

Social Justice Watch 0612

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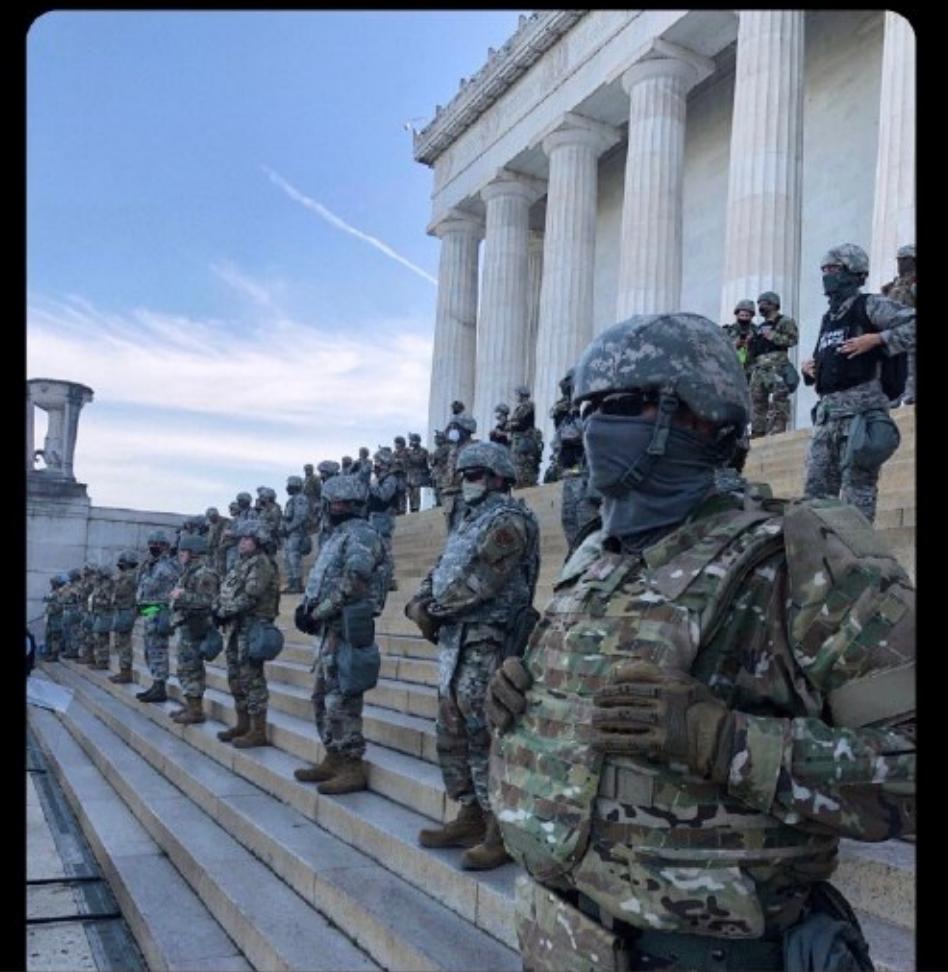




Vera Bergengruen ✅
@VeraMBergen

▼

Remarkable photo via
@MarthaRaddatz, where protestors
are being blocked from the steps of
the Lincoln Memorial





The New York Times ✓

@nytimes



Members of the D.C. National Guard were ordered in front of the Lincoln Memorial by Attorney General William Barr, according to a senior National Park Service official. The Park Service has been told to expect a more militarized presence at its sites. nyti.ms/2Aw7jLO



Win McNamee/Getty Images



Alex Ghenis

@aghenis



Replying to @MarthaRaddatz

So wait, they think the protestors fighting for black lives will somehow storm and deface the memorial of the guy who freed black slaves? Because that's what it looks like.

What a shameful image...

#DCProtests #AmericaOrTrump

09:19 · 2020/6/3 · Twitter for Android

277 Retweets 2,184 Likes

司法部长下令重兵镇守林肯纪念堂..... [source](#)

  r/coolguides · Posted by u/gitgudsam 2 hours ago    4  & 13 More

41.5k 

Five Demands, Not One Less. End Police Brutality.

THE FIVE MAJOR DEMANDS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



- Create an independent inspector body to investigate police misconduct
- Create a requirement for states to establish board certification with minimum education and training requirements
- Refocus police resources on training, de-escalation, and community building
- Adopt the “absolute necessity” doctrine for lethal force
- Codify into law the requirement for police to have positive control over the evidence chain of custody

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

 1.9k Comments  Give Award  Share  Save ...

96 现在 Reddit 的头条，诉求开始明确了。 (编号 95 已跳过)

D.C. Mayor Bowser has 'Black Lives Matter' painted on street leading to White House

The act was intended to honor protesters who had peacefully assembled earlier this week.





[source](#)

AA

boredpanda.com

longer protesting police brutality, but rather seeking to exploit Mr. Floyd's death for their own political motives.

#9 George Floyd - Philadelphia Protest Today



reddit.com

Report



1K



3

20:15

56%

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#1 A Group Of Black People Protecting A Cop Who Got Separated From The Others



Courier-Journal

Report



1.2K

Add a comment...

