

Repression, Persecution, and Human Rights Violation: The Case of Kurds in Iran

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The Kurdish people in Iran face numerous human rights challenges, including discrimination, oppression, and violence. As the most prominent ethnic minority in the country, they are denied cultural and linguistic rights, and their cultural identity is threatened by the Iranian government's suppression of Kurdish political activism. The government has also banned Kurdish political parties and organizations, subjecting activists to arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings. Kurdish women are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. The Iranian government has also carried out military operations against Kurdish communities in western regions, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement. While some efforts have been made to improve the situation, these efforts have not been enough to address the systemic discrimination and human rights abuses faced by the Kurdish community. The global community urges the Iranian government to uphold their rights and liberties. The study explores how state mechanisms have perpetuated structural inequalities and stifled Kurdish cultural and political expression. Particular attention is given to the strategies employed by the Iranian regime to suppress dissent, the impact of these measures on Kurdish identity and livelihood, and the broader implications for human rights in the region.

Keywords: Kurds, Iranian Kurds, Ethnicity, Marginalisation, Repression, National Security, Human Rights, Violation

The Kurdish people are indigenous to a mountainous region that stretches through Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia. The Kurds have a long and complex history, marked by a struggle for independence and recognition of their cultural and linguistic rights. Approximately 7 to 9 million Kurds are believed to live within the borders of the Iranian state. The Kurdish population in Iran accounts for approximately 12-15% of the total population, which includes Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Gilakis, Mazandranis, Lurs, and Turcomen. (McDowall, 2004).

Most Kurds occupy the mountainous region in western Iran, stretching some 95,000 square kilometers, from the Turkish and Iraqi borders west to Lake Urmieh in the northeast. As with greater Kurdistan, the exact boundaries of northern and southern Kurdistan in Iran are problematic because the nation-states inhabited by Kurds are hostile to Kurdish nationalism, have a vested interest in downplaying the actual size of their Kurdish communities, and hold more conservative views on the geographical borders and the number of Kurds living in Iran. The Kurdish population, one of the largest ethnic groups without a state of their own, has long faced significant repression and human rights violations in several countries, including Iran. Within the Iranian context, the Kurds have endured systemic discrimination,

marginalization, and persecution under various regimes, from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic Republic. These injustices have persisted despite the Kurds' substantial contributions to the region's cultural, social, and economic life.

This paper will explore the Kurdish people's culture, politics, Human rights violations, and current situation in Iran. It also examines the Kurdish community's challenges, including discrimination, political marginalization, and cultural assimilation. The paper mainly used secondary sources like journals and books. However, apart from journals and books, some primary materials were used for the analysis. Primary materials published by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and other critical actors related to this particular issue were used for the theoretical framing of the study and analysis.

Human Rights of Kurds: Theoretical Framework

Human rights represent a universal framework for ensuring all individuals' dignity, freedom, and equality, transcending cultural, social, and political boundaries. Rooted in philosophical, legal, and ethical traditions, the concept of human rights has evolved significantly over time. The idea of human rights can be traced back to ancient civilisations, where notions of justice and human dignity were first articulated. Early texts such as the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1754 BCE) and the Cyrus Cylinder (539 BCE) provided some of the earliest examples of codified principles concerning individual rights and responsibilities (Ishay, 2004).

In Western philosophy, the Enlightenment era marked a critical juncture for formalising human rights. Thinkers like John Locke emphasised the natural rights to life, liberty, and property, which he argued were inherent to all individuals (Locke, 1689/1996). These ideas heavily influenced political revolutions, including the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). In the eighteenth century, however, such adjectives as 'natural', 'inherent', 'inalienable', and 'imprescriptible' had usually been used before the term the 'Right of Man' to signify that the existence of these rights was independent of positive law. The term the rights were independent of positive law. The contemporary use of the term 'Human Rights' as it finds its mention in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 is, of course, a revival of the eighteenth-century concept of the 'Rights of Man'. One of the central debates within the human rights discourse is the tension between universalism and cultural relativism. Universalists argue that human rights are inherent and apply to all individuals regardless of cultural or societal differences. This perspective is embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), which asserts that all human beings are "born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1). Conversely, cultural relativists contend that human rights must be interpreted within specific cultural and social contexts. They argue that imposing a universal framework risk undermining local traditions and values (Donnelly, 1984). This debate continues to shape international human rights policies, particularly in diverse and multi-ethnic societies.

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of human rights, a look at the various theories becomes necessary to observe the shifting of priority of rights during the different phases of history. These theories provide the basis to determine the precise subject matter upon which there could be an agreement. Natural Law Theory which is rooted in the belief that rights are derived from natural, moral laws that

transcend human-made legal systems. This perspective views rights as inherent and unalienable (Finnis, 1980). Legal Positivism argues that rights are established and enforced through legal systems and societal agreements, rather than inherent moral principles (Hart, 1961). Marxist Critique challenges the liberal individualist basis of human rights, arguing that they perpetuate capitalist inequalities by prioritising individual freedoms over collective welfare. Marxism critiques the commodification of rights, suggesting that meaningful human rights cannot exist without addressing structural economic disparities. Feminist Perspectives highlights how traditional human rights frameworks often marginalise women's experiences and advocate for the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches (Charlesworth, 1994). Feminist theories emphasise the importance of addressing systemic patriarchy and recognising the intersection of gender with other axes of oppression. Postcolonial Theory examines how human rights discourse has historically been used as a tool of imperialism, perpetuating global hierarchies between the Global North and South (Mutua, 2001). Postcolonial theorists call for decolonising human rights practices to ensure they do not reinforce neo-imperialist power structures. Critical Race Theory focuses on the role of race and racism in shaping the human rights agenda, arguing that systemic racial inequalities often go unaddressed in mainstream frameworks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This perspective advocates for an anti-racist approach to human rights, recognising the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism and slavery. Ecological Perspectives address the interdependence between human rights and environmental sustainability. This perspective highlights how environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalised communities and calls for integrating ecological justice into human rights discourse (Humphreys, 2006).

