Research report:

**The Protection of Human Rights in the Use of Protest and Civic Advocacy**

**Guiding question:**

*What are the rights of a protester, how can we protect them and to which extend is the government allowed to act against these protests?*

***Examples Of Violent Protests:***

Violent protests Hong Kong

The extradition bill which triggered the first protest was introduced in April. It would have allowed for criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China under certain circumstances.

Opponents said this risked exposing Hong Kongers to unfair trials and violent treatment. They also argued the bill would give China greater influence over Hong Kong and could be used to target activists and journalists.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets. After weeks of protests, leader Carrie Lam eventually said the bill would be suspended indefinitely.

How did the protests escalate?

Protesters feared the bill could be revived, so demonstrations continued, calling for it to be withdrawn completely.

By then clashes between police and protesters had become more frequent and violent.

In July, [**protesters stormed parliament**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48821640), defacing parts of it. In August, one protester was injured in the eye, leading to demonstrators wearing red-coloured eye patches to show their solidarity.

[**Protest action at Hong Kong international airport in August**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49330848) also saw renewed clashes and led to hundreds of flights being cancelled.

In September, [**the bill was finally withdrawn**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-50150853), but protesters said this was "too little, too late".

Demonstrations continued, marked by an increasing level of violence.

On 1 October, while China was celebrating 70 years of Communist Party rule, [**Hong Kong experienced one of its most "violent and chaotic days"**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49891403).

An 18-year-old was shot in the chest with a live bullet as protesters fought officers with poles, petrol bombs and other projectiles.

The government in response [**banned protesters wearing face masks**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49931598) - a ban that many activists continue to defy.

In early November, [**a pro-Beijing lawmaker was stabbed**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-50312310) in the street by a man pretending to be a supporter.

One week later, [**a policeman shot one protester**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-50370715) at close range when activists were trying to set up a road block and later that day another man was set on fire by anti-government protesters. Both had to be treated in hospital.

What do the protesters want?

Some protesters have adopted the motto: "Five demands, not one less!" These are:

* For the protests not to be characterised as a "riot"
* Amnesty for arrested protesters
* An independent inquiry into alleged police brutality
* Implementation of complete universal suffrage

The fifth demand, the withdrawal of the bill, has already been met.

Some also want the resignation of Carrie Lam, whom they view as Beijing's puppet.

Protests supporting the Hong Kong movement have spread across the globe, with rallies taking place in the UK, France, US, Canada and Australia.

In many cases, people supporting the demonstrators were confronted by pro-Beijing rallies.

Chinese president Xi Jinping has warned against separatism, saying any attempt to divide China would end in "bodies smashed and bones ground to powder".

What is Hong Kong's status?

Hong Kong is a former British colony handed back to China in 1997.

It has its own judiciary and a separate legal system from mainland China. Those rights include freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

But those freedoms - the Basic Law - expire in 2047 and it is not clear what Hong Kong's status will then be.

**Status of Hong Kong**

Hong Kong, officially the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR), is a special administrative region on the eastern side of the Pearl River estuary in southern China. With over 7.4 million people of various nationalities in a 1,104-square-kilometre territory, Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated places in the world.

Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire after Qing China ceded Hong Kong Island at the end of the First Opium War in 1842. The colony expanded to the Kowloon Peninsula in 1860 after the Second Opium War, and was further extended when Britain obtained a 99-year lease of the New Territories in 1898.The territory was returned to China in 1997. As a special administrative region, Hong Kong maintains separate governing and economic systems from that of mainland China under the principle of "one country, two systems".

Originally a sparsely populated area of farming and fishing villages, the territory has become one of the world's most significant financial centres and commercial ports. It is the world's tenth-largest exporter and ninth-largest importer, and its legal tender (the Hong Kong dollar) is the world's 9th-most traded currency (as of 2019).Hong Kong hosts the largest concentration of ultra high-net-worth individuals of any city in the world.Although the city has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, there is severe income inequality.

Hong Kong is a highly developed territory, ranking seventh on the UN Human Development Index. The city has the largest number of skyscrapers of any city in the world and its residents have some of the longest life expectancies in the world. Over 90% of its population uses public transportation.Air pollution has resulted in a high level of atmospheric particulates in the city.

