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Iran protests: BBC identifies many more people killed in demonstrations after Mahsa Amini's death

🕒 6 December



By BBC 100 Women, Disinformation, Monitoring, BBC Persian and Visual Journalism teams

BBC News

"If I don't go out and protest, who else will?"

The last words of Minoo Majidi to her family before she died.

Minoo was 62 when she was shot by security forces on the streets of Kermanshah in the west of Iran. According to her daughter, she was shot with 167 gun pellets. She died on her way to hospital.

Following Minoo's death, her daughter Roya Piraei posted an Instagram photo taken next to her mother's grave. Her head shaven, she was holding her own hair as a sign of mourning and defiance. It quickly went viral.

"I knew I couldn't speak out. This is all I could do to show how cruel this system is," Roya told BBC 100 Women.

Roya's mother is one of hundreds of Iranians across the country who have been killed while protesting against the death in custody of Mahsa Amini.

The **BBC 100 Women list** in 2022 reflects the role of women at the heart of conflict around the world - including the protesters demanding change in Iran,



| Minoo Majidi died in hospital after being shot by security forces

The 22-year-old Kurdish woman was detained for allegedly not complying with the strict dress code on head coverings and the mandatory hijab for women.

State officials have acknowledged more than 300 people have died during the protests, but their figures include security forces and pro-government people. According to **Iran Human Rights**, as of 29 November at least 448 people have been killed by security forces, including 29 women and 60 children.

Iran Human Rights believe the actual number of people killed is "certainly higher", as they only include cases they have been able to verify and they have received a high volume of reports of deaths, which they continue to investigate.

Identifying the dead

Using painstaking forensic techniques, teams from the BBC have been able to verify the identities of more than 75 of those killed.

By searching official records, online sites and social media we found death certificates, images of funerals and harrowing photos of the deceased. We also

spoke to relatives, activists and human rights groups to confirm and cross-check the information we'd found.

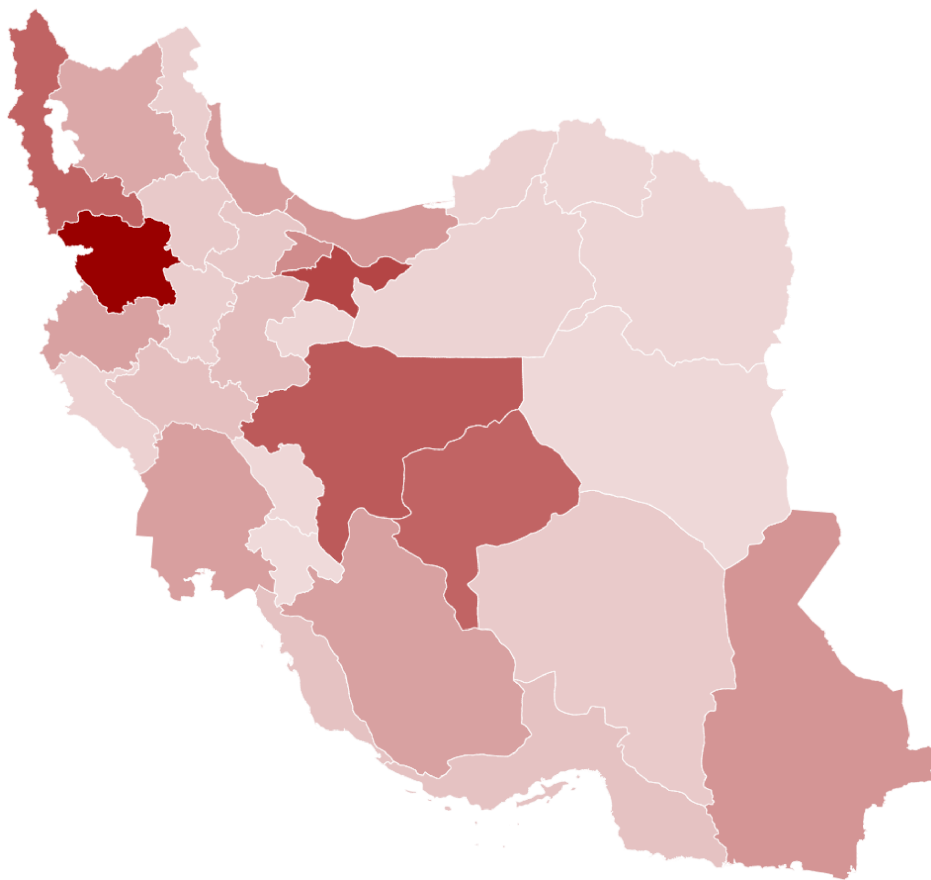
Our research confirmed many of the dead are women, and that high numbers of those killed come from marginalised ethnic minority groups. The deaths include children as young as seven.

We also identified that some people killed were caught up in the wider violence and unrest surrounding protests, rather than being directly involved in demonstrations themselves.

Number of protests in each province

from 16 Sep - 30 Nov 2022

4  130



Source: [Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for War & Peace](#) • 12 protesters must be present to meet Critical Threats protest activity threshold

Minority communities see most deaths

"I believe that what's happening in Iran is not a protest any more. It started with a protest, but a revolution is taking shape," says Roya.