In the context of globalization, economic inequalities and transnational issues have raised questions about the adequacy of existing human rights frameworks. Scholars argue for expanding economic, social, and cultural rights to address global challenges such as poverty, labour exploitation, and environmental degradation (Pogge, 2002). As global interconnectivity increases, human rights concerns transcend national borders. While globalization has led to increased awareness and advocacy, it has also created challenges such as exploiting workers, environmental degradation, and the erosion of cultural practices. Rapid technological advancements pose new challenges for human rights, particularly regarding privacy, surveillance, and digital freedoms. The rise of artificial intelligence and big data has led to concerns about ethical oversight and the potential for human rights violations in the digital sphere (Floridi, 2016). The concept of intersectionality highlights how overlapping identities—such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation—shape individuals' experiences of oppression and discrimination. Integrating intersectionality into human rights frameworks ensures a more nuanced understanding of systemic inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991).

The effects of climate change have been framed as a human rights issue, especially regarding the right to life, health, and livelihood. Vulnerable populations, such as indigenous communities and low-income countries, often bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Environmental rights movements call for equitable access to a clean and safe environment, especially for marginalized communities disproportionately affected by environmental harm. Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals remains widespread in many parts of the world, despite significant progress in some countries. The rights of LGBTQ+ persons to marry, adopt children,

or live free from violence continue to be contentious issues. (Amnesty International , 2017)

Systemic racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities, including Indigenous peoples, continue to be significant challenges to the realization of human rights. Movements such as Black Lives Matter highlight the ongoing struggles for racial equality and justice. Gender-based violence, unequal pay, lack of reproductive rights, and underrepresentation in leadership roles are all critical issues for the human rights of women and gender minorities worldwide. The rights of refugees and asylum seekers are among the most pressing human rights challenges. Border policies in many countries have become more restrictive, and refugees are often denied basic rights such as safe housing, healthcare, and access to education. Rising nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments have led to violations of the rights of migrants (Ishay, 2004). These issues complicate the global effort to protect displaced populations and uphold the rights of people seeking asylum. In the wake of global terrorism, many states have enacted laws and measures that may infringe upon basic rights, such as detention without trial, surveillance, and restrictions on free expression. Balancing national security with the protection of fundamental human rights remains a contentious issue. armed conflicts, political repression, and forced migration continue to be significant challenges to the protection of human rights. In war-torn regions, issues such as refugees' rights, torture, child soldiers, and sexual violence are common (Pogge, 2002).

The concept of R2P (Responsibility to Protect) has become central in the international discourse on human rights during conflict. It asserts that the international community has a responsibility to intervene when a state fails to protect its citizens from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. While international human rights law provides standards for the protection of rights, its enforcement often depends on the willingness of states to comply. The challenge is finding ways to hold states accountable when they violate human rights without infringing on state sovereignty. Although various international bodies (e.g., the United Nations) are tasked with promoting and protecting human rights, enforcement remains weak. Human rights abuse often go unpunished due to lack of political will or international cooperation (Watch, 2021).

The human rights of Kurds, a stateless ethnic community dispersed across different countries, are characterised by ongoing efforts for cultural recognition, political autonomy, and liberation from violence and oppression. The issues stem from both historical and contemporary contexts; thus, comprehending the complexities of Kurdish human rights necessitates a theoretical framework that encompasses international human rights law, self-determination, indigenous rights, and intersectionality considerations. The human rights of Kurds in Iran can be analysed through several theoretical frameworks that intersect with ethnicity, national identity, political autonomy, and state sovereignty. For the Kurds in Iran, the state's policies often marginalize or suppress their identity, language, and culture. The ethno-political theory looks at how the state's centralization of power leads to the political exclusion of ethnic minorities, with Kurds frequently being denied political representation and cultural rights. Iran, as a multiethnic country, emphasizes a unified national identity, often at the expense of regional ethnic groups like the Kurds. The framework examines the balance (or lack thereof) between national

cohesion and the rights of ethnic minorities to self-determination. Kurds in Iran face restrictions on their language and culture, which undermines their rights to preserve and promote their distinct ethnic identity. This theory aspect highlights the tension between Iran's efforts to maintain control over cultural expression and the Kurdish demand for cultural autonomy.

According to the international law, ethnic minorities have the right to self-determination, including the right to determine their political status. Kurds in Iran have historically sought greater autonomy or independence, leading to conflicts with the Iranian government. Postcolonial theory helps understand the treatment of Kurdish minorities in Iran within the broader context of imperialism, state formation, and national identity. The Kurds in Iran, as in other Middle Eastern countries, often see themselves as a historically oppressed group subjected to marginalization by the central government. The centralization of state power after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and later with the establishment of the modern Iranian state, ignored the specific needs and desires of Kurdish people for self-determination (Amnesty International , 2017).