POST



Daria B 1 week ago

This one is touching, seriously. This police officer is actually armed. And yet, there is this mutual trust and care for one another. Totally kills all stereotypes both about the protesters and the police.

450 Reply

3

20:14

57%

boredpanda.com

#4 It's Not White vs. Black, Rich vs. Poor, Police vs. Citizens....it's Everyone vs. Racists



reddit.com

Report



1.1K

3

20:14

57%

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#7 Portland, Oregon. Police Demonstrating And Trying To Show They Hear And Understand The Frustration.



Alice Evelyn is at Downtown Portland.

47 mins • Portland •

Y'all. This is historic.



reddit.com

Report



1.1K

3

20:12

59%

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Lisa loves cats 1 week ago

Thank you for standing up in what you believe in

↑ 155 ↓ Reply

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#11 Helping Cleaning Up



Monica Chung
@lolwtfnnotmonica



Community coming together to clean up in South Minneapolis. Of course the media won't show you this part though.



♡ 607K 10:54 PM - May 28, 2020

213K people are talking about this



lolwtfnnotmonica

Report



1K

3G

20:16

54%

boredpanda.com

#8 We're Stronger Together



reddit.com

Report



1K

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“If you do not move, you will be dead!”

- Police in a military vehicle in Walnut Creek, California. [source](#)

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https://youtu.be/DY6F_pLU5ng

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U.S. Protesters Are Taking Some Tactics From Hong Kong's Playbook

As anti-racism protests rage across the U.S., Hong Kong activists are standing by to offer guidance from afar. Demonstrators on the front lines in Seattle th...

<https://youtu.be/32KTKXZZ-BI>

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How Hong Kong Protesters Evade Surveillance With Tech | WSJ

Protesters in Hong Kong fear they are being monitored by the local government and potentially by China, a country at the cutting edge of mass surveillance. S...

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telegra.ph/The-LA-riots-were-a-rude-awakening-for-Korean-Americans-06-08

Telegraph

The LA riots were a rude awakening for Korean-Americans

Story highlights Police left Los Angeles' Koreatown to burn during the 1992 riots Some Korean-Americans say riots made them realize importance of political power Chang Lee gripped his fingers tighter around the gun and screamed at potential looters from the...

“Before he beheaded his 14-year-old daughter with a farming sickle, Reza Ashrafi called a lawyer.

His daughter, Romina, was going to dishonor the family by running off with her 29-year-old boyfriend, he said. What kind of punishment, he asked the lawyer, would he get for killing her?

The lawyer assured him that as the girl’s guardian he would not face capital punishment but at most 3 to 10 years in jail, Mr. Ashrafi’s relatives told an Iranian newspaper.

Three weeks later, Mr. Ashrafi, a 37-year-old farmer, marched into the bedroom where the girl was sleeping and decapitated her.

The so-called honor killing last month, in a small village in the rolling green hills of northern Iran, has shaken the country and set off a nationwide debate over the rights of women and children and the failure of the country’s social, religious and legal systems to protect them.”

[telegra.ph/A-Daughter-Is-Beheaded-and-Iran-Asks-if-Women-Have-a-Right-to-Safety-06-10](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/a-daughter-is-beheaded-and-iran-asks-if-women-have-a-right-to-safety-06-10/) | source

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The so-called honor killing of a 14-year-old girl in Iran has shaken the country and forced an examination of its failure to protect women and children. Before he beheaded his 14-year-old daughter with a farming sickle, Reza Ashrafi called a lawyer. His daughter...

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Telegraph

'Gone with the Wind' pulled from HBO Max until it can return with 'historical context'

HBO Max has pulled "Gone with the Wind" from its library of films. The removal of the film comes as mass protests sweep across the United States following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who was killed while in police custody. The 1939 film...

telegra.ph/Irans-policies-about-transgender-rights-are-unique-in-the-world--Quartz-06-11

Telegraph

Iran's policies about transgender rights are unique in the world — Quartz
In Iran, homosexuality is a crime, punishable with death for men and lashings for women. But Iran is also the only Muslim country in the Persian Gulf region that gives trans citizens the right to have their gender identity recognized by the law. In fact,...

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HBO Max has pulled "Gone with the Wind" from its library of films.

The removal of the film comes as mass protests sweep across the United States following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who was killed while in police custody. The 1939 film, which tells the love story of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler during the American Civil War, is considered by many to be a cinematic classic and is one of the most popular films ever made. However, the movie is also incredibly controversial. The film's portrayal of slavery, African Americans and the Civil War South has been received much more critically in the decades since its release. A spokesperson for HBO Max, which like CNN is owned by WarnerMedia, told CNN Business that "Gone with the Wind" is "a product of its time and depicts some of the ethnic and racial prejudices that have, unfortunately, been commonplace in American society."

