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The Jangali Movement and How Its Themes Persist in Protests Under the Islamic Republic

SAM ATABAY BIDGOLI*

Abstract

Thanks to the Jangali Movement in the early decades of the 20th century, the northern province of Gilan in Iran was able to successfully establish a system of government that served the working-class population of the region. Although short-lived, this movement was a product of years of extreme exploitation of the labor, resources, and capital by both the national government and the global hegemonic powers of the era. The movement brought together an incredibly diverse coalition of working-class individuals who wanted to create a more equitable society. Under the current Islamic Republic of Iran, there have been several large-scale protests that have been triggered by similarly dire economic conditions. Although these recent protests have yet to bring about significant lasting change, the proliferation of each subsequent protest shows that the country is ripe for a serious restructuring of society, akin to the Jangali Movement that occurred a century prior, to focus more on the struggling working class population in Iran.

I. Introduction

The Jangali Movement was a pivotal movement in Iran’s history. It created the blueprint for a working-class movement striving to create a more idealistic and equitable Iran. Since the 1979 Revolution, there have been several attempts to mobilize against the current authoritative regime, namely the Green Movement and the recent Gas Price Protests. Both movements independently achieved several conditions necessary for a successful uprising against the Islamic Republic. In order to move towards an Iran that works for today’s working class, a movement would have to emulate many of the elements of the Jangali Movement, which the Green Movement and the Gas Price Protests each partially achieved.
II. Part 1: The Jangali Movement

A. A Brief History

The Persian Constitutional Revolution that took place from 1906 until 1911 resulted in the ratification of Iran’s first constitution, one of the first in the Middle East.\(^1\) However, there was major discontent with the ratified constitution amongst the working class, because it left a monarchy in place who for years had “granted special privileges and consequent control of the Iranian economy to British and Russian companies and envoys, often at the expense of the local Iranian merchants and artisans.”\(^2\) Furthermore, the constitution failed to curb the continued influence of global hegemonic power in Iran.\(^3\) This led to the birth of the Jangali Movement in the northern Iranian province of Gilan in 1915,\(^4\) which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran from 1920 to 1921.\(^5\) The Jangali Movement would come to “[epitomize] the tragic ideological drifting and factional conflicts of postconstitutional Iran.”\(^6\)

The Jangalis were primarily a group of working-class individuals comprised of “radical intellectuals, tribal leaders, merchants, as well as artisans, peasants, and small [landowners].”\(^7\) They were a ragtag group of idealists that “knew almost nothing about politics or military strategy” and “pledged not to cut their hair or shave their beards until all foreigners, Russian and British occupiers especially, left the country.”\(^8\) The Jangalis became one of the first “Third World guerrilla movements of the twentieth century.”

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\(^2\) Id. at 45.


\(^4\) See Abdy Javadi-Zadeh, *Iranian Ironicity*, 92 n.239 (2011). “Jangali” translates to “people of the jungle,” which is a reference to the guerrilla warfare tactics that were utilized in the lush and dense forests of region. Id. The movement is also commonly referred to as the “Jangal Movement.” Id. This paper will use the term, “Jangali Movement,” to focus on the individuals of the movement instead of the movement’s geography.


\(^6\) Amanat, supra note 3, at 407.


\(^8\) Id.
century fighting for national liberation.” Their main goals were to achieve national independence from the Russian and British Empires and to end the government corruption in Tehran that had plagued the country for many years.

As the Russians began their retreat from the region in the lead up to the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Jangalis were able to establish political and military control of Gilan. The Jangalis organized administrative agencies, built roads, set up medical clinics, and taxed imports that entered through Gilan’s ports on the Caspian Sea. The Jangalis “saw themselves as the continuers of the unfinished Constitutional Revolution” from years earlier as they addressed the numerous long neglected needs of the working class in Gilan.