Roya is from a Kurdish community. Our research has shown Kurdish areas, as well as regions home to other ethnic minorities - like the Baluch in south-eastern province Sistan Baluchistan - have seen the highest proportion of deaths.

32 of the names we verified were from Kurdish areas, while 20 were from Sistan Baluchistan province.

Sistan Baluchistan is one of Iran's poorest provinces, and one of the most conservative. Most of the Baluch people belong to Iran's Sunni minority. According to human rights groups, they face discrimination on the basis of both religion and ethnicity.

Despite its conservatism, in recent weeks women have joined protests in the provincial capital Zahedan. In online videos, women wearing the full-body veil - the chador - can be seen chanting, "whether with hijab or without it, onwards to revolution."



7-year-old Hasti Narouei was also from the Baluch community. This picture shows her wearing a traditional Baluchi dress.

On 30 September, she was in Zahedan with her grandmother at Friday prayers. Social media footage from the day shows security forces responding to a protest by firing into the crowd.

According to local activists, Hasti was hit on her head by a tear gas canister. She suffocated.

She was her parents' only daughter. She had two brothers, and was just one week short of her first day at school.

Amnesty International says at least 66 people were killed the day Hasti died, including **10 children** who belonged to the Baluchi minority. It was the deadliest day on record since protests started. Activists have named it "Bloody Friday".

Challenges of verifying



| Some of the victims in Sistan Baluchistan province

For the BBC teams, discovering the identities of those killed in Sistan Baluchistan province had another layer of complexity.

As one of the most conservative provinces in Iran, people are not typically online, with almost none of the regular social media posting that has enabled the identities of others who have died to be shared. Hasti's family, for example, have not spoken publicly about their daughter other than on strictly-controlled state media.

The province also has weak internet infrastructure, with few able to access or rely on home broadband connections.

Of the 20 people the BBC verified as killed in Sistan Baluchistan province, many appeared to have had no social media or other online presence. Their post-mortem photos were the only visual record of their identities we were able to find.

The role of social media

Elsewhere in the country, in areas with higher internet usage, social media has enabled deaths to get wider attention.

32-year-old Fereshteh Ahmadi, from Mahabad in West Azerbaijan province, was one of three Kurdish women we identified.

On 26 October, protests were held throughout the country to mark the 40th day of mourning for Mahsa Amini.

Fereshteh died after government forces allegedly shot her in the chest while she was on the roof of her house. The government has denied this.

The intelligence authorities have summoned her family for questioning.



A photo from Fereshteh's funeral of a little girl thought to be her daughter Bawan, crying whilst holding a handful of soil from her mother's grave, was shared widely across social platforms and viewed millions of times.

On BBC Persian Instagram alone, the picture was viewed by more than 2.5 million people and received more than 198K likes.

Protestors in the north-eastern city of Mashad even started using her **image on billboards** to highlight the plight of other children who have lost their parents.

No chance to mourn



Behind the numbers and images are families in shock and grief. In many cases, unable to speak out because of fear of retribution.

Safely now out of Iran, Roya remembers her mother Minoo. She recalls her zest for life, her endless calm and patience.

"She was sporty and she loved horse-riding. She even coached ping-pong!" she says.

"But I just don't feel like I have had the chance to mourn her death. It was so unnatural.

"The only hope I have now is that Iran will be free one day. That those who were killed unjustly, didn't die in vain. Iranian people deserve to have a normal life."

Methodology

The map showing protests across Iran was created using data confirmed by the Critical Threats Project (CTP). The project assigns a confidence level (high, moderate, or low) to convey their assessment of the likelihood that the protest occurred on a specific day and in a specific location. The BBC has used confirmed protests from the high and moderate data set.

CTP uses social media images and videos and reporting from Iranian state media to assess the date, location, and size of protests. The CTP, who have been monitoring protests since 2017, have set their threshold for reporting as a dozen individuals gathering.

A BBC investigation in October named a total of 45 men, women and children who had died in the Iran protests. On that occasion, journalists used the same techniques we have used here, starting with open-source research and then moving on to contacting sources, rights groups, relatives, activists, and BBC Persian to gather and cross-check data. Post-mortem images or funeral footage were also obtained in nearly all cases.

The images were sourced from social media, human rights organisations or local media.

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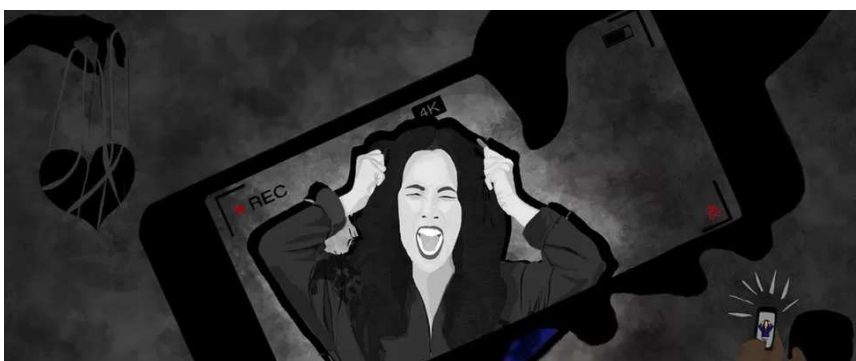
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