

## Strategic Challenges Facing Women And The Policies Of The Islamic Republic Of Iran

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<https://doi.org/10.22034/srq.2023.182518>  
[https://quarterly.risstudies.org/article\\_182518.html](https://quarterly.risstudies.org/article_182518.html)

Receive Data: 10 Jun 2023

Accept Data: 06 Aug 2023

### *Extended Abstract*

#### *Introduction*

The diverse and numerous issues concerning women in the Islamic Republic of Iran lack a singular characteristic and vary in their significance. For this, policy-makers cannot address all these issues simultaneously. Hence, effective decision-making necessitates a comprehensive understanding of these and their appropriate prioritization. This study aims to identify and categorize these issues based on their impact and relevance, thereby aiding policy-makers in their decision-making process. The key questions we seek to answer are: What are the current critical issues concerning women? What challenges does the decision-making structure encounter in the realm of women's issues? How do these issues interrelate? Which of these issues should be the primary focus and priority for decision-makers and politicians?

In scrutinizing these issues, prioritizing governance frameworks and policy-making necessities is crucial. However, the perspectives and attitudes of women towards their social, political, legal, and economic world - their current demands - are equally central. Essentially, women's issues are characterized by their emergence from the interaction between political system and society. The persistence of these issues could pose challenges for governance.

#### *Methodology*

This study employs a methodology that includes gathering expert opinions through surveys, brainstorming sessions, and elite meetings. These insights are then processed using MicMac software to measure the indirect effects of the components on each other, thereby determining the position and priority of each strategic issue within the Islamic Republic of Iran. To address the research questions, the study is structured into five sections, in addition to the introduction. These sections include an examination of strategic issues in the women's field; ranking of women's issues; issue analysis; cause chain analysis; and strategic recommendations.

### ***Discussion and Results***

The primary focus of policy-makers should be on transforming four key components: lateness of religious jurisprudence (ijtihad), the crisis of political representation, securitization, and politicization. Without progress in these four areas, significant development in other issues is far-fetched. The common thread linking these four challenges is the lack of a genuine and accurate understanding of social changes in the realm of women. Precise and authentic knowledge, facilitated by intellectual elites, is the government's first necessary step toward addressing these issues. These elites can equip policy-makers with a comprehensive and inclusive perspective on Iran's social changes concerning women.

The "insufficiency of domestic authorities to address women's issues" in comparison to foreign ones, and "the opposition's exploitation of the government's neglect of women's demands" are two dependent variables. These variables are influenced by all factors but have minimal impact on them. To address these issues, policy-makers should concentrate on key determinants and reinforcing factors. These include "the gap between women's formal and informal lifestyles" and "neglect of women's emerging demands." Identifying an effective solution to these two issues could significantly enhance governance efficiency in relation to women and mitigate costly repercussions. Abandoning the "marginalization" approach and adopting policies that acknowledge and respect diverse preferences is the fundamental basis of policy-making in this field.

While identifying all aspects of women's informal lifestyle may challenge certain facets of the Iranian-Islamic identity desired by the state, articulating the current situation and future outlook necessitates flexibility to surmount serious challenges and threats. Indeed, the state should treat this issue with utmost seriousness to prevent civil disobedience from becoming a societal conflict with itself. In other words, policies that could potentially transform women's lifestyles into a battleground against the political system should be avoided.

It's worth noting that employing harsh methods to address this issue could potentially amplify its scope and depth, fostering growing empathy with manifestations of disobedience and ultimately leading to a decline in domestic authority. Demonstrating pliability towards some of the women's demands and acknowledging certain aspects of their lifestyle does not conflict with the values of the political system. Rather, it is a necessary action, which can help prevent certain outcomes that could disrupt social order.

For instance, objections to granting motorcycle licenses to women may drive them to obtain international licenses, which are also recognized by Iranian courts. Ultimately, this means that policy-makers have to accommodate a demand related to the informal lifestyle. This situation sets a precedent where people realize that their demands will only be met through coercion and civil disobedience; a model that could have costly implications for the political system.

Another aspect that policy-makers are compelled to consider and effect changes in, pertains to regulatory issues that serve a moderating role. Given that most regulatory issues are agent-oriented, policy-makers encounter fewer constraints in managing and controlling these issues compared to structural ones. In this context, the political system can make proper changes in these types of problems with measures that are not overly long-term or structural.

In this study, "Policies conflicting with women's sense of discretion and dignity" have been identified as a regulatory component. This issue pertains to policies that, whether at the advertising and announcement stage or the implementation stage, wrongly target women. To mitigate the impact of this problem and address its consequences, policy-makers should reassess some of these policies and pursue the intended objectives through alternative approaches.

### ***Conclusion***

In general, the study's findings highlight the following as key factors impacting women's issues:

- Neglect of women's social developments in religious jurisprudence (ijtihad);
- Crisis of political representation and the predominantly masculine structure of decision-making and policy-making;
- Perceiving women's demands as a threat and securitizing those; and
- Politicization of women's issues and incorrect prioritization of their concerns.

**Keywords:** *Women's Issues; Policy-Making; Decline in Domestic Authority; Lateness of Religious Jurisprudence (Ijtihad); Women's Demands.*