In May of 1920, Mirza Kuchik Khan, the de facto leader of the Jangali Movement, formally established the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran. A few months later in July, control of Gilan shifted from Mirza Kuchik Khan and his socialist supporters to a pro-communist faction of the Jangali Movement. This new government enforced a “stringent tax on the wealthy” and “proposed radical social changes such as greater rights for women.” They even circulated rumors that “wealthy landowners who did not surrender their property would be buried alive.” The Jangalis ultimately lost control of Rasht, the capital and largest city in Gilan, in September 1921 when Reza Khan Pahlavi sent in forces to dismantle the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran.

B. The Legacy of the Jangali Movement

The Jangali Movement was never intended to become a separatist movement from Iran because the Jangalis were extremely nationalistic. To this day, Iranians, particularly those from Gilan, fondly remember Mirza Kuchik Khan as a heroic revolutionary and socialist who looked out for the working class in order to create a better Iran. He came to “characterize all
the hopes and despair of nonelite Iranians” of the era.20 Even the current government of Iran, the Islamic Republic, has propagated Mirza Kuchik Khan’s story to show how he was “a forerunner of the Islamic Republic,” because he was an avowed nationalist and a devout practitioner of Islam.21

Instead, the Jangali Movement was the culmination of a series of protests and movements which had been occurring across the country, but were particularly concentrated in Gilan leading up to the Constitutional Revolution.22 When the Constitutional Revolution fell short of meeting the needs of everyday Iranians, the wheels of the Jangali Movement were set into motion. The constitution had failed to expel the influence of foreign nations in Iranian politics and put an end to their exploitation of Iranian people and resources. Additionally, the constitution left the monarchy in place, preventing Iran from becoming a true democracy and facilitating the “return to power of the old elites joined by wealthy provincial landowners.”23 The ultimate irony in the saga of the Jangali Movement and the short-lived Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran is that they were ultimately crushed by a monarch who rose to power “through a British-Sponsored coup”—a combination of the things their movement was against.24

C. The State of the Iranian Economy in the 19th Century

Throughout the 19th century, the British and Russian exploitation of Iranians and their land destroyed the Iranian economy, ravaging the province of Gilan in particular. British and Russian banks began opening financial institutions across Iran in order to expedite and facilitate trade due to the increasing demand for products from Iran.25 Gilan and the Caspian region in northern Iran likely saw the most commercialization in the country thanks to its uniquely wet climate and fertile land.26

Gilan’s economy has traditionally been based primarily on agriculture resulting in a large working-class population. However, the level of foreign demand for its agricultural goods led to the over-extraction of fields and was destroying the livelihoods of the people of Gilan. As a result, the working class “saw their standard of living inexorably decline” as they were pressured

20. AMANAT, supra note 3, at 407.
23. AMANAT, supra note 3, at 408.
25. Afary, supra note 22, at 140.
26. Id. at 148.
to produce more “export crops” to send abroad, instead of the “food staples” they needed to survive.27

Additionally, monopolies on crops, such as olives, were granted to corporations that were based in other countries by the central government in Tehran, which was working in conjunction with the Russians and the British.28 Consequently, not only were the global hegemonic powers controlling what people in Iran were producing, they were limiting who would be able to profit off that production. The peasants and working class were essentially locked into their place in society and any surplus they created was promptly extracted by external forces.

Furthermore, the proliferation of trade with Europe hurt the artisans of Iran because their “handicrafts were no match for the less expensive, mass-produced merchandise from abroad.”29 Iranian merchants “watched while their control of the export trade and some internal markets fell into Western hands.”30 These smaller traders and artisans simply “suffered the collapse of their livelihood.”31 The effects were further compounded by the increasing costs of food and rapidly rising levels of unemployment.32 The failure of the Iranian government to protect its people, instead choosing to get in bed with the imperialistic powerhouses of the time, led to the destruction of the livelihoods of the working class and the peasants across the country, but particularly in Gilan.

As a result, the Jangalis desperately wanted autonomy from the increasing influence of the global hegemonic powers within Iran. By the end of the 19th century, growing economic ties with the West resulted in the “destitution” of the working class.33 Fortunately, Gilan had a prominent history of trade union activity and a “tradition of alliance among the craftsmen, the urban poor, and the poor peasants.”34 This network of organization provided the foundation for what would ultimately become the Jangali Movement.