**Protests in Iran, against the government due to multiple reasons**

There have been anti-government protests in the Iranian capital, Tehran, and other cities after the Iranian authorities admitted they had "unintentionally" shot down a Ukrainian International Airlines plane.

Some of the protesters have been heard shouting slogans against the leadership.

So how strong is opposition in Iran, and what do the protesters want?

Who are they protesting against?

The crowds taking to the streets in recent days have been concentrated in Tehran and other cities such as Isfahan, and comprise mainly university students and others from the middle classes, angered by the deaths of those on the plane.

They have condemned the authorities for not initially telling the truth. But slogans have also been heard against the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and the Islamic regime.

"Lots of them will have known people on that plane as they are students who can afford to travel abroad," says the BBC's Rana Rahimpour.

There is also little sign of these protests concentrating around a particular personality. "It's hard to say there's a single figurehead right now that people can unite around," says Fatemeh Shams, an Iranian professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

What political opposition is allowed?

Iran's system allows for elections, but political groups must operate within the strict boundaries of the Islamic Republic.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, [nearly half of the candidates were disqualified by Iran's Guardian Council](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35614493), which vets them for their commitment to Iran's Islamic system.

And for this year's parliamentary elections, which are due to be held in February, thousands of potential candidates have again been disqualified, including 90 current lawmakers.

Any candidates from groups opposed to the Islamic Republic, or who want to change the existing system altogether, are not allowed to run.

The Guardian Council can also bar any would-be presidential candidates, and veto any legislation passed by parliament if it is deemed to be inconsistent with Iran's constitution and Islamic law.

Ayatollah Khamenei, who is positioned at the top of Iran's political power structure, appoints half of the members of this body.

The Supreme Leader also controls the armed forces and makes decisions on security, defence and major foreign policy issues.

So in practice, the president and the parliament in Iran - even if they support change - have limited powers.

There are also opposition movements who want greater autonomy for ethnic minorities like the Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Azerbaijanis.

Some of these groups - like the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan - are armed and have fought for decades against the Iranian state.

Does the opposition have leaders?

There has been a movement pushing for reform in Iran for years, with Mohammad Khatami, the former president, as its figurehead.

In office from 1997 until 2005, Mr Khatami brought in limited social and economic reforms, and put out feelers to Western countries.

More extensive changes, however, were blocked by conservative interests, and Mr Khatami himself has been sidelined - with his movements and access to the media restricted.

In 2009, a major challenge to the regime came after a disputed presidential election, won by hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Defeated candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi challenged the result and became leaders of what was called the Green Movement. Millions took to the streets to demand a re-run of the election, but Ayatollah Khamenei insisted the result was valid.

Tough action against protests

There was a widespread crackdown against demonstrators that year and dozens of opposition supporters were reportedly killed. Many of the top opposition figures were detained. Mr Mousavi and Mr Karroubi remain under house arrest over a decade later.

More recently, there were protests at the end of 2017 and in early 2018 over worsening economic conditions.

* [Iran faces watershed moment](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-51081826)
* [How Iranian media reported plane crash anger](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-51117855)
* [Profile of Ayatollah Khamenei](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29115464)

High levels of unemployment in some parts of the country had hit the relatively young population particularly hard.

The wealthier middle classes also joined these protests against the handling of the economy by the government of President Hassan Rouhani, who is considered a moderate.

Those taking part shouted slogans against the country's leaders, and [calls were heard for the restoration of the monarchy](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-42544618), overthrown in 1979.

Protests erupted again in November 2019 after the government announced it was raising petrol prices by 50% as it struggled to cope with economic sanctions reinstated by the US when it abandoned the nuclear deal the previous year.

The unrest prompted a bloody crackdown by the security forces.

Amnesty International said more than 304 people were killed, but a Reuters news agency report put the death toll at 1,500. The Iranian authorities dismissed both figures. An internet shutdown lasted for some five days, virtually cutting off the country.

A feature of these more recent protests is that they have often been leaderless, and fuelled by grassroots anger over inflation, unemployment and widening inequality.

However, despite outbreaks of unrest, the government has managed to remain in control, using a combination of severe restrictions on opposition figures and repressive actions.

UN Human protest rights

#### **Article 1.**

#### All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

#### **Article 19.**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

#### **Article 20.**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

#### **Article 21.**

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

#### **Article 22.**

#### Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.