

OPINION

Kurdistan in Tehran: What the murder of Jina Amini means for the future of Iran

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If the protests over the beating and murder of Jina (Mahsa) Amini continue, they could bring about the end of the Iranian regime, and possibly freedom for Kurdistan. (Ozan Kose / AFP via Getty Images)

The [brutal beating of Jina \(Mahsa\) Amini](#) for not wearing the “proper hijab” and her subsequent murder by the Iranian regime’s “morality police” have dominated the frontpage of newspapers and news sites throughout the world.

What was not mentioned in the initial reporting was her true ethnic identity. The victim was not Persian; she was Kurdish, from Eastern Kurdistan (Rojhelat), in Tehran on a visit. She dressed modestly, even conservatively by most standards in the modern world, including the Middle East.

Jina Amini was as brave in her own way as the Kurdish female soldiers who defeated the fanatics of Da'esh on the Syrian battlefields. What happened to her is not “religion”; it is perversion. If such an action is condoned and carried out systematically, that is the word that best characterises the regime in Tehran. Her death could precipitate major changes for the Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan, as well as for Iranian citizens in general.

Kurdish women in their own region have successfully rejected the dress code arbitrarily imposed by Persian leaders living in another era, in another place, in another culture. From its very outset in 1979, the Iranian regime's plan was to defame the Kurds. They were charged with establishing a “second Israel” in the region. In December 1979, ultimately, the government reached an agreement with the Kurds which recognised Kurdistan's autonomy, but it was practically fettered by the Shi'ite theocracy.

The Kurds — a separate non-Persian people — are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims of modern outlook. Having made no mention of the Kurds and their rights in the new constitution, between 85 and 90 per cent of the Kurds boycotted the referendum of March 1979. In the first post-revolutionary parliamentary elections in March 1980, most of the Kurds threw their support behind the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), but its leader, Dr Abdul Rahman Qasimlu, was declared *persona non grata* and the KDPI “the party of Satan”. The election results in the Kurdish-populated regions were declared void. Animosity resumed, and Ayatollah Khomeini ordered *jihād* on the Kurds, which led to the state-sponsored massacre and extrajudicial executions of the Kurds. The “autonomy” the Kurds voted for was perceived to be secession by the new Iranian regime.

A decade later, in July 1989, while waiting for the Iranian delegation, Qasimlu, his deputy, and the intermediary [were assassinated in Vienna](#) by the agents of the regime. Sediq Kamangar, a senior member of the Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala) and the successor to Qasimlu, Dr Sadeq Sharafkandi, along with fellow activists met the same fate in Berlin (known as [Mykonos assassinations](#)) the next month and in September 1992 respectively. In April 1997, [the Berlin Court of Appeal](#) upheld that “Iran's political leadership ordered the crime”.

Over the last two decades, many activists of Kurdish parties based in Southern Kurdistan (in Iraq) have similarly been assassinated by the regime's agents. [Human rights reports](#) refer to the excessive use of force against and systematic, extrajudicial killings of Kurds in Iran. Furthermore, violations of Kurds' economic, social, and cultural rights are commonly noted in almost all [UN reports on the human rights situation in Iran](#). This is confirmed by the disproportionately high number of Kurdish political prisoners who receive the death penalty and have thus far been executed. According to [human rights groups](#), 17 Kurds have been murdered in the ongoing protests and more than 800 have been injured to date in Eastern Kurdistan alone. This is to say nothing of the mass arrests currently underway.

Since the 1990s, the Kurds have abandoned armed resistance in order to focus their energies instead on the liberalisation of Eastern Kurdistan — for the most part remaining quiescent, though occasionally conducting military operations inside Rojhelat.



The [murder of Jina Amini has sparked widespread protests](#), beginning in Eastern Kurdistan. In the ongoing demonstrations against the Iranian regime, for the first time Baluch, Arabs, Persians, Azeris, and other national and ethnic minorities have joined in support of the Kurds. They chant “*Jin, Jiyar, Azadi*” (“Woman, Life, Freedom”). This motto has been promoted by the Kurdish female fighters (Women’s Protection Units) and is being put into practice in Rojava (Western Kurdistan in Syria) since the 2011 Syrian civil war. This suggests that the protests are now going beyond the question of the hijab — which has never been an issue for the Kurds, though it remains a fundamental issue for the regime.

What happened to Jina has seemingly united the people in Iran, insofar as it represents an intersection between the Kurds’ claim for self-determination and Iranians’ desire to throw off the incumbent regime.

It is noteworthy that other Kurdistan segments of the population have also shown their support of the protests. The Kurds in East Kurdistan have the potential to change the *status quo* as they already built a fledgling Kurdish state, the Republic of Kurdistan, in 1946. Over the last three decades, Kurds in Southern Kurdistan (in Iraq) and Rojava (in Syria) have managed to keep stability and security and thriving economies in the territories under their control, in contrast to the mayhem and violence that has characterised in the wider Middle East. In terms of

governability, the Kurdish regions are functioning much better than their neighbours. This has been achieved through the high price the Kurds have paid for their legitimate rights.

If the current protests continue, the Iranian government may lose its sway over Eastern Kurdistan – this, in turn, could pave the way to implementing Kurdish self-determination. Time will tell what form their right to self-determination takes. It might be in the form of autonomy, federalism, or independence. The Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan were not considered candidates for self-determination in the aftermath of the First World War by virtue of the 1919 Anglo-Persian Treaty.

The protests over the murder of Jina (which means “life-and-sprit-giving” and “eternal” in Kurdish) now have the potential for regime change, as well as freedom for Kurdistan. This would mark an end to the regime’s alignment with Putin, the sale of drones to Russia for use against Ukraine, and Tehran’s policies of regional destabilisation, state-sponsored terror, and nuclear blackmail. The world might witness the sun rising from Rojhelat, as it always rises from the east.

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