The modern borders of Iran were drawn without regard to ethnic or cultural divisions, and Kurdish areas were subsumed within the new state. This is an example of the colonial legacy in shaping state boundaries, which disregards the desires of indigenous ethnic groups to preserve their autonomy. Kurdish movements, including those for autonomy or independence, can be understood through a postcolonial lens as forms of resistance against a dominant state that enforces a homogenized national identity. Kurdish struggles for rights are not merely about ethnic recognition but are tied to a broader fight for dignity and resistance to oppression. Nationalism and self-determination are important components of the Kurdish struggle. Kurds in Iran are part of a larger transnational Kurdish diaspora, with Kurdish populations also in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. This larger context of Kurdish nationalism impacts the politics of the region. Kurdish nationalism in Iran is often focused on securing greater political autonomy within the Iranian state. This can be seen in the demands for cultural rights, language recognition, and political representation (Ashraf, 1993).

The Kurdish issue in Iran is not isolated; it is part of the broader Kurdish question that transcends borders. The Iranian government often frames the Kurdish movement as a threat to national unity, which influences its policy toward the Kurds. The theoretical frameworks applied to the human rights of Kurds in Iran involve a complex interplay of ethnicity, politics, economics, and state sovereignty. They highlight the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, recognition, and equality, while also revealing the state's efforts to maintain a unified national identity at the expense of ethnic diversity. Understanding these dynamics helps contextualize the human rights violations faced by the Kurdish population and the political and social movements advocating for their rights.

History of Kurds in Iran

The origins of the Kurds can be traced back to the 7th century, when they first emerged as a distinct ethnic group. They are believed to be descended from ancient Iranians who inhabited the Kurdistan region northwest of modern-day Iran. Over the course of time, the Kurds have cultivated their own distinct language, culture, and identity, which distinguishes them from the prevailing Persian culture in Iran.

During the Safavid period (1501-1722), the Kurds had a significant role in Iran's political and military affairs. Many Kurdish tribes were enlisted in the Safavid army and were used to suppress revolts and maintain law and order in the region. However, their contribution to the Safavid dynasty, the Kurds remained marginalized, with little political power or representation. During the Safavid era, the Kurdish region was divided into several principalities, each led by a local chief or emir. The Safavid rulers initially granted these Kurdish princes' autonomy in exchange for their allegiance, but over time, they sought to centralize power and subjugate the Kurdish chieftains (McDowall, 2004).

In the 17th century, the Safavids launched a series of military campaigns against the Kurdish principalities to weaken their power and assert the central government's authority. These brutal campaigns resulted in significant loss of life and displacement for the Kurdish population. The Qajar dynasty, which succeeded the Safavids in the 18th century, continued the policy of centralization and suppression of Kurdish autonomy. However, the Kurds remained a significant force in the region, with many serving as soldiers in the Qajar army or participating in tribal uprisings against the central government. One of the most potent Kurdish uprisings against the Qajars occurred in the early 19th century, led by a Kurdish chieftain named Simko Shikak. Simko and his followers revolted against Qajar's rule and established a de facto Kurdish state in the northwestern region of Iran. The Qajar army eventually crushed the uprising, and Simko was captured and executed (McDowall, 2004).

In the early 20th century, Iran underwent a period of political and social upheaval, with various groups vying for power and influence. During this time, the Kurdish nationalist movement began to take shape, with Kurdish intellectuals and activists calling for greater autonomy and recognition of Kurdish identity and culture. The Pahlavi dynasty, which came to power in Iran in the 1920s, pursued a policy of modernization and Westernization but also sought to suppress ethnic and cultural diversity within the country. Kurdish nationalist movements were banned, and the Kurdish language and culture were marginalized. In the 1940s and 1950s, Kurdish political groups advocated for Kurdish autonomy and rights within Iran. These parties included the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan. The KDP-I, founded in 1945, initially pursued a peaceful approach to Kurdish rights and autonomy. Still, in the 1960s and 1970s, it became more militant, launching guerrilla attacks against Iranian military and government targets. The Komala Party, founded in 1969, also pursued an armed struggle against the Iranian government (Ashraf, 1993).

Kurdish nationalists believed that the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which destroyed the Pahlavi dynasty and established the Islamic Republic, would grant them greater autonomy and acknowledgment of their rights. However, these hopes were quickly dashed when the new government cracked down on Kurdish political parties and activists. In the 1980s, the Iranian government launched a brutal campaign against the Kurdish insurgency, using military force and political repression to suppress Kurdish autonomy and nationalism. Thousands of Kurds were killed, and many more were imprisoned or forced into exile (Entessar, 2019).

Kurdish political parties and activists remain active, advocating for greater autonomy and recognition of Kurdish identity and culture. However, the Iranian government continues to view Kurdish nationalism as a threat to national unity and

has shown little willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue or compromise with Kurdish groups. From the Safavid Empire to the present-day Islamic Republic, Kurdish people in Iran have faced discrimination, violence, and marginalization (Bayat, 2008).

Kurdish political organizations and activists continue to strive for their rights and autonomy despite these obstacles, demonstrating the persistence of Kurdish nationalism. While progress has been made in some areas, such as the recognition of the Kurdish language in schools and media, much remains to be done to address the systemic discrimination and marginalization of Kurdish people in Iran. International pressure and support for the Kurdish cause in Iran could help to bring about positive change and greater recognition of Kurdish rights and autonomy. However, the region's complex political and social dynamics make it challenging to predict the future of the Kurdish struggle in Iran (Gunes Murat Tezcur, 2019).

Kurdish Population, Culture, and Language

The Kurdish population in Iran is estimated to be between 10-15 million people, which makes them the second-largest ethnic group in the country after Persians (McDowall, 2004). Most Kurds in Iran are Sunni Muslims, with a small minority practising Shia Islam. The Kurdish people have a distinct culture, language, and history and have struggled for decades to gain recognition for their human rights. Kurdish culture is rich and diverse, encompassing music, dance, food, and traditional dress.

