Decoding the Iranian Uprising

What is the issue?

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- Amid deep economic and political crisis, Iran is presently seeing its largest public uprising since the 2009 “Green Movement”. Click here to know more.
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- The current wave seems demographically unique, politically neutral, and has ushered in a new era of uncertainty to the Islamic Republic.
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What is unique with the recent uprising?

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- While all previous Iranian uprisings were urban middle class phenomenon, the current one is driven by lower working classes in small towns.
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- It started out with strong economic grievances of the downtrodden who’ve suffered due to economic mismanagement and political alienation.
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- Significantly, their economic frustrations have got channelized against Iran’s aggressive foreign interventions in Syria and Yemen.
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- Initially, hard-liners within the Iranian power elites hoped that protests would derail the reformist government of President Rouhani.
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- But the protests have spiralled out of control and seem to be challenging the very basis of the state and not just the government.
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- Hence, alongside issues of rampant inflation, corruption, and joblessness, the very legitimacy of the Islamic revolution of 1979 has come under scrutiny.
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- This signifies the emergence of a new young generation that doesn’t connect to the euphoria of the 1979 and the generational gap seems to be widening.
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- Events across cities reveal that despite iron fisted oppressive actions, the

tension between discontented youth and the regime isn’t diffusing.
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What are the demographic factors?

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- In the last 30 years, Iran underwent a major socio-political evolution, which has thrown up new challenges with no immediate solution.
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- Significantly, its increasingly young population has become more educated, secular and rebellious due to the rapid expansion of university education.
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- The demographic “youth bulge” combined with urbanisation, and increasing unemployment rates (40%) provided ripe sociological conditions for unrest.
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- Hence, alienation was building up in the essentially young and educated citizenry (including women) with no political, economic or social future.
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- Hence, Iran became a society divided between rich supporters of the regime and poor rebels with no ideology and no political leaders.
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- While the theocratic setup has been seeking to strike the appropriate balance in governance for long, it has never before been so categorically challenged.
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What are the political implications?

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- The recurrent street protests in Iran are indicative of the meltdown of the theocratic ideology on which the republic was founded in 1979.
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- This is significant, as the present phase is led by the Iranian poor, who were thought to be the bedrock of the regime.
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- Notably, the Green Movement of 2009, which had a strong elite feed, also challenged the theocracy form a cultural perspective.
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- But strangely, the usual reformist voices stayed low in the current happenings and were totally absent in leading or participating in them.
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- Also, barring an erratic statement by Mr. Trump, international reactions have largely been muted and non-partisan.
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- This was probably due to the fear of internal tensions building up into a full blown civil war in Iran, like in Syria.
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- Notably, an unstable Iran won’t be liked even by Iran’s arch-rivals (Saudi Arabia, Israel) due to its potential catastrophic fallouts beyond Iran.
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Source: The Hindu

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