Online Protests Erupt In Iran After Arrest Of Teenager For Social Media Posts

July 10, 2018

By Shannon Van Sant

NPR

<https://www.npr.org/2018/07/10/627840241/online-protests-erupt-in-iran-after-arrest-of-teenager-for-social-media-posts>

Iranians are protesting and mocking clerical rulers on social media after the arrest of a teenage girl for posting videos of herself dancing on Instagram.[Maedeh Hojabri](https://www.instagram.com/mahimaedeh_officiall/)currently has more than 11,000 followers and had uploaded dozens clips in which she is dancing to Western and Iranian music.

Islamic sharia law in Iran has strict requirements for women in public: they are required to wear headscarves and dancing is banned. Instagram, however, has blurred the lines between public and private spheres in the country. The social media site is one of the only Western social media outlets allowed — Facebook and Twitter are blocked.

[The New York Times reports an obscured video](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/09/world/middleeast/irans-instagram-dancer-teen.html) of Hojabri appeared on a state television show called "Wrong Path," in which she sobbed as she said dancing is a crime in Iran and that her family was unaware that she was posting videos to social media.

Iranian authorities may have intended her arrest as a warning to the public, but it has also inspired an outpouring of support from Iranians, many of whom use the hashtag, #dancingisnotacrime. Women posted videos of themselves dancing, or wrote messages in support of Hojabri. Some posted messages to social media from outside the country; others used VPNs and other software to access Twitter from inside Iran.

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](https://support.twitter.com/articles/20175256)

*The Times* reported on the thousands of online protests: "The criticism was sharp and bold. 'In this land corruption, rape or being a big thief, animal or child abuser, not having any dignity, is not a crime,' Roya Mirelmi, an actress, wrote under a picture she posted of Ms. Hojabri that got 14,133 likes. 'But in my motherland, having a beautiful smile, being happy and feeling good is not only a crime but a cardinal sin.'"

The criticism of Iran's government [follows demonstrations over the economy](https://www.npr.org/2018/06/26/623451381/thousands-of-iranians-protest-falling-value-of-the-rial), which have spread through many parts of the country. Iran's elected President Hassan Rouhani, who came to power in 2013, has promised to liberalize Iran. He has [defended the right to protest](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42531165), [the use of social media and messaging apps](https://www.ft.com/content/14da685c-4d24-11e8-97e4-13afc22d86d4), and tried to increase Internet speeds to allow for easier video streaming.

Rouhani faces opposition from Iran's [hardliners though, who control the country's judiciary](https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-06-29/irans-rulers-face-discontent-as-us-pressure-mounts). *The Times* reports authorities have said they may soon ban Instagram, and announced that 51,000 Instagram pages are under surveillance for vulgar and inappropriate videos.

*The Times* quoted a hard-line analyst in Iran, Hamidreza Taraghi: "Instagram started out as an innocent tool, available on the internet, where people would upload photos and write some words. But the Westerners behind it gradually turned Instagram into a mischievous tool for dangerous subversive actions against the state or pornographic purposes. Naturally we must block it."

In February police arrested a woman, Shapark Shajarizadeh, for removing her Islamic head-covering during a public protest. She says she was recently [sentenced to twenty years in prison](http://time.com/5334187/iran-woman-protests-headscarf-prison/) for the offense.

*The Washington Post* reported several Iranians have [also been arrested for teaching Zumba](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/08/10/6-iranians-performed-zumba-then-they-were-arrested/?utm_term=.88bd2522e5fd), a Colombian fitness routine, and in 2014 [a group of at least six Iranians](https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/may/21/iran-releases-pharrell-williams-fans-detained-singing-happy) was arrested for making a version of the Pharrell Williams song "Happy," in which they were dancing on rooftops in Tehran. Their sentence of jail for one year and 91 lashes was later suspended.