The Kurdish people have a long history in Iran, dating back to ancient times. They are believed to have migrated to the region around 2,000 years ago and settled in the mountainous areas of western Iran (Gunter, *The Kurdish Question in Perspective*, 2004). Over time, they developed a unique culture and language that set them apart from other ethnic groups in the region. One of the most important aspects of Kurdish culture is their music. Kurdish music is characterized by its lively rhythms, unique melodies, and poetic lyrics. It often features instruments such as the daf (a type of frame drum), the tanbur (a long-necked lute), and the saz (a stringed instrument). Kurdish music is integral to social and cultural events, such as weddings and religious festivals (Gunter, 2004).

Dance is another important aspect of Kurdish culture. Kurdish dances are usually performed in groups and feature intricate footwork and hand gestures. The most famous Kurdish dance is the halay, often performed at weddings and other celebrations. The halay is a lively and energetic dance accompanied by traditional Kurdish music. The Iranian government has historically viewed the Kurdish population as a threat to national security and has sought to suppress their culture and identity. It included banning the Kurdish language in schools and universities, restricting the use of Kurdish names, and limiting Kurdish cultural expression in the media and public life (Gunter, 2004).

In recent years, however, there have been some positive developments for the Kurdish population in Iran. The government has begun to recognize the Kurdish language and culture, and some Kurdish-language media outlets have been allowed to operate. There has also been a growing interest in Kurdish culture among Iranians, with many attending Kurdish music and dance performances and enjoying Kurdish cuisine.

In short, the Kurdish population in Iran is a significant ethnic group with a rich and diverse culture. Kurdish culture encompasses music, dance, food, and traditional dress and is an integral part of social and cultural life in the region. Even though facing discrimination and oppression, Kurds in Iran have preserved and celebrated their culture, and there are signs of growing recognition and appreciation of Kurdish culture among Iranians.

Kurdish language

Kurdish is an Iranian language spoken by the Kurdish people; an ethnic group indigenous to the Middle East. In Iran, Kurdish is spoken by approximately 10 million people, making it one of the country's largest minority languages. The Kurdish language has a long history in Iran, dating back to ancient times (Hassanpour, 2015).

The Kurdish language in Iran is characterised by its significant dialectal variation. Iran is home to several unique Kurdish dialects, such as Sorani, Kurmanji, and Kalkhori. Sorani, the predominant Kurdish dialect in Iran, serves as the official language of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (Hassanpour, 2015). Due to the significant population of Kurdish speakers in Iran, the Iranian government has consistently oppressed and marginalised the language. For an extended period, the utilisation of Kurdish in both public and private spheres was categorically forbidden, and the instruction of the Kurdish language was restricted in educational institutions. Nevertheless, in recent years, there have been endeavours to encourage the utilisation of Kurdish in Iran, such as the establishment of Kurdish language schools and the publication of Kurdish-language publications and newspapers (Entessar, 2019).

Kurdish speakers in Iran have difficulties due, in part, to the language's lack of standardisation. There is no official Kurdish language standard in Iran, despite the widespread use of Sorani. Because speakers of different dialects may have trouble understanding one another, this can create barriers in the classroom and in everyday conversation. Lack of official recognition and support is another problem for the Kurdish language in Iran. There are still many obstacles to using Kurdish in public life, even though the Islamic Republic of Iran constitution recognises the right of ethnic minorities to use their language in private (Hassanpour, 2015). There are limited prospects for Kurdish speakers to work in government or other official jobs, and there is censorship and other types of repression faced by media sources that are written in Kurdish (Hassanpour, 2015).

Due to the passion and perseverance of Kurdish speakers and activists, the Kurdish language continues to flourish in Iran despite all the challenges. Kurdish speakers have promoted the use of their language and raised awareness of the difficulties affecting their community through grassroots organizing and cultural events (Group, 2021). As the Kurdish language continues to evolve and develop in Iran, it remains an integral part of its cultural and linguistic heritage.

Internal Dynamics of the Kurdish Community in Iran

The Kurdish community in Iran is a distinct ethnolinguistic group with a complex internal dynamic shaped by political, social, and economic factors. Despite their significant presence, the Kurds in Iran face challenges related to governance, identity, and internal divisions. This analysis explores these dynamics, highlighting the political affiliations, social structures, and economic conditions that influence

Kurdish life in Iran. One of the defining aspects of the Kurdish community in Iran is its political diversity. The Kurds have historically been involved in various political movements, ranging from nationalist to leftist and Islamist factions. The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and Komala are the most influential Kurdish political parties, both of which advocate for greater autonomy and rights for Kurds (Gunter, 2020). However, internal divisions between these parties have often weakened Kurdish political aspirations. The Iranian government has also played a role in suppressing Kurdish political activity, with crackdowns on activists and leaders (Yildiz & Taysi, 2018).

Socially, the Kurdish community is structured along tribal, religious, and generational lines. While traditional tribal affiliations remain significant, modernization and urbanization have diluted their influence in recent decades. Nevertheless, tribal loyalties still affect local governance and leadership dynamics (McDowall, 2004). Additionally, religious diversity within the Kurdish population, which includes Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and followers of Yarsanism, adds another layer of complexity. Sunni Kurds, in particular, face discrimination in Shia-majority Iran, which exacerbates ethnic and sectarian tensions (Voller, 2014).