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29. Id. at 140.
30. Id. at 140.
31. Id. at 140.
32. Id. at 140.
33. Id. at 140.
34. Id. at 137.
D. Land Disputes in 19th Century Iran

Furthermore, although the Constitutional Convention “marked the end of the Qajar absolute monarchy,” the Jangalis were disappointed that the monarchy remained and retained a significant amount of power in the new government, ultimately at the cost of working-class people’s interest.35 There were many reasons for the discontent regarding the monarchy and its neglect of working-class Iranians. However, one of the primary sources of frustration, particularly in Gilan, was the seizure of land by the government and its subsequent sale to private landowners.36

Traditionally, land was organized into “village settlements” in Iran where “community members often held equal property rights.”37 This arrangement had provided “a relatively high standard of living” for peasants in the Iran during the 19th century.38 Peasants typically had “a comfortable residence, sufficient clothing, and a good supply of food, including fruit and sometimes meat.”39 However, this “increase in landlord holdings” and privatization of the commons directly resulted in a “worsening of the living standards of the peasants.”40

Furthermore, not only had the peasants and the working class lost control of the lands that they lived on, worked on, and profited from, but they also lost their informal system of settling disputes within their respective communities. Traditionally, an elder within the village mediated conflicts and settled disputes that arose within the commons, but that role was swiftly replaced by the landlords who had only monetary interests at stake in any disputes.41 While in the past “a peasant’s right to his land was guarded stringently by the village community,” now the landlords were making decisions with only their profits in mind.42

Even before the nascence of the Jangali Movement, this new arrangement was deeply unpopular with the working class. In addition to all the aforementioned economic struggles, landlords had increased taxes on the working class and increasingly passed the costs of production onto workers.43 British and Russian troops used tens of thousands of soldiers to

37. Afary, supra note 22, at 139 (emphasis added).
38. Id.
39. Id.
40. Id.
41. Id.
42. Id.
43. Foran, supra note 27, at 800.
protect landlords in order to maintain stability in the country to ensure the continued production of the valuable export crops.\textsuperscript{44}

By the mid-to-late 19th century, peasants in Rasht eventually had organized several strikes and demanded that the landlords be expelled.\textsuperscript{45} They began “[refusing] to continue paying their landlords’ rents.”\textsuperscript{46} Even with British and Russian troops on their side, the landlords felt that they had to create their own council “to break the peasants’ resistance.”\textsuperscript{47}

These tensions between landowners and peasants persisted until the Jangali Movement blossomed in 1915. The landlords of Gilan “resented the extensive support the [Jangali] fighters received from the Gilani peasants.”\textsuperscript{48} Meanwhile, with the bad blood between the peasants and the landlords still fresh, Mirza Kuchik Khan and the armed Jangalis financed their movement in large part “by extorting ransom from Gilan landowners.”\textsuperscript{49}

\section*{E. Takeaways from the Jangali Movement}

The Jangali Movement was a product of the events that were occurring within Iran that were simultaneously being shaped by forces from outside the county. The continued meddling in Iranian affairs by the British and Russians stunted Iran’s ability to develop as a country during a pivotal moment in its history. Its economy was ravaged and its people were exploited. Decisions were made by the Iranian government, at the expense of the working class, and the beneficiaries were thousands of miles away. The “process of class formation” in 19th-century Iran by the British and the Russians was solely driven by capitalistic intentions. This was no accident: “tribalism was the \textit{modus operandi} of a globalized capitalistic modernity that had invented and designated ‘Europe’ as its epicenter.”\textsuperscript{50} Consequently, a direct byproduct of the hegemonic powers creating such clear discrepancies between “the disenfranchised and the beneficiaries” resulted in the “the invention of the Third World.”\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Id. at 813-14.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Afary, \textit{supra} note 22, at 150.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Id. at 152.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Afary, \textit{supra} note 7, at 12.
\item \textsuperscript{49} LENCZOWSKI, \textit{supra} note 19, at 55.
\item \textsuperscript{50} DABASHI, \textit{supra} note 35, at 79.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Id.
\end{itemize}
III. Part 2: Major Protests Under the Islamic Republic