"These racist depictions were wrong then and are wrong today, and we felt that to keep this title up without an explanation and a denouncement of those depictions would be irresponsible," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson added that when the film returns to HBO Max, it "will return with a discussion of its historical context and a denouncement of those very depictions," and will be presented "as it was originally created, because to do otherwise would be the same as claiming these prejudices never existed." "If we are to create a more just, equitable and inclusive future, we must first acknowledge and understand our history," the spokesperson said. The removal also comes after John Ridley, the Academy Award-winning screenwriter of "12 Years a Slave," wrote an op-ed in the Los Angeles Times this week asking HBO Max to take the film out of its rotation. "It is a film that glorifies the antebellum south. It is a film that, when it is not ignoring the horrors of slavery, pauses only to perpetuate some of the most painful stereotypes of people of color," Ridley wrote. "The movie had the very best talents in Hollywood at that time working together to sentimentalize a history that never was." Ridley made it clear that he didn't want "Gone with the Wind" to be "relegated to a vault in Burbank," California, but rather be taken down for a "respectful amount of time." "Let me be real clear: I don't believe in censorship," Ridley wrote. "I would just ask, after a respectful amount of time has passed, that the film be re-introduced to the HBO Max platform along with other films that give a more broad-based and complete picture of what slavery and the Confederacy truly were." Ridley added that the film "could be paired with conversations about narratives and why it's important to have many voices sharing stories from different perspectives rather than merely those reinforcing the views of the prevailing culture."

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A Daughter Is Beheaded, and Iran Asks if Women Have a Right to Safety

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The so-called honor killing of a 14-year-old girl in Iran has shaken the country and forced an examination of its failure to protect women and children.

Before he beheaded his 14-year-old daughter with a farming sickle, Reza Ashrafi called a lawyer.

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The so-called honor killing last month, in a small village in the rolling green hills of northern Iran, has shaken the country and set off a nationwide debate over the rights of women and children and the failure of the country's social, religious and legal systems to protect them.

It has also prompted a me-too moment on social media of women pouring out their own stories of abuse at the hands of male relatives in hopes of shedding light on a problem that is usually kept quiet.

Minoo, a 49-year-old mother of two in Tehran, said her husband had beaten their 17-year-old daughter when he spotted her with a male friend in the street.

Hanieh Rajabi, a Ph.D. student in philosophy, tweeted that her father had lashed her with a belt and kept her out of school for a week because she had walked home from class to buy ice cream instead of taking the school bus.

Others shared stories of rape, physical and emotional abuse and running away from home in search of safety.

“There are thousands of Rominas who have no protection in this country,” tweeted Kimia Abodlahzadeh.

In many ways, women in Iran are better off than those in many other Middle Eastern countries.

Iranian women work as lawyers, doctors, pilots, film directors and truck drivers. They hold 60 percent of university seats and constitute 50 percent of the work force. They can run for office, and they hold seats in the Parliament and cabinet.

But there are restrictions. Women must cover their hair, arms and curves in public, and they need the permission of a male relative to leave the country, ask for a divorce or work outside the home.



Honor killings are thought to be rare but that may be because they are usually hushed up.

A 2019 report by a research center affiliated with Iran's armed forces found that nearly 30 percent of all murder cases in Iran were honor killings of women and girls. The number is unknown, however, as Iran does not publicly release crime statistics.

Horror over the killing of Romina Ashrafi, a round-faced high school student with a bright smile, was nearly universal, condemned by liberals and conservatives alike. Her father is in jail awaiting trial.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called for "harsh punishment" for any man who abuses women in what appeared to be a reference to Romina's case.

But the question of what to do about it broke along familiar lines.

"Everyone is infuriated and shocked because it's a reminder that these laws are abnormal, these laws need to change," said Shadi Sadr, a prominent women's rights lawyer living in exile in London. "These laws were not meant for a woman or a child to be killed."

Conservatives defended the existing laws and blamed Romina for promiscuity and disobeying religious and cultural strictures.

"The laws for violence against women are enough," Mousa Ghazanfarabadi, a conservative cleric and lawmaker, told local media. "We cannot execute Romina's father because it's against Islamic law."

President Hassan Rouhani asked Parliament last week to fast-track legislation to protect women. The bill, which has been pending in Parliament for eight years, would criminalize emotional, sexual and physical abuse and impose jail time for violators.

A separate bill that would criminalize the abuse and abandonment of children has stalled for 11 years.

Domestic violence is thought to be widespread, and the chief of Iran's family protection agency said in November that it had increased by at least 20 percent

over the previous year, the IRNA official news agency reported.

The agency said in April that reports of domestic violence had tripled during the coronavirus lockdown, and its hotline was receiving 4,000 calls a day.

Some women's rights advocates see the current bill as an important step, but it is unclear whether the new conservative Parliament — elected in February after the majority of critics and reformers were disqualified — will pass it. Conservatives dismiss any effort to change the law as succumbing to Western feminism.

But even if the bills passed, they would not change the punishment for a father killing his child.

Murder in Iran is subject to the death penalty under the Shariah mandate of “an eye for an eye.” But the penal code, based on Islamic law, exempts a guardian from capital punishment for killing his child. A child’s father and paternal grandfather are considered legal guardians.