Economically, the Kurdish regions in Iran suffer from systemic underdevelopment. The government has historically neglected Kurdish provinces regarding infrastructure, investment, and employment opportunities. As a result, many Kurds rely on cross-border trade, particularly smuggling goods between Iran and Iraq, as a primary source of income (Bouris & Ahmadi, 2021). However, the Iranian authorities frequently crack down on such activities, citing security concerns. This economic marginalization fuels grievances against the state and contributes to political unrest. Another critical aspect of Kurdish internal dynamics is cultural identity. The Iranian state enforces policies that limit Kurdish cultural expression, including restrictions on Kurdish-language education and media (Hassanpour, 1992). Despite these constraints, Kurdish activists and intellectuals have worked to preserve their language and traditions through underground networks and digital platforms. However, generational differences exist regarding cultural activism, with younger Kurds engaging in more modern forms of resistance, such as social media campaigns, compared to older generations relying on traditional political activism (Sheyholislami, 2012).

The intersection of these political, social, and economic factors creates a multifaceted landscape within the Kurdish community in Iran. While Kurdish political movements continue to seek greater rights, internal divisions, state repression, and economic hardships pose significant challenges. Moreover, shifting regional dynamics, including Iran's geopolitical strategies and relationships with Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey, further influence the situation (Natali, 2005). Understanding these complexities is crucial for grasping the broader implications of Kurdish identity and resistance in Iran.

Kurdish Political Parties in Iran

Kurdish political parties in Iran have a long and complex history. The Kurdish people, in Iran, have long sought greater autonomy and representation in Iranian politics. Over the years, various political parties and organizations have emerged to represent Kurdish interests in Iran. This essay will provide an overview of some of

the most significant Kurdish political parties in Iran, and explore their history, ideology, and impact.

The Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan is among the longest-running and most significant Kurdish political groups in Iran. Since its founding in 1969, Komala has, on multiple occasions, engaged in military combat against the Iranian government. The party's platform includes demands for a socialist and democratic Iran as well as independence for the Kurdish people. Komala is still very much involved in Iranian Kurdish politics, despite the Iranian government's prohibition and suppression (Ashraf, 1993). Among Iran's Kurdish political groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party—Iran (KDP-I) stands out. The KDP-I has been fighting for Iranian Kurdish rights since its founding in 1945. Despite its various iterations, the party's dedication to Kurdish nationalism and the creation of an independent Kurdish entity in Iran has never wavered. The KDP-I has been persecuted and repressed heavily due to its violent battle against the Iranian government (Center, n.d.).

The Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) is another notable Kurdish political party in Iran. Founded in 1981, PAK advocates for Kurdish autonomy and the establishment of a democratic federal system in Iran. The party has also been involved in armed struggle against the Iranian government, and has faced significant repression and Persecution as a result. PAK has been active in Kurdish politics in Iran for decades, and has maintained a strong following among Kurdish youth and intellectuals (Ashraf, 1993).

The Kurdistan Democratic Party - Iran (KDP-IR) is a splinter group from the KDP-I, and was founded in 2006. The KDP-IR is more moderate than its parent organization, and advocates for a federalist system in Iran that recognizes Kurdish autonomy. The party has also sought to distance itself from armed struggle, and has instead focused on nonviolent forms of resistance and activism. The KDP-IR has faced significant challenges in establishing itself as a viable political force in Kurdish politics in Iran, but remains active and influential (Center, n.d.).

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a Kurdish political organisation and militant force that founded in Turkey, but has also been involved in Kurdish politics in Iran. The PKK promotes the idea of Kurdish self-governance and aims to create a socialist and democratic nation in Kurdistan. The party has actively engaged in military conflict against the Turkish government and has been officially labelled as a terrorist organisation by multiple nations, including Iran. Nevertheless, the PKK has managed to sustain a substantial support base among Kurdish youth and intellectuals in Iran. Several Kurdish civil society organisations and advocacy groups are crucial actors in Kurdish politics in Iran, alongside the existing political parties. These encompass organisations that prioritise women's rights, human rights, and cultural preservation, among various other concerns. Although these organisations may not possess the same degree of influence as the major political parties, they have a significant impact on creating Kurdish identity and advocating for Kurdish issues in Iran.

In short, Kurdish political parties in Iran have a long and complex history and have been involved in various forms of struggle for Kurdish autonomy and representation in Iranian politics. While these parties have faced significant repression and Persecution from the Iranian government, they have remained active and influential in Kurdish politics in Iran. As the political landscape in Iran continues to

evolve, it remains to be seen how Kurdish political parties will navigate these changes and continue to advocate for Kurdish rights and autonomy in Iran.

Attitude of the Iranian government toward Kurds

The attitude of the Iranian government towards Kurds has been complex and often contentious throughout the country's modern history. Kurds have historically endured prejudice and marginalisation from the Iranian government, as well as deadly warfare and repression. The history of the Kurdish-Iranian relationship is complex and dates back centuries. The Kurds are an ethnic group with a distinct language and cultural identity spread across several countries in the Middle East, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. In Iran, Kurds are concentrated mainly in the northwest of the country, in the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan (World Directory of Minorities, 1997).

There have been times of cooperation and times of strife in the relationship between the Iranian government and the Kurds. A large number of Kurdish political figures served as ministers and governors under the Qajar era (1785–1925). Nevertheless, the relationship between the Kurds and the Iranian state started to worsen in the early 20th century, when the Pahlavi dynasty rose to power (McDowall, 2004). The founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Shah, sought to eliminate regional and ethnic identities in Iran and consolidate control. Part of this attempt included removing Kurdish leaders from positions of political authority and outlawing the wear and usage of the Kurdish language in public places. During his reign from 1941 to 1979, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—the son of Reza Shah—persisted in this programme of coerced assimilation (McDowall, 2004).