A. A Brief History

Since the 1979 Revolution, there have been periodic uprisings throughout the country against the authoritarian regime, due to its brutal policies and disregard for the Iranian people. However, there have been three major, nationwide protests that have all occurred within the past decade: the Iranian Green Movement (“Green Movement”) that started in 2009, the protests in 2017-2018, and the “Gas Price Protests”52 in 2019. The Green Movement was the first protest of its scale since the inception of the Islamic Republic, and it was born out of a legitimate challenge to the democratic process. Meanwhile, the Gas Price Protests resulted in an unprecedented crackdown from the regime because of the burgeoning movement powered by the working class.

The protests in 2017-2018 were significant in their own right and resulted in over 20 people being slaughtered by the regime. Furthermore, these protests garnered widespread support from the working class demanding better working conditions for ethnic minorities, protection against discrimination for women, and the end of the compulsory hijab. Unfortunately, these demonstrations were never able to materialize past large-scale protests into a sustained movement, like the Green Movement and the Gas Price Protests. These latter two movements bear the greatest resemblance to the Jangali Movement.

B. The Iranian Green Movement

The Green Movement53 was born out of a series of protests and demonstrations that broke out after there was “obvious vote rigging” in the 2009 Iranian Presidential Election.54 As the results of the election started coming in, a couple provinces recorded “a turnout of more than 100%,” while four others reported a turnout of over 90%.55 Even if these falsified numbers were set aside, the official results put out by the government were
still essentially a statistical impossibility. Furthermore, the election was called within two hours in favor of the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—preferred candidate of the Supreme Leader—despite the fact that the entire country uses paper ballots that are required to be counted by hand.\textsuperscript{56} Consequently, protests broke out across the country within hours and continued to grow in size.\textsuperscript{57} These protests continued throughout the rest of the year and into 2010, growing into a sustained movement.\textsuperscript{58} Support for the movement was also subsequently rekindled in 2011 and 2012 during the Arab Spring.\textsuperscript{59}

These protests were notable for the participation of large numbers of “women, young people, intellectuals” and even “members of the moderate clerical establishment.”\textsuperscript{60} This was not the first time that women were highly involved in an Iranian movement,\textsuperscript{61} but it has become less common since the Islamic Republic was established due to the restrictions it has put in place. Additionally, the involvement of the clerical establishment in the protests was simply unprecedented. It signaled the first break in the unified front that the religious elite have presented, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Although this widespread involvement by numerous different groups resulted in the largest demonstrations since the 1979 Revolution, the movement was primarily classified by and remembered for the particularly strong turnout and active involvement of the “urban middle class.”\textsuperscript{62}

Although the Iranian economy has been particularly under pressure from international sanctions and from neglect by the central government in the past decades, the working class has primarily had to shoulder that financial burden. However, the government’s shameless disregard of democracy was an attack on the aspirational ideals of the educated middle class. There is no dispute that Iran’s democracy is extremely flawed. This is most notably due to both the simple lack of transparency in Iranian politics and the very structure of Iranian elections where the Guardian Council, a constitutionally created body of religious elite, reserve supreme veto power over any candidate who is elected to public office. Nevertheless, such a blatant and globally undisputed rigging of an election was an affront to the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Worth & Fathi, \textit{supra} note 56.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Foran, \textit{supra} note 27, at 804.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} AMANAT, \textit{supra} note 3, at 894.
\end{itemize}
educated middle class and resulted in several years of unrest throughout the country.

Ultimately, the government’s response to all these protests was swift and unprecedented in Iran. There were “subsequent clampdowns on the rallies, mass arrests of protesters, barbaric torture in detention centers, and secret murders of detainees.”63 Furthermore, the government held “mass trials in front of television cameras.”64 The government in Tehran wanted to assure that they would not be challenged by such a unified group of Iranians again by instilling fear in society.