However, a mother who kills her child would face execution.

Under the Islamic patriarchy that has governed Iran for the past 40 years, changing Shariah is not an option. But some Islamic legal scholars and activists argue that the guardianship exception is based on tradition and interpretations, and is not found in the words of the Quran or sacred texts.

“How is it possible that a father kills and he is not held accountable and he does not face capital punishment?” Faezeh Hashemi, a prominent women’s rights activist and former lawmaker, told local media. “If we want to approach this issue with logic, wisdom and justice, the father needs to face retaliation punishment multiple times over.”

She said that passing the bill without changing the punishment amounted to window dressing and would offer no meaningful protection for women and children.

Other critics of the current law oppose capital punishment — a minority view on a penalty prescribed by the Quran — but argue that, regardless, a father should not receive a lighter sentence for the murder of a child.

Romina’s father had threatened her many times before he killed her.

The two had frequently argued. She pushed against the rules by letting her hair poke out from her scarf when outside and posted pictures of herself on Instagram without hijab dressed in jeans and T-shirts, her black hair flowing to her waist.

When he discovered that she had a boyfriend, he flew into a rage, according to her mother, Rana Dashti, and other relatives. The details of Romina's story were pieced together based on accounts provided to Iranian media by her family members, her boyfriend, his family and security officials.

The boyfriend, a farmer's son who rode a motorcycle and sported a buzz cut and a tattoo, said he had been courting Romina since she was 12 and had proposed marriage. Iran has no law prohibiting an adult from having a romantic relationship with a child, and girls can marry with their father's permission at age 13.

Mr. Ashrafi rejected the proposal not because of the age difference, Ms. Dashti said, but because he didn't like the man's family.

He confiscated Romina's phone, kept her at home and began to threaten and terrorize her, Ms. Dashti told an Iranian magazine. One evening he came home with rat poison and rope, she said, encouraging Romina to commit suicide so he wouldn't have to kill her.

Romina ran away, leaving a note.

"Baba you wanted to kill me," it said, addressing her father. "If anyone asks you where Romina is, tell them I am dead."

The struggle for women's rights has a long history in Iran but has suffered setbacks since the 1979 Islamic revolution. The women's movement was finally dismantled as an organized effort in 2009, criminalized on grounds that it threatened national security.

Today its most prominent faces, including the Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi and the feminist lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, are either in exile or in jail. Even Ms. Hashemi, whose father was president and a founding father of the revolution, was jailed.

"Women's rights are politicized and criminalized making it very hard to channel this outrage on the ground into tangible action," said Sussan Tahmasebi, a

women's rights activist based in Tehran and Washington.

The advocates said they held little hope of changing the laws and culture that led to Romina's killing.

Three days after she ran away, Mr. Ashrafi discovered her hide-out and called the police, accusing the boyfriend of kidnapping. An investigator from the prosecutor's office dismissed the kidnapping charge after Romina said she went with him voluntarily.

Romina pleaded not to be sent home with her father, telling the investigator of his threats on her life. But Mr. Ashrafi assured him of her safety and she was released to her father's care.

By the next night she was dead.

After the killing made headlines across the country, the prosecutor said that the investigation and trial would be expedited and that he would seek the maximum 10-year sentence for Mr. Ashraf.

In Romina's village of Lamir, population 600, her school girlfriends still trek up the hill to the cemetery on most days. They lay yellow and purple wildflowers on her grave, and whisper a prayer that this will not be their fate.

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Iran's policies about transgender rights are unique in the world — Quartz

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Rainbow nation.

In Iran, homosexuality is a crime, punishable with death for men and lashings for women. But Iran is also the only Muslim country in the Persian Gulf region that gives trans citizens the right to have their gender identity recognized by the law. In fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran not only allows sex reassignment, but also subsidizes it.

Before the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran there was no official government policy on transgender people. After the revolution, under the new religious government, transsexuals were placed in the same category as homosexuals, condemned by Islamic leaders and considered illegal.

Things changed largely due to the efforts of Maryam Khatoon Molkara. Molkara was fired from her job, forcibly injected with male hormones and put in a psychiatric institution during the 1979 revolution. But thanks to her high-level contacts among Iran's influential clerics, she was able to get released. Afterwards, she worked with several religious leaders to advocate for trans rights and eventually managed to wrangle a meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini, the

“supreme leader” of Iran at the time. Molkara and her group were able to eventually convince Khamenei to pass a fatwa in 1986 declaring gender-confirmation surgery and hormone-replacement therapy religiously acceptable medical procedures.

“The Iranian government...sees trans individuals as people with psychosexual problems, and so provide them with a medical solution”

Essentially, Molkara, the Iranian religious leaders she worked with, and the Iranian government had reframed the question of trans people. Trans people were no longer discussed as or thought of as deviants, but as having a medical illness (gender identity disorder) with a cure (sex reassignment surgery).

