

# On Wednesdays We Wear White: Iranian Women's Fight for Equality

For the first time in thirty seven years, on June 20, 2018, Iranian women were allowed to enter a Tehran stadium to watch a broadcast of the World Cup game between Iran and Spain. For many Iranian women, the World Cup was an opportunity to advocate for their rights and equal treatment under the confines of Islamic rule on an international level.



AFP/Getty Images

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, legislation in Iran forbids women to attend events considered to be for males only, including sporting events. Additionally, Islamic law in

Iran obliges women to uphold “traditional feminine virtues” of modesty and chastity by covering themselves. Both of these policies discriminate against women under the guise of religious-based protection and uphold a toxic patriarchal system that thrives on making women invisible. Looking at the examples of the ban against women in the sporting arena and compulsory head covering, over time, Iranian women have become a marginalized “other”, denied agency in a male-dominated society.

Despite the ban on women’s participation in sports culture, over the decades Iranian women have pushed the boundaries of the law. Some women have even gone to the extent of [wearing fake beards and wigs](#) to attend sports competitions and to rebel against the male-only stadium protocol. Since the rise of social media, Iranian women’s protests also take place online, resulting in a thriving and trackable culture of participation and dissent. Looking at the online space and the recent policy shift during the World Cup that incorporated women into national sports fandom, we witnessed a moment of inclusion and empowerment for women and girls, and thus an opportunity to strengthen Iranian civil society.

The fight for women’s rights in Iran is an ongoing struggle and social media campaigning is an increasingly powerful tool for activism. In spite of the nation’s Islamic dress code that requires all women to cover their heads in [hijabs](#), a new movement in Iran, called [#whitewednesdays](#), encourages women’s freedom of choice in public dress. Masih Alinejad, the founder of the #WhiteWednesdays campaign, started the movement to encourage Iranian women to [wear something white on Wednesdays](#) as a form of protest against the compulsory hijab. As Alinejad [explains](#), #WhiteWednesdays is more than just a movement of women who are “fighting against [a] small piece of cloth...we are fighting against the philosophy behind it, the men behind these compulsory hijab laws telling us what to wear, how to behave, what kind of lifestyle to follow.”



Photo courtesy of [Global Citizen](#)

Illustrating how truly international the current women's rights movement is, the #WhiteWednesdays movement in Iran is in alliance with the [US Women's March](#). Alinejad was one of thousands of women who participated in the New York City march. She did so to advocate for freedom of choice in Iran and to represent the millions of Iranian women who still don't have the right to protest under the government's threat to imprison – and even kill – women who try.



[Masih Alinejad](#) marches in New York City

A movement like #WhiteWednesdays is another revolutionary step for Iranian women fighting against the oppressive nature of

Islamic rule in Iran. With regard to sports, seeing as an exception was only made for the World Cup games and the Iranian government's decision to permanently lift the ban is [yet to be determined](#), the exclusion of Iranian women in sports stadiums is an ongoing issue. However, as the #WhiteWednesdays campaign shows, Iranian women will continue to rise in the face of adversity and steadily pursue their rights and freedoms until justice is served.