. These protests, spanning all 31 provinces, are not mere cries of desperation but a resounding call for systemic upheaval. The only viable solution to Iran's cascading economic and social crises lies in the complete dismantlement of the theocratic regime and the establishment of a democratic system that prioritises the people's needs over the enrichment of a corrupt elite.

The mullahs' regime offers no path to reform because it sees it as a quick fall into the abyss of overthrow. Its priorities—funding foreign proxies, sustaining IRGC-linked cryptocurrency schemes, and diverting resources to military projects—have left Iran's infrastructure crumbling and its citizens destitute. Official admissions, such as Energy Minister Ali Abadi's confession on 14 May 2025 of a 20,000-megawatt shortfall and the absence of new power investments, underscore a regime incapable of addressing even basic needs. The daily economic losses of 80 trillion rials (\$1.96 billion) and the staggering \$25.2 billion required to repair the grid highlight the scale of neglect. Meanwhile, water shortages have crippled agriculture, with farmers in Khonj and Kazeroon blocking roads to protest well shutdowns, and urban dwellers in Bushehr and Chabahar facing exorbitant tanker prices. Inflation above 50%, coupled with unpaid pensions and wages, has rendered survival a daily struggle for retirees, workers, and small-business owners alike. The regime's response—empty promises, tear gas, and a surge in executions—only deepens the chasm between rulers and ruled, proving that reform within this system is a mirage.

As Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, declared on 22 May 2025, the truck drivers' cry of "We can no longer continue; we are crushed, but we will not remain silent" encapsulates the spirit of a nation refusing to be silenced. She rightly asserted, "Uprising and resistance are the only paths to freedom from poverty, discrimination, unemployment, and systemic government corruption."

The courage of Iran's people, forged in shared suffering, transcends class and geography, uniting bakers chanting "Enough with empty promises!" with students proclaiming, "We will not accept humiliation!" This solidarity signals a movement poised to reshape Iran's destiny. The chants of "Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the Leader!" and "The enemy is right here—they lie when they say it's America!" reflect a profound rejection of the regime's propaganda and a demand for accountability.

The Iranian people's courage, born of shared suffering, signals a movement that could reshape the nation's destiny. Only by uprooting the theocratic regime and empowering the Iranian people to chart their own course can the nation overcome its crises and secure a future of prosperity and justice.

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