“The Iranian government doesn’t recognize being trans as a category per se, rather they see trans individuals as people with psychosexual problems, and so provide them with a medical solution,” says Kevin Schumacher, a Middle East and North Africa expert with OutRight Action International, a global LGBTIQ-rights organization. The policy is based on Islamic notions that gender is binary and that social responsibilities should be split between men and women. “If you’re born a man and your body is a female then in order to protect you and the wellbeing of society,” says Schumacher says, “the government is responsible for fixing the issue.”

An uncomfortable truth

For Sarah, life in Iran was divided into two very distinct parts: before and after she had gender confirmation surgery.

As a young child growing up in the late 1980s in Tehran, Sarah (who, because she is not openly trans, did not want to publish her full name) was uncomfortable wearing the clothes and playing the games traditionally associated with being a boy, and felt she did not belong at the all-boy’s school to which her parents sent her. “You are alone against all the social norms that dictate what you should do, what you should wear, how you should live,” she says.

She was a good student, but in high school, when puberty hit and gender roles grew starker, Sarah began to have difficulty coping with schoolwork and dropped out. “I had to deal with sexual harassment from my classmates and from other people in society on a daily basis, from everyone that thought that [I] was a

girlish boy, a sissy boy,” she says. “My life as a teenager was total hell.”

Despite the official policy about trans individuals, trans issues are not openly discussed in Iran. And because the government heavily censors material available on the internet (a 2013 analysis found that nearly half of the 500 most popular sites on the internet are blacklisted in Iran) Sarah couldn’t research what it means to be transgender or connect with others in the community.

Meanwhile, she felt guilty about her inability to fit in. “Everybody expected me to behave like a man and be like a man and I hated to be like that,” she says. “I wondered why I couldn’t be like other people. Why I couldn’t meet the social expectations.”

At 16, she decided to make a change. “If I’m not a woman, if I’m not a man, I thought at least I should be a productive person and live a...happy life,” she says. So she enrolled in university in Tehran, and began to study languages and translation skills. Even though she continued to live as a man, she grew more confident in her gender identity thanks to the more tolerant atmosphere at the university, and from her academic successes—though she was still years away from realizing she was trans.

The official view

Officially, an Iranian can be diagnosed as having gender identity disorder only after a complex series of medical tests and legal procedures including obtaining a court order, multiple visits to a psychiatrist, and physical and psychological examinations at the state’s Legal Medicine Organization. Even if you somehow figure out how to navigate this process—and Sarah did not—it can take over a year, according to a report compiled by OutRight Action International, a global LGBTIQ-rights organization.

When people do approach doctors in Iran about being transgender, the experience is not always pleasant or helpful. Amir, a 26-year-old trans man from Shiraz, Iran, told OutRight that when he approached a medical professional about his condition, the doctor tried to intimidate him:

It all started when I was eight or nine years old. My parents took me to see a doctor because I kept saying I was a boy. The doctors never talked to me. They just told horrible and terrifying stories to shut me up. They said things

like “you will die if you undergo [sex reassignment surgery],” or “many girls who wanted to become boys died during the surgery”

All of them treated me like I was delusional.... They would tell me: “It’s not possible, you were born like this.” But I knew I had to do this operation and change my sex. I was convinced there was a way and I was just looking for some kind of confirmation, from someone, who would tell me “yes, it’s possible!” Instead, one of the doctors gave me pills, and another other one injections.... [Another] told me to “get out and close the door behind [me],” as if I was a dirty and untouchable person.

If an Iranian is officially diagnosed with gender identity disorder, the government issues the authorization for them to legally start the sex reassignment process, and at the end of that process the court issues a new identity card, with a new gender listed. In other words, while Iran does not mandate that all trans individuals have the surgery, it is not possible to change your gender marker on official documents without undergoing the surgery.

Over the last decade, with high-profile clerics and academic centers advocating for trans rights, social awareness on the issue has grown, says Schumacher. In 2007, Molkara established the Iranian Society to Support Individuals with Gender Identity Disorder, the first legally registered trans advocacy group. In 2008, the BBC reported that Iran was second only to Thailand in the number of sex-change operations performed, and the country’s surgery industry still attracts patients from all over the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Between 2006 and 2014, nearly 1,400 people applied for permission for the process according to government figures published in Iranian media.

There are even Iranian movies about accepting trans identities: 2012’s *Facing Mirrors* was something of a social turning point, giving local journalists a chance to address the issue publicly. The film’s release was even covered by state-run television and radio channels.

“I was so scared of the ramifications of what I was going to do, because I thought I [would] lose everyone and everything that I had fought for.”

Nevertheless, stigmas remain, reinforced by the notion perpetuated by the government that being trans is a medical problem. Outright’s report found that trans individuals are often subjected to bullying, domestic violence, and social discrimination. In some cases, family members disown trans relatives. Openly

trans people often can't get jobs, and when employers find out an employee is trans they are often fired. Trans individuals can't rent houses or apartments easily and find it hard to get married because families don't welcome the idea of having a trans son- or daughter-in-law.