In the end, although unsuccessful in their goal, “the Green Movement . . . above all demonstrated popular demand for liberalization, democracy, and accountability.”65 It came to symbolize the first time, since the 1979 Revolution, that the Iranian people came together and spoke out against the government on such a unified front. The Green Movement was recognized worldwide and the global community was sympathetic with the Iranians’ calls for, above all else, free, fair, and transparent elections. The Green Movement paved the way for future demonstrations and, at the very least, demonstrated the feasibility of organizing at such a large scale under the Islamic Republic. It is no coincidence that since 2009, the number and size of nationwide protests has increased, despite the current regime’s willingness to crackdown and use increasingly violent measures against Iranians to ensure that the regime’s power and authority remains unchallenged.

C. The Gas Price Protests of 2019

When the clock struck midnight on Friday, November 15, 2019, the Iranian government “abruptly” doubled fuel prices across the country and “imposed a strict rationing system” without any prior warning to the Iranian people.66 As a result, “within hours,” Iranians across the country had flooded the streets in protest.67 By the end of the weekend, “outraged demonstrators in cities large and small were calling for an end to the Islamic Republic’s government and the downfall of its leaders.”68

63. Id. at 895.
64. Id.
65. Id.
67. Id.
The price hikes on gasoline alone would have been extremely onerous on the working class in Iran. However, when combined with the sanctions that United States President Donald Trump had reinstated on Iran a couple years earlier, it dealt a devastating blow to the working class of the country. The sanctions were designed to bring Iranian leaders to the table to negotiate a new nuclear deal following the United States’ withdrawal from the previous one. However, all the costs resulting from the sanctions have primarily impacted low- and middle-income Iranians, because the regime simply passes off any costs onto the people, while the governing elite continue to live extravagant lifestyles. In recent years, this has put an unsurmountable strain on the lives of everyday Iranians.

Consequently, “most of the nationwide unrest seemed concentrated in neighborhoods and cities populated by low-income and working-class families.”69 These were the people who were already suffering most from Iran’s struggling economy and now had to deal with the additional burden of higher gas prices. Gas is normally relatively cheap in Iran, thanks to government subsidization, so almost everyone relies heavily on their cars.70 The subsidies are particularly crucial to students and the working class, because it allowed them to use their cars to make money by serving as a messenger or driver, essentially creating a “micro-economy” around the cheap gas.71 By doubling the price of fuel, the Islamic Republic essentially targeted the one lifeline many Iranians had to keep their lives afloat.

Furthermore, a great number of these protests occurred within working-class cities and towns, many of which have historically religious and conservative populations, “suggesting [that] this was an uprising born in the historically loyal power base of Iran’s post-revolutionary hierarchy.”72 There are some clear parallels to when a handful of religious elite participated in the Green Movement and broke the typically unified front that the religious elite present in Iran. However, this movement was distinct because it was a product of the discontent that the religious working class were feeling, not the religious elite. If the Islamic Republic is to be removed, through a domestic movement without any intervention from Western democracies, a critical mass of conservative religious Iranians must withdraw their ardent support for the current regime. This coalition is much more likely to be formed with the working-class religious Iranians, as opposed to the religious elite who likely are much more content with their place in Iranian society.

69. Id.
71. Id.
72. Fassihi & Gladstone, supra note 68.
The fact that these crucial populations, that would be necessary for a future revolution, mobilized and turned out for the Gas Price Protests definitely presented a red flag for the regime and they made sure to respond accordingly. Although the current regime has not shied away from using violence against Iranians in the past, the government’s “use of lethal force against people throughout the country [in response to the protests was] unprecedented, even for the Islamic Republic and its record of violence.”

There are still no exact numbers regarding total fatalities, and there likely will not be one in the future if the Iranian government has its way. Nevertheless, the roughly two weeks of protests quickly became the “deadliest political unrest since the Islamic Revolution 40 years ago.”