Under Pahlavi's rule, Kurds continued to face discrimination and repression. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Iranian government implemented a policy of "modernization" in the Kurdish regions, which involved forced resettlement, land expropriation, and the suppression of Kurdish cultural practices. Kurdish political groups, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) and the Komala Party, were banned, and their leaders were jailed or executed (McDowall, 2004).

The Islamic Republic and the Kurds

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, which toppled the Pahlavi monarchy and established the Islamic Republic, gave the Kurdish Minority fresh hope. The revolution pledged to establish a more democratic and egalitarian society with more rights for ethnic and religious minorities (Kamali, 2004).

However, these promises were not fulfilled for the Kurdish population. In the early years of the Islamic Republic, the government attempted to reach out to the Kurds, offering them greater political representation and autonomy. The new government even allowed Kurdish language to be taught in schools, which had been banned under the Pahlavi dynasty (World Directory of Minorities, 1997). Although, tensions between the Islamic Republic and Kurdish groups soon emerged. In 1979, Kurdish leaders established the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I), which called for greater autonomy and recognition of Kurdish identity within the Islamic Republic. The Iranian government viewed the KDP-I as a threat to national security. It launched a military offensive against the group in 1979, leading to thousands of Kurds' deaths (Amnesty International, 2017).

The conflict between the Iranian government and Kurdish groups continued throughout the 1980s, with both sides engaging in violent attacks against one another. The government accused the Kurdish groups of seeking to secede from Iran, while the Kurdish groups argued that they were fighting for greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural identity. The conflict reached its peak in 1988 when the Iranian government launched a brutal military campaign against the Kurds, known as the Anfal campaign. The campaign involved the use of chemical weapons and the forced displacement of Kurdish civilians, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds (International, 1999)

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the Iranian government's stance towards the Kurds has become increasingly intricate. The government has taken certain measures to address Kurdish issues, including granting permission for Kurdish language and cultural expression. However, the government has persistently repressed Kurdish political activism and employed military measures against Kurdish groups in situations where they are deemed to pose a potential risk to national security (Entessar, 2014). For example, in the 1990s, the Iranian government cracked down on Kurdish groups that were operating in the country's border regions with Iraq and Turkey. The government accused these groups of supporting Kurdish separatists in Iraq and Turkey and launched military offensives against them. In 1996, the Iranian government launched a major offensive against the KDP-I, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Kurdish fighters and civilians (Watch, n.d.).

More recently, the Iranian government has taken a hard-line approach towards Kurdish political activism. In 2016, the government executed several Kurdish political prisoners, including the leader of the KDP-I, Salah Hassanpour (Watch, Iran:Crackdown on Kurdish Minority, n.d.). The government has also cracked down on Kurdish language media, shutting down several Kurdish-language TV channels and newspapers in recent years. Several factors, including geopolitical considerations, ethnic and cultural tensions, and regional security concerns, influence the Iranian government's attitude towards the Kurds. Iran shares borders with several Kurdish regions in neighbouring countries, including Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, which has led to concerns about Kurdish separatism and the potential for cross-border conflicts (Center, n.d.).

The Iranian government's attitude towards Kurds has been complex and often contentious throughout the country's modern history. Kurds have long faced discrimination and repression, and the relationship between the two groups has been marked by periods of conflict and cooperation. While the Iranian government has made some efforts to address Kurdish grievances, including allowing Kurdish language and cultural expression, it has also used military force against Kurdish groups when they pose a perceived threat to national security. The government's hard-line approach towards Kurdish political activism and its crackdown on Kurdish language media suggest that the relationship between Kurds and the Iranian state remains fraught (Group, 2021).

Violations of human rights in Iran

Although the country's constitution ensures fundamental rights for all its residents, it has faced criticism for its extensive human rights abuses. These transgressions have had an impact on diverse demographics, encompassing women, religious

minorities, and political dissidents. The marginalisation of Kurds in Iran may be traced back to the establishment of the contemporary Iranian nation-state during the early 20th century. In 1908, the Constitutional Revolution established a new political system that sought to centralize power and impose a single Iranian identity on all citizens, including ethnic minorities such as the Kurds (Ashraf, 1993). As a result, the Kurdish language and culture were suppressed, and Kurds were barred from holding positions of power in the government or military. This policy continued under the rule of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), which used force to suppress Kurdish uprisings and marginalized the Kurdish population (McDowall, 2004).

Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Iranian government made some initial steps towards recognizing the rights of ethnic minorities, including the Kurds. In 1980, the new constitution granted official status to Kurdish as a language and recognized the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve their culture and traditions (Watch, 2021). However, these reforms did little to improve the situation for Kurds in Iran, as the government continued to restrict their political participation, limit their access to education and employment, and crack down on Kurdish cultural activities.

One of the most significant human rights issues facing Kurds in Iran is the use of violence by the government to suppress their political and cultural aspirations. In the early 1980s, the Iranian government launched a brutal crackdown on Kurdish political groups that sought greater autonomy or independence for the Kurdish regions of Iran. The government used military force, including airstrikes, to target Kurdish villages and communities suspected of harbouring or supporting Kurdish separatists (Watch, 2021). These attacks often resulted in civilian casualties, and the government carried out arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings of Kurdish activists and civilians. The Iranian government has also used other tactics to suppress Kurdish political and cultural activities, such as censorship, surveillance, and harassment. The government has banned Kurdish-language media, literature, and music and has arrested and imprisoned Kurdish journalists, writers, and artists (Amnesty International, 2017). The government has also imposed restrictions on Kurdish cultural festivals and gatherings and has banned Kurdish political parties and organizations (Entessar, 2019).