All of which is why when Sarah finally realized that she was trans, when she was in her early 20s and already graduated from college, she did not feel comfortable coming out in public. "Only my family members and few of my close friends knew about it," she says. "I had to hide everything."

Making the decision to go through with gender-confirmation surgery was fraught with uncertainty. "On one hand I really wanted to do that and be free and liberated from all the problems of my past," says Sarah. "On the other hand I was so scared of the ramifications of what I was going to do, because I thought I [would] lose everyone and everything that I had fought for. My university degree, my job, everything. I saw myself having to stand against the entire world."

Practically, she did not have the means to go through with the surgery and live independently. According to OutRight's report, the cost of the gender-confirmation surgery in Iran is \$13,000 and hormone-replacement therapy costs \$20-\$40 a month—and the average Iranian's monthly income is about \$400.

The government does offer some limited financial support for gender-confirmation surgery, hormone-replacement therapy, and psychosocial counseling. But funds are limited and government officials decide on a case-by-case basis which individuals qualify. In 2012, the government announced that health insurance companies must cover the full cost of sex-change operations, according to a BBC report. But OutRight has found that insurance companies still often decline to cover some forms of transition-related care, on the basis that they are cosmetic and not medical.

"The government pays a lot of lip service but the actual services that they provide are extremely limited," says Schumacher. "You talk to many people and they tell you that they have been waiting for many years, hoping to receive some government assistance for these medical bills, but they are still waiting."

The challenges of being trans in Iran

For those who don't get the surgery, life in Iran is exceedingly difficult.

Sharia-based laws mandate segregation of men and women in schools and public transport, and Iranian law requires men and women to wear "gender-appropriate" clothing in public spaces. Women are expected by law to wear a hijab, which means they must dress modestly and cover their head, arms, and legs. Traditionally, this is interpreted as a long jacket, called a manteau, accompanied by a headscarf. Failure to conform to this is a crime and could result in arrest or assault at the hands of vigilantes.

"If their appearance is not completely male or female, they are even stopped in the streets by the moral police in Iran," says Saghi Ghahreman, president of the Iranian Queer Organization based in Canada. These are the undercover agents deployed by the police to patrol public spaces looking for men and women dressed or behaving in a manner deemed un-Islamic, The Guardian reported in 2016. The moral police crack down on loose-fitting headscarves, tight overcoats, shortened trousers for women and necklaces and shorts for men. The laws are often extended to cover new fashions. For instance in 2010 Iran banned ponytails, mullets, and long, gelled hair for men; in 2015 the country cracked down on "homosexual" and "devil worshiping" hairstyles along with tattoos, sunbed treatments, and plucked eyebrows for men.

Hasti, a 30-year-old Iranian trans woman from Khansar, told OutRight that she was frequently harassed by Iranian police for her feminine appearance and makeup. "The [police] would lift up my dress, look at my ID card and ask me if I was a man or a woman," she said. "In the end they would force me to sign a pledge letter [to promise that I would no longer dress as a woman] and then release me."

Because women are expected to get married at a young age and produce children, trans people who have not gone through the surgery are sometimes forced into marriage.

Worse, a trans person who is not legally recognized can be accused of homosexuality and face the death penalty. In fact, in some cases gay people in Iran decide to undergo the surgery because the alternative is death. "The sex change operation is most of the time forced on trans people by the culture and by the government," says Ghahreman.

Making the transition

Sarah spent six years preparing mentally and financially to go through with the surgery. She describes that period as one of the darkest phases of her life. “I was so depressed and anxious about everything,” she says. “At that time almost all the transgender people I saw in Iranian society were involved in prostitution, were isolated, were ostracized by the society and their family. I didn’t see any successful transgender people. I was afraid if I did it myself, my life would turn into a kind of new misery.”

“The sex change operation is most of the time forced on trans people by the culture and by the government”

But she stuck with the plan: she worked in a managerial job, living and dressing like a man, while saving for the surgery. When she had enough money, she decided to travel to Thailand for the surgery; despite the high number of gender confirmation surgeries performed in Iran, the quality of the work is poor. “The operations are done by surgeons that are not professionally trained,” says Ghahreman. “Almost all of the trans people who have operations in Iran are suffering from many side effects that disable their body. Every trans person I have met in the past 10 years, they have a lot of pain because of the surgery and they cannot have normal or pleasurable intercourse.”

When she was 28, Sarah had sex reassignment surgery. “I turned into a whole new version of myself which I loved so much,” she says, likening the process to dying and being reborn. I felt more liberated than what I was in the past. Because in the past I was imprisoned within the framework of my body and my former identity. After the surgery, I got liberated from all those things. For me, anything was better, anything. At least after the surgery I got to enjoy some basic rights that I didn’t enjoy before the surgery.”

Afterwards, she was surprised to find that “almost everyone was very welcoming and very supportive.” Sarah had worried government officials would harass her during the legal process after the surgery, but “everyone treated me like a saint,” she says. “They adore me so much and they admire me so much for doing such a courageous thing—they respect me on a whole different level. I didn’t even expect that—to be respected by people for being a transgender. But it all happened after the surgery.” And, all of a sudden, she could wear the clothes she wanted, change her name, and live the lifestyle of her choice.