As soon as protests started breaking out, the regime promptly called on military and police forces to respond and they “[opened] fire on unarmed protesters” and “shot without warning.” They even targeted some of the “poorest suburbs” with tanks. The Iranian government claimed that “enemy cells” were firing at Iranian militias however this version of the story is highly disputed and likely false. Although the regime finally acknowledged killing civilians, they referred to them as “armed terrorists” and claimed that they were “hiding in the marshes and shooting at security forces.” The regime made sure to send a clear message that uprisings in the future will be responded to with a similar amount of force.

The estimated fatalities according to “international rights organizations, opposition groups and local journalists” ranges from 180 to 450 people dead, within the four days following the increase in the price of gasoline. The State Department of the United States of America reported that the total number is “around 1,000.” However, the most recent estimate, based on numbers provided by three Iranian interior ministry officials to Reuters, has the total number dead at 1,500—“significantly higher than figures from international human rights groups and the United States.” By contrast, the

73. Id.
74. Id.
75. Id.
76. Id.
78. Id.
79. Id.
most liberal estimates of people killed by the current regime in any previous protest or uprising had not passed 100 people.

Furthermore, at least 2,000 have been wounded and over 7,000 have been detained.82 The regime continues to dispute the accuracy of these numbers.83 However, it will likely be impossible to ever obtain an accurate count, because the Islamic Republic is highly unlikely to disclose the precise number of individuals killed. Additionally, numerous bodies of murdered Iranian have been taken by the government and remain missing.84 The handful of families who were given bodies of their loved ones back had to agree not to speak to media or hold any funerals.85 The regime is doing everything it can to make sure that the global community does not find out the true extent of the atrocities that they committed. There is already a report of one family being arrested for calling for “a nationwide day of mourning” after their family member was killed.86

There have been hundreds of protests of various sizes throughout the country in the subsequent weeks following the initial wave of protests,87 resulting in hundreds of more murders by the government.88 Future demonstrations will be a sign of progress for protesters, however they will also mean that the total number of fatalities will continue to grow as the government’s crackdowns continue to intensify and the brutality of the tactics they use becomes worse.

Another element that made this series of protests distinct from previous uprisings in Iran, other than the number of people involved and the severity of the subsequent crackdown, was the government’s step to essentially disconnect the entire country from the internet.89 The “blanket of silence that fell over the country with the internet shutdown” was particularly notable because of the large population of Iranian émigrés across the world.90 Iranians increasingly rely on messaging applications and social media to

82. Fassihi & Specia, supra note 77.
83. Id.
84. Fassihi & Gladstone, supra note 68.
85. Id.
90. Id.
keep in touch with their relatives all around the world who they otherwise would have no way to communicate with. Nevertheless, the Iranian government decided to “completely [deny] access” to the internet for civilians while using “their own intranet . . . to keep vital infrastructures running like hospitals and banks.”91 As a result, Iranians were blocked out from the rest of the world. Not only were people unable to communicate with each other, but the regime was able to have free reign to violently silence protesters without fear of video and images being distributed over the internet and across the world. Eventually, the internet was restored and information and images of the violence began to leak out, but ultimately, the internet blackout effectively served its function. As of the publication of this paper, the Islamic Republic has yet to face any serious international punishment or repercussion as a result of these barbaric measures.

Partial and complete internet shutoffs are becoming more commonplace under authoritarian governments as the severity of censors on specific websites and applications increases and the throttling of national internet speeds occurs more frequently.92 In 2019, people in numerous countries including Venezuela, Sudan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Benin, Malawi, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Chad, Algeria, Ethiopia, Mauritania, and Turkey all experience some degree of an internet shutoff in response to political unrest.93 Governments take these actions under the guise of “public safety,” which is “always a convenient excuse” because many countries have written into law that the government has the power to “cut off communication” in “situations of public emergency or public safety concerns.”94

Iran had instituted a partial internet shutoff during the 2017-2018 protests, primarily targeting all social media outlets, but it was not as severe as the internet shutoff caused by the Gas Price Protests. NetBlocks, an organization that tracks internet access across the globe, described this as the “most severe disconnection” that they had ever tracked “in terms of its technical complexity and breadth.”95 The Iranian government will likely not hesitate to digitally silence its 80 million people again because of how efficiently it stifles any potential social movement. Not only does disabling

91. Id.
93. Id.
the internet prevent the rest of the world from seeing the atrocities being committed by the current regime during times of civil unrest and revolt, but it also prevents Iranians from organizing and coordinating demonstrations.