In recent years, there have been notable improvements in the position of Kurds in Iran. In 2014, the government enacted legislation permitting the inclusion of Kurdish language instruction in schools. Subsequently, in 2017, the government rescinded the prohibition on Kurdish-language satellite television channels. (Amnesty International, 2017). Nevertheless, the changes that have occurred have been gradual, and Kurds in Iran still have substantial obstacles in achieving their political and cultural entitlements. The primary impediment to enhancing the circumstances for Kurds in Iran is the absence of political determination inside the Iranian government and society. A significant number of Iranians perceive the Kurdish community as a menace to the cohesion and territorial integrity of the nation. There is a prevailing conviction that Kurdish separatists have connections with foreign nations like the United States and Israel (Watch, 2021). The prevailing impression has posed challenges for Kurdish activists and organisations in garnering support from the Iranian population or participating in productive discourse with the administration.

The international community has a crucial responsibility in addressing the human rights challenges that Kurds in Iran are confronting. The United Nations and Amnesty International have extensively documented multiple instances of human rights violations committed against Kurds in Iran. These international organisations have urged the Iranian government to take immediate action in addressing these egregious abuses. Amnesty International released a report documenting the Iranian government's arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings of Kurdish activists and civilians (Amnesty International , 2017). The report called on the Iranian government to respect the rights of Kurds to freedom of expression, association, and assembly and to end the use of violence to suppress Kurdish political and cultural activities.

The international community can employ diplomatic coercion to persuade the Iranian government to enhance the conditions for Kurds in Iran. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in 2020 to express its worry on the human rights conditions in Iran, specifically addressing the mistreatment and aggression experienced by ethnic and religious minority groups. The resolution urged the Iranian government to implement tangible measures to tackle these concerns, such as ceasing violence against minority groups and facilitating more political and cultural involvement of Kurds and other minority communities (United Nations, n.d.).

Kurdish Women in Iran

Kurdish women in Iran face a wide range of challenges and obstacles. They are subjected to both gender-based violence and ethnic discrimination. The patriarchal culture prevalent in Iran, combined with the discrimination against Kurds, has resulted in a double burden for Kurdish women.

One of the main issues that Kurdish women face in Iran is limited access to education. The Iranian government has restricted Kurdish children's access to education by imposing language policies that require education to be taught in Persian instead of Kurdish. This policy has made it difficult for Kurdish women to access education and has resulted in lower literacy rates for Kurdish women compared to other women in Iran (Ozkirimli, 2014). Another issue that Kurdish women face in Iran is limited access to healthcare. The Iranian government has failed to provide adequate healthcare services in Kurdish regions, and the few available health services are of poor quality. The lack of access to healthcare services has resulted in higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity among Kurdish women (Amnesty International , 2017).

In addition, Kurdish women experience gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, rape, and honour killings. These problems are widespread in Iran and are particularly serious in Kurdish areas. Kurdish women are confronted with a notable problem, namely honour killings. These killings target women who are believed to have violated cultural or religious norms, and the perpetrators frequently escape punishment (Amnesty International, 2017). There is a significant lack of representation of Kurdish women in the political and public spheres in Iran. Kurdish women in Iran face limitations on their political engagement and are frequently marginalised from decision-making procedures. The isolation of Kurdish women has led to their underrepresentation in government and public institutions (Yildiz, 2012). Despite the substantial presence of Kurdish women in Iran's population, they are

inadequately represented in political decision-making processes. The absence of representation results in the disregard of their opinions and concerns, leading to the formulation of policies and laws that impact them without their input (United Nations, n.d.).

Finally, Kurdish women in Iran are also subjected to economic marginalization. The economic policies of the Iranian government have resulted in a lack of economic opportunities for Kurds, and Kurdish women are disproportionately affected. They have limited access to employment and face discrimination in the labour market (Ozkirimli, 2014).

Kurdish women in Iran encounter a diverse array of difficulties and barriers. Kurdish women experience both gender-based violence and ethnic discrimination, leading to a dual burden. The Iranian government has not effectively tackled these problems and has implemented measures that limit the ability of Kurdish women to obtain education, healthcare, engage in political activities, and pursue economic possibilities. The Iranian government must promptly and effectively tackle these concerns and ensure that Kurdish women are granted equitable rights and opportunities. The international community should exert pressure on the Iranian government to address these issues and guarantee the protection of Kurdish women's rights.

Children and Human Rights Issues

The treatment of Kurdish children in Iran has long been a concern for human rights organizations. According to Amnesty International, Kurdish children in Iran are subject to discrimination, arbitrary detention, and torture (World Directory of Minorities, 1997). Additionally, Kurdish children are often denied access to education in their native language, further exacerbating their marginalization (Watch, n.d.).

Kurdish children face discrimination in education, with Kurdish-language schools being shut down or not being provided adequate funding. Kurdish students have been denied the opportunity to learn their language and culture, significantly impacting their identity and sense of belonging. Kurdish students have also faced discrimination in university admissions, with quotas limiting the number of Kurdish students accepted into universities.

One particularly concerning issue is the use of the death penalty against Kurdish children in Iran. As per a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, between 2013 and 2020, at least seven individuals of Kurdish descent who were below the age of 18 at the time of their claimed offence were put to death (United Nations, n.d.). This action is in violation of international human rights law, which explicitly forbids the execution of individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of their claimed crime. The treatment of Kurdish children in Iran is a grave human rights concern that demands immediate attention and action from the global community.

Other Serious Challenges

1. *Restrictions on political freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly:* Kurds in Iran are not allowed to form political parties or organizations, and their activities are subject to strict government control. They also face limitations on their freedom of expression and assembly, with

Kurdish publications and broadcasts subject to censorship and repression.

