

# Iran's opposition struggles to unite

Despite repeated outbreaks of nationwide protests stretching back decades, Iran's opposition to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's theocracy remains fragmented among rival groups and ideological factions



**Reza Pahlavi**  
Son of Iran's last shah, **Mohammad Reza Pahlavi**, who fled country in 1979 during Islamic Revolution

Based in U.S., Reza Pahlavi calls for regime change through non-violent civil disobedience, sustained protests and referendum on future system of government

**Popular among parts of Iranian diaspora, but level of support inside Iran remains uncertain**



**Maryam Rajavi**  
Exiled leader of of **People's Mujahedin of Iran**, known by Persian name **Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)**

MEK helped overthrow shah but later broke with ruling clerics and sided with Iraq during Iran-Iraq war in 1980s

**MEK now advocates secular, democratic Iran, but analysts say it has minimal popular support inside country**

## Ethnic minorities

Iran's mostly Sunni Muslim **Kurdish** and **Baluch** minorities have long resisted rule from Persian-speaking, Shia-led government in Tehran

**Kurdish regions in western Iran have seen periodic insurgencies. In eastern Baluchistan, opposition ranges from Sunni clerics seeking greater autonomy to armed jihadist groups linked to al-Qaeda**



**Iran's ethnic map (boundaries approximate)**

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Persian	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFFF00; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Kurd	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #9370DB; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Lur	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #D3D3D3; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Others or sparsely populated
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #8A2BE2; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Azeri	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #228B22; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Arab	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FF8C00; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Baloch	