Iran has increasingly displayed an affinity towards taking more control of its people’s use and access to the internet than it has in the past. Under normal circumstances Iranians, unlike people under some other authoritarian regimes, are actually able to access many websites and social media outlets, although with a significant amount of lag at times. However, Iran, amongst other countries, has shown interest in “creating different levels of access to the internet.”96 Access would likely be partitioned by “social class” or “occupational needs.”97 This will certainly be considered more seriously by the government after these recent protests, both as a retaliatory measure in response to these protests but also as a preventative measure to decrease the likelihood of organized uprisings in the future. Under this model, the regime can prevent the working class’ access to adequate internet to prevent future organization of mass movements, similar to the ones that were fueled by the working class during the Gas Price Protests. At the same time, they would be able to provide adequate internet to Iranians in the middle and upper classes to keep them satiated and content. Ultimately, the working class is going to have the cards stacked against them more so than ever before when the next nationwide movement against the Islamic Republic occurs.

IV. Conclusion

The Green Movement and the Gas Price Protests (as events currently stand) fell short of reaching their desired goals. However, moving forward, both will serve as extremely valuable lessons for future movements in Iran.

For example, “superficially, the Green Movement was just questioning the accuracy of the electoral vote-count,” however “at a deeper and more troubling level for the regime, it was giving air and momentum to something more deeply repressed.”98 It was the first time a movement on that scale had broken out since 1979, which showed that “the defiant spirit of Iran’s cosmopolitan culture . . . [had] resurfaced in triumph.”99 Consequently, even though the Islamic Republic has been in power for several decades, it had

97. Id.
98. DABASHI, supra note 35, at 6.
99. Id.
“failed to manufacture a *Homo Islamicus*.” This is particularly notable because even in places like modern-day Russia, decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, *Homo Sovieticus* is “alive and well.” The presence of the desire to push back against the regime despite decades of their oppressive rule was an encouraging development in the wake of the Green Movement.

Furthermore, the murder of Neda, a young female protester during the Green Movement, became one of “the most widely witnessed deaths in human history.” The deliberate and merciless murder of a peaceful protester has come to symbolize the ruthlessness of the current regime. The “massive social uprising” that followed after the video went viral “shook the Islamic regime to its foundations.” The entire global community was put on notice that the Islamic Republic has no regard for the lives of its own people.

The recent Gas Price Protests are more reminiscent of the Jangali Movement thanks to the widespread organization of the working class. Unfortunately, these protests never found a leader, like the Jangalics, so protests were not organized and coordinated. The Green Movement had a de facto leader in Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the candidate who had lost in the election. Even though he was promptly placed under house arrest by the government, his guidance and leadership allowed the people to better organize and to continue protests over the course of several years. It remains to be seen whether the Gas Price Protest will grow into a full-scale movement or will simply be remembered for being a short period of bloody unrest. Although the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani by the United States seemed to disrupt the momentum from the protests by bringing portions of the Iranian population together to mourn, the regime’s awful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has frustrated Iranians once again.