2. *Economic policies used to suppress Kurdish rights:* The Iranian government has failed to allocate sufficient resources to address the economic needs of Kurdish regions, and the Kurdish people have been denied access to economic opportunities and development projects. One example of economic policies used to suppress Kurdish rights is the allocation of oil revenues. Iran is a major oil producer, and oil revenues are a significant source of income for the government. However, Kurdish regions in Iran have not received a fair share of these revenues, and have been denied access to the economic benefits of oil production. Another example is the use of economic sanctions against Kurdish businesses and individuals. The Iranian government has imposed economic sanctions on Kurdish businesses and individuals who are suspected of supporting Kurdish political organizations or activities. It has significantly impacted the Kurdish economy and the livelihoods of Kurdish communities (Watch, 2021).

The Iranian government has also failed to provide sufficient infrastructure and development projects in Kurdish regions. The lack of investment in roads, bridges, schools, and healthcare facilities has resulted in significant social and economic hardship for Kurdish communities. The Iranian government has also used economic policies to restrict the movement of Kurdish people within Iran. Kurds in Iran are subject to restrictions on travel and residency, and are required to obtain permits from the government to travel to certain regions. This has limited the economic opportunities available to Kurds and has resulted in the separation of Kurdish families and communities (Watch, Iran:Events of 2020, 2021). Overall, using economic policies to suppress Kurdish rights in Iran is a significant issue that has profoundly impacted Kurdish communities' economic wellbeing and livelihoods. The Iranian government must address these issues and ensure that Kurds in Iran have equal access to economic opportunities and development projects (United Nations, n.d.).

3. *Targeting of Kurdish political organizations and activists:* Kurdish political parties and organizations have been banned or forced to operate underground, and their members have been subject to arbitrary detention, torture, and execution. The Iranian government has also targeted Kurdish journalists and human rights activists (World Directory of Minorities, 1997).
4. *Forced displacement:* Kurds in Iran have been forcibly displaced from their homes and lands as a result of government policies and military operations. This has disrupted Kurdish communities and caused significant social and economic hardship. According to Amnesty International, "Iran's Kurdish minority continue to face forced displacement as a result of the ongoing armed conflict in the region (Watch, n.d.)." In 2015, the Iranian government launched a military campaign against Kurdish militants in the border region with Iraq. This campaign displaced thousands of Kurds, with many forced to flee their homes and lands due to the fighting and military operations. The Iranian government has employed forced displacement as a means to repress Kurdish political participation. Kurdish political organisations and activists have been specifically singled out by the government, resulting in their members being

subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, and execution (Aso Zangana, 2019). Consequently, a significant number of Kurds have been compelled to evacuate their residences and seek refuge in undisclosed locations. The phenomenon of forced displacement has exerted a substantial influence on the Kurdish communities residing in Iran (Watch, 2021). Kurdish individuals who have been forced to leave their homes have several social and economic obstacles, such as restricted possibilities to receive education, healthcare, and job. They are also often forced to live in overcrowded and inadequate living conditions, and are at risk of exploitation and abuse. The Iranian government is responsible for respecting Kurds' rights in Iran, including their right to live in their homes and lands without fear of forced displacement. The government must also support and assist displaced Kurds to ensure their rights and needs are met. The international community must also address the issue of forced displacement of Kurds in Iran and hold the Iranian government accountable for its actions (Watch, 2021).

5. *Denial of citizenship and civil rights:* Some Kurds in Iran have been denied citizenship and civil rights, and therefore cannot access public services, education, and employment opportunities. This has resulted in a marginalized and disenfranchised Kurdish population in Iran (Watch, 2021).
6. *Environmental degradation:* Kurdish regions in Iran have been subject to environmental degradation, including deforestation and pollution, which has significantly impacted the health and livelihoods of Kurdish communities.
7. *Military operations and violence:* The Iranian government has conducted military operations against Kurdish militants and armed groups, resulting in civilian casualties and the displacement of Kurdish communities. The use of violence and military force has further exacerbated the human rights situation of Kurds in Iran (Aso Zangana, 2019).
8. *Lack of accountability and justice:* Despite the documentation of human rights abuses against Kurds in Iran, there has been a lack of accountability and justice for those responsible. The Iranian government has failed to conduct independent investigations and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The issues facing Kurds in Iran are complex and multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive and sustained response from the Iranian government and the international community.

Conclusion

Kurds are an ethnic minority group in Iran, with a population of approximately 10 million, making up around 12% of the country's total population. Although their significant numbers, Kurds have long faced discrimination and marginalization from the Iranian government, with periods of violent conflict and repression. The human rights situation of the Kurdish people in Iran remains a matter of concern. The Iranian government continues to restrict political freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. The Kurdish people face discrimination in education, employment, and access to public

services. They are also subject to arbitrary detention, torture, and execution. The Iranian government has been accused of using extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and collective punishment against Kurdish communities.

The Iranian government has also used economic policies to suppress Kurdish rights. The Kurdish regions in Iran are among the poorest in the country, with high levels of unemployment, poverty, and underdevelopment. The Iranian government has failed to allocate sufficient resources to address these issues, and the Kurdish people have been denied access to economic opportunities and development projects. The Iranian government has also targeted Kurdish political organizations and activists and restricted the use of the Kurdish language and culture. The international community has called on the Iranian government to respect the Kurdish people's rights and end human rights abuses against them.

In conclusion, the Iranian government's attitude towards Kurds has been complex and often contentious throughout the country's modern history. Kurds have long faced discrimination and repression, and the relationship between the two groups has been marked by periods of conflict and cooperation.

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