

The Internationalisation of Jina Mahsa Amini Anniversaries: Memory, Diaspora and Human Rights Politics (2023–2025)

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Abstract

Anniversaries occupy a pivotal place in the politics of memory, functioning as contested arenas where states, societies and diasporas negotiate identity, legitimacy and justice. Focusing on the Mahsa Amini anniversaries (2023–2025) and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement, this paper argues that commemorative practices have reconfigured domestic mnemonic contestation into a transnational human-rights narrative that recalibrates claims of state legitimacy in international arenas. The analysis integrates Politics of Memory, Mnemonic Security and Contested Memories with debates on human rights in International Relations to theorise how anniversaries travel across scales. Using qualitative thematic content analysis, the study traces mechanisms through which anniversaries operate as instruments of political communication, social mobilisation and reputational politics. It identifies patterned tensions between state-sanctioned narratives and alternative societal or diasporic memories, highlighting processes of framing, ritualised digital commemoration, securitisation and institutional uptake. By situating the Amini anniversaries within broader literatures on memory, security and human rights, the paper contributes a mechanism-focused account of how commemorations mediate the interplay of

authority, resistance and normative claims in contentious political contexts, and clarifies the conditions under which mnemonic struggles become internationalised.

Keywords: *anniversaries, diaspora activism, Iran, Jina Mahsa Amini, memory politics, woman, life, freedom*

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Introduction

The death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody in September 2022 and the subsequent Woman, Life, Freedom uprising transformed a specific incident of state violence into one of the most visible protest cycles in contemporary Iran. The first, second and third anniversaries of her death, from 2023 to 2025, did not simply repeat the memory of the original event. They became recurring moments in which mourning, protest, state control, diaspora mobilisation and international human rights claims were reactivated. This article examines these anniversaries as temporal formations through which domestic struggles over memory are connected, contested and translated across transnational political arenas.

The case is significant because it is embedded in a longer history of protest and repression in Iran. Over the past decade, Iran has witnessed repeated waves of mobilisation, including the 2017–2018 protests, the 2019 fuel-price protests and the 2022–2023 Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. These cycles have been shaped by socioeconomic grievances, political repression, gendered forms of state control, and recurrent struggles over public mourning and political visibility (Bayat 2017; Amnesty International 2023; Human Rights Watch 2023). In this context, anniversaries are not isolated commemorative dates. They are moments when past violence returns to the present as a contested political claim.

The article draws on memory studies, security studies, diaspora studies and human rights literature to analyse how anniversaries operate across scales. Anniversaries can function as sites of memory in which competing actors struggle over the meaning of the past (Nora 1989; Assmann 2011). They can also become objects of securitisation when states treat commemorative practices as threats to public order or political legitimacy (Mälksoo 2015). At the same time, memories do not travel automatically or without contestation. Diasporic actors, media networks, human rights organisations and international institutions may translate domestic claims into globally legible narratives, but these translations are selective, contested and shaped by political opportunity structures (Keck & Sikkink 1999; Ghorashi & Tavakoli 2006; Ghorashi & Boersma 2009; McAuliffe 2008).

This article therefore asks: *How do the anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death mediate the relationship between domestic memory contestation, diasporic meaning-*

making and transnational human rights politics? The argument is not that anniversaries automatically produce international pressure, nor that diaspora activism simply mirrors domestic activism. Rather, the article argues that anniversaries can create recurring opportunities for the reactivation, translation and institutional referencing of memory claims. In the Amini case, these opportunities were shaped through competitive framing, ritualised digital commemoration, securitisation and institutional uptake.

Empirically, the article traces the three anniversary cycles from 2023 to 2025 through a qualitative thematic content analysis of public documents, including state-affiliated media texts, diaspora and activist materials, international media reports and institutional documents from the European Union, United Nations bodies and human rights organisations. The analysis shows how the anniversaries became recurring focal points of reputational politics: not as direct causes of international mechanisms such as the UN Fact-Finding Mission, but as calendar moments through which existing human rights concerns, accountability claims and diplomatic assessments were renewed and made visible. The article contributes to debates on memory, diaspora activism and human rights by showing how commemorative time can structure the internationalisation of domestic political conflict.

Previous research and theoretical debates

The study of anniversaries as political events sits at the intersection of several research traditions: memory studies, the politics of commemoration, securitisation, diaspora activism and human rights politics. Rather than treating anniversaries as merely symbolic repetitions of past events, this article approaches them as recurring temporal moments in which political actors can reactivate, contest and translate memory claims across different arenas.

A first body of literature concerns collective memory and the political organisation of the past. Classical work on nationalism has shown that collective identities are not naturally given, but are reproduced through shared narratives, symbols, rituals and institutions. Anderson's account of the nation as an imagined community and Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on invented traditions remain important for understanding how collective belonging is reproduced through ritualised forms of memory (Anderson 2008; Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012). Memory studies further shows that collective memory is not a neutral reflection of the past, but a field of contestation in which actors struggle over legitimacy, responsibility, victimhood and political identity. Nora's concept of sites of memory is useful here because it shows how memory becomes institutionalised when the continuity of lived memory is disrupted (Nora 1989). Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory similarly helps explain how memories are stabilised through repeatable forms such as rituals, texts, images

and ceremonies (Assmann 2011). Recent work on transnational memory further clarifies how collective memories circulate beyond bounded national and cultural frameworks, making them available for reinterpretation across diasporic, media and institutional spaces (Erll 2025).

Anniversaries occupy a specific place within this politics of memory. They provide recurring moments when past events can be returned to the present and made politically visible. Recent work on protest memory and commemorative activism has emphasised that anniversaries do not simply preserve memory; they can also organise hope, critique, solidarity and renewed mobilisation (Rigney 2026). Hom's work on political timing and round numbers is also relevant because it shows that *when* political claims are made can be as important as *what* is claimed (Hom 2017). In the Iranian context, this temporal dimension is not new. Commemorative cycles have long played a role in political mobilisation, including the ceremonies of *chehelom* during the 1979 revolutionary period and later practices of mourning around political violence and martyrdom. The anniversaries of Amini's death should therefore be situated within a longer history of protest temporality and commemorative politics rather than treated as isolated events.

A second body of literature concerns the relationship between memory and security. In international relations and security studies, memory has increasingly been analysed not only as a cultural or domestic issue, but also as a matter of political order and legitimacy. Mälksoo's concept of mnemonical security shows how states may attempt to defend particular narratives of the past while delegitimising or criminalising competing memories (Mälksoo 2015). This is relevant to anniversaries because commemorative practices can be interpreted by authorities as threats to public order, symbolic authority or regime legitimacy. Work on critical security history similarly argues that history and memory are not simply background contexts for security politics, but active components of how threats, identities and political communities are narrated (Donnelly & Steele 2019). This literature helps explain why commemorative dates may become objects of surveillance, restriction or securitised framing.

A third body of literature concerns diaspora activism and transnational meaning-making. Earlier models of transnational advocacy, especially the boomerang model, show how domestic actors facing blocked political channels may seek external allies, who can then generate pressure on a target state through international networks (Keck & Sikkink 1999; Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999). However, this process should not be understood as automatic or linear. The relationship between domestic activism, diaspora mobilisation, media circulation and international pressure is selective, contested and shaped by political opportunity structures. Studies of the Iranian diaspora are particularly important in this regard because they show that diaspora communities are internally diverse rather than politically homogeneous. McAuliffe highlights internal diversity within

the Iranian diaspora, while Elahi and Karim emphasise the plurality of diasporic identities, histories and political positions (McAuliffe 2008; Elahi & Karim 2011). Khosravi similarly describes the Iranian diaspora as fragmented, suggesting that diasporic politics cannot be reduced to a single collective voice (Khosravi 2018).

Other studies show that Iranian diasporic activism is shaped by the interaction between transnational networks, local host-country contexts, media infrastructures and competing memories of homeland politics. Ghorashi and Tavakoli demonstrate the paradoxes of organising across borders, while Ghorashi and Boersma show how new media can enable both political action and humanitarian mobilisation among Iranians abroad (Ghorashi