“I felt I was a monkey at the zoo”

Not everyone has such a positive experience with Iranian officials. Assal, a trans woman who travelled back from Iran after undergoing the surgery in Thailand told OutRight she was harassed by Iranian border police agents who passed around her medical documents to each other and laughed at her. “I felt I was a monkey at the zoo,” she told OutRight.

And despite the support, Sarah never came out officially. Instead, she began to live as a woman in Iran. “The people who know me from the past, they know that I am a transgender, but the people who know me after the surgery, they have no idea of who I was,” she says. “They just think that I am a straight woman.”

Sarah stayed in Iran for six years after surgery. Now 36, she lives in Canada and works as a freelance journalist and translator. But she returns to the country of her birth frequently, and helped found an organization for trans rights there with Maryam Khatoon Molkara. “The culture needs to change,” says Sarah. “The society needs to change its mindset towards people who not like the mainstream. It doesn’t matter if they are gay, bisexual, or trans.”

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The LA riots were a rude awakening for Korean-Americans

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Story highlights

- Police left Los Angeles' Koreatown to burn during the 1992 riots
- Some Korean-Americans say riots made them realize importance of political power

Chang Lee gripped his fingers tighter around the gun and screamed at potential looters from the rooftop of the small strip mall where he stood. The 35-year-old had never held a firearm before the LA riots. Lighting up the blocks around him, Lee could smell the fires burning in Los Angeles' Koreatown.

"Where are the police? Where are the police?" Lee whispered over and over from his rooftop perch. Lee would not see law enforcement for three days -- only fellow Korean-Americans, who would be photographed by news agencies looking like armed militia in what appeared to be a guerrilla race war on the streets. It was April 30, 1992, and the city of angels raged in a second day of looting, armed assaults and arson in the wake of the acquittal of four white LAPD officers for use of excessive force in the videotaped beating of Rodney King. The nearly weeklong, widespread rioting killed more than 50 people, injured more than 1,000 people and caused approximately \$1 billion in damage, about half of which was sustained by Korean-owned businesses. Long-simmering cultural clashes between immigrant Korean business owners and predominately African-American customers spilled over with the acquittals. The

Rodney King verdict and the ensuing riots are often framed as a turning point for law enforcement and the African-American community. But it's also the single most significant modern event for Korean-Americans, says Edward Taehan Chang, professor of ethnic studies and founding director of the Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies at the University of California, Riverside. "Despite the fact that Korean-American merchants were victimized, no one in the mainstream cared because of our lack of visibility and political power," Chang said. "Korean immigrants, many who arrived in the late 1970s and early 80s, learned economic success alone will not guarantee their place in America. What was an immigrant Korean identity began to shift. The Korean-American identity was born."



Korean storeowners during the 1992 riots.

The 25th anniversary of the LA riots falls on the same day as Trump's 100th day in office -- and for the Korean-Americans CNN interviewed, the coincidence is significant. "Twenty-five years ago, we learned a lesson in what the lack of political power and cultural misunderstandings between minority groups can do," Lee said.

"It can destroy us." Asian immigrants, once a conservative bloc, have steadily moved to the center and left of the political spectrum, especially as their US-born children identify with more liberal beliefs. Exit poll data show that since 1992, Asian-Americans have steadily moved further away from the Republican Party, shifting to the Democrats and independents. In 2016, exit polls showed

Asian-Americans broke 65% for Clinton to 27% for Trump. As the country's fastest-growing immigrant group, the trends don't bode well for the GOP, who lagged behind the Democrats in Asian-American engagement in 2016."What I'm hearing from Trump and the rise in hate crimes in this country is scaring me," Lee said. "Los Angeles had this painful past. Now it's time for minority ethnic groups to talk to each other, stay bound together, understand and support each other."

'They left us to burn'

Lee was the only son in his family, so as the riots spread into Koreatown, the duty of protecting his parents' business fell on him. Lee left his own gas station unprotected.In the middle of those three chaotic nights, Lee recalled watching the local news on a portable TV on the rooftop."I watched a gas station on fire, and I thought, boy, that place looks familiar," he said. "Soon, the realization hit me. As I was protecting my parents' shopping mall, I was watching my own gas station burn down on TV." That he ended up on a rooftop with a borrowed gun was never in Lee's life plan. He had quit his job as an engineer at an aerospace company to pursue what he hoped would be life as an independent businessman, opening up three businesses in Koreatown."I truly thought I was a part of mainstream society," said Lee, who immigrated with his family to the United States as a child. "Nothing in my life indicated I was a secondary citizen until the LA riots. The LAPD powers that be decided to protect the 'haves' and the Korean community did not have any political voice or power. They left us to burn."

'We were trapped'



GLEN STUBBE/LIAISON

Store owner Richard Rhee stands vigil, armed with a handgun and a cellular phone on the roof of his grocery store in the Koreatown area of Los Angeles on May 2, 1992.