Nevertheless, the ability of the Gas Price Protests to unite the working class in Iran will be tremendously helpful for movements going forward. Although the organization of the middle class during the Green Movement was essential for laying the groundwork for future movements, organizing the large number of working-class individuals in Iran will be invaluable in any future protests. The Gas Price Protests featured many “unemployed and

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100. *Id.* This concept refers to the practice of a national government engineering and broadcasting a representation of what a generic/model person in that society should look and act like by prioritizing certain values/beliefs and promoting certain traits as superior. *Id.*


103. DABASHI, *supra* note 35, at 141.

104. *Id.*
student youths, including many women” whose energy and voices will be crucial going forward.\textsuperscript{105}

Furthermore, there were significant changes in the country between the Green Movement and the Gas Price Protests, particularly with respect to the state of the economy in Iran and the willingness of the regime to violently and ruthlessly fightback against protesters. The sanctions that have been placed on Iran over the past decade have destroyed its economy, which had already been weakened by the “billions of dollars” the government has spent on its “nuclear and missile programs” and its “political intervention[s] in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.”\textsuperscript{106} Even though food, medicine, and other essentials are not included in the sanctions, “Iran’s [entire] banking system is included,” meaning that these necessities effectively cannot be purchased.

As a result, while the middle class were “demanding reforms within the existing system” in 2009, the 2017-2018 protests and the Gas Price Protests “have been revolts of the working class, especially unemployed youths,” and women thanks to the rapidly increasing levels of socioeconomic inequality in the country.\textsuperscript{107} The working class want a new system now, more than ever. Furthermore, this “deepening and diversification of protests since 2009” has led to the unrest penetrating the most rural communities, not just populated urban centers.\textsuperscript{108} Most notably, the working class, who have been in the frontlines of the 2017-2018 protests and the Gas Price Protests, “have gone beyond the demand for reform and want the overthrow of the regime.”\textsuperscript{109}

Ultimately, the Iranian people, particularly the working class have the burden of mobilizing citizens against the central government. The country has become an “inefficient, militarized, theocratic state-capitalist regime in which over 80 percent of the capital is owned and managed by the IRGC or its contractors.”\textsuperscript{110} Similar to the Jangalis who strived for a more idealistic Iran with a transparent and accountable central government that had the interests of the working class in mind, the modern working class in Iran have the same desire.


\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{110} Profile: Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, BBC (Jan. 3, 2020), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47852262. The “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps” is a branch of the military that the Supreme Leader utilizes to protect the country’s Islamic political system. \textit{Id.} They are frequently the forces that are called in to break up protests and ensure the Islamic laws of the nation are being followed. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Id.}
What remains to be seen is whether the regime continues to violently break up protests and movements by killing hundreds, if not thousands, of people. Frankly, the regime, devoid of any sympathy or compassion, does not have any motivation to do otherwise. Consequently, if the next major movement against the Islamic Republic wants to be successful, it will either need extremely widespread popular support to overwhelm the regime’s inevitable violent response, or some sort of intervention from abroad.

Additionally, the question of how the regime will wield control of the internet looms large. There are already reports that the regime has been blocking internet access ahead of scheduled subsequent protests.112 Internet access is essential to coordinate, organize, and broadcast what the regime is doing inside Iran. Without internet access, any future movement will struggle to be successful because it will be difficult to quickly mobilize people to streets. Alternatively, it is ineffective to organize protests too far in advance when the internet access is adequate because the regime would have significant time to plan a response.

Nevertheless, a more idealistic, democratic, and equitable Iran will continue to be sought after by Iranians, particularly the working class, despite the dire conditions they face. As of the publication of this paper, it remains to be seen whether the Gas Price Protests will develop into a full sustained movement like the Green Movement. Signs seemed to point in the direction that it might become a full movement thanks to the popular national support it has gathered and the continuation of demonstrations over a month after the initial gas price hike. However, it is unclear how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will shape Iran’s future and effect the momentum of these protests. The regime botched the response to the pandemic, killing tens of thousands of Iranians, so the regime will likely be faced with a rekindling of protests and demonstrations akin to the level of outrage there was during the Gas Price Protests.

One thing that is crystal clear is that the people have shown that they want change. It is undisputed that the Islamic Republic has continued to put the needs and desires of the religious ruling elite ahead of the needs and desires of everyday Iranians. Once again, Iran is at a point in its history where the Iranian government is making decisions without the Iranian people in mind. Thousands of lives have already been lost in the effort to push back against the current regime in favor of a more idealistic and democratic Iran that has an accountable and transparent government. The struggle will continue, but the people have definitely showed their will to fight.