Andy Yoo was confused. He stood on his apartment balcony, watching men his father's age pace in front of the California Supermarket with long guns. To the seventh-grader, they looked like action figures in the war movies he'd seen. The boy thought, this must be war. Born and bred in Los Angeles, Yoo just didn't understand who was fighting whom. Yoo's mother told him to get back inside. But his childhood curiosity kept getting the better of him, as he peeked out at the gunmen and the chaos outside the supermarket. He wanted to know how Koreatown in America could be equivalent to a war zone, with no police coming to help families like his. The image of the gunmen on that supermarket rooftop would become the iconic, and enduring, picture of the LA riots. Yoo's balcony, his family's car and the streets were covered in soot, as ash rained down from the fires across Koreatown. He also remembers police lining Crenshaw Avenue, cutting off access to the west side of Los Angeles. "It was containment," said Yoo, now a lawyer who works in Koreatown. "The police cut off traffic out of Koreatown, while we were trapped on the other side without help. Those roads are a gateway to a richer neighborhood. It can't be denied."

A shifting political bloc

That single childhood realization, the separation of Yoo's community from the

richer, white neighborhoods with a police barrier, drove Yoo to become a lawyer."I realized I needed to learn the law, learn the rules of this society. If you're going to play the game you need to learn the rules and be a part of this system. What happened to us as children led to a political awakening in young Korean-Americans. We would help our parents as the American-born children of immigrants and not let what happened to them happen again."At the time of the riots, many businesses in low-income, majority-black neighborhoods like South Central were owned by Korean immigrants, who were able to purchase them for low prices from white owners who were leaving the neighborhood.Tensions between the two groups came to a head on March 16, 1991, when Soon Ja Du, a Korean store owner, fatally shot Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old African-American girl. Du accused Latasha of trying to steal a bottle of orange juice. The girl threw the juice on the counter and began walking away when Du shot her in the head. That incident, along with the acquittal of the officers who beat Rodney King, contributed to the anger that exploded on April 29, 1992.In the wake of the riots, the nonprofit Korean American Coalition formed the Alternative Dispute Resolution Center to mend cultural tensions and resolve anger between the communities, Yoo said.Today, the KAC center works with the diverse ethnic populations of Los Angeles County. "We, the black and Korean communities, were pitted against each other without understanding each other. We have to engage each other. I learned that the powers that be will try to divide and conquer. This is why I'm engaged politically and why I'm a liberal," Yoo said.

A race 25 years in the making

Robert Lee Ahn wasn't sure he would ever see his father again. In 1992 the high school student lived in West LA, but his family's business was based in Koreatown. Ahn's father owned a real estate business in a strip mall and he had gathered with the tenants to protect their businesses as the riots spread. He watched the unfolding chaos on television, wondering why the police would leave his father alone as Koreatown burned.Ahn saw his father on the second or third night, he recalled. "The community felt abandoned by law enforcement," said Ahn, adding that the tenants managed to protect the strip mall from being set on fire. "They were deemed expendable. The reason was simple: a lack of political voice and political power."Ahn, 41, a former LA city planning commissioner, is now a candidate in the runoff race for the 34th congressional district seat, which includes Koreatown. "That's why I think my race is so important, because it's the culmination of 25 years in the making," he said.Xavier Becerra vacated the seat to become California's attorney general. In

the primary with a field of more than 20 candidates, a strong Korean-American vote buoyed Ahn into the runoff where he'll face state Assemblyman Jimmy Gomez, a fellow Democrat. Gomez captured the most votes in the primary and has higher name recognition. But if Ahn manages to win, he'll be the country's first Democratic Korean-American congressman. Ahn is clear that while his political ambitions may have originated from those days when he was a teenager, what propels him in his campaign now is trying to bridge minority groups and extend their political reach. Ahn points out that Koreatown today, a thriving economic engine for the city of LA, is home to more Latinos than Koreans or African-Americans. Ahn also doesn't mince words about President Trump's first 100 days in office, which he called divisive and frightening.



Chang Lee's neighbors came out to help him clean up after his gas station burned down.

Latinos, African-Americans and Korean-Americans have "a lot more in common than differences," Ahn said. "In the midst of this Washington chaos and uncertainty, I see an opportunity to coalition build and really improve the district." In Ahn's congressional race, UCR Professor Chang sees the progression of Korean-American engagement, although he says, "we have a long way to go." Only one Korean-American is in California statewide office and if Ahn loses, Congress will remain at zero representation for the community. Twenty-five years after Lee's gas station burned down, he is once again a businessman in Koreatown. He has since served as an LA-area planning commissioner, and calls

members of the Latino and African-American communities his friends and colleagues. Lee believes he managed to come back from the ashes because of one act by the community, a day after the fire that destroyed his business. Lee remembers that for some reason, perhaps out of shock, he began to pointlessly sweep the debris around the shell of the gas station. "One by one," said Lee, "neighbors came out to help. They were black, Korean, and Latino. 30 people. They gave me hope. They are my community. And it's time again to stay bound together these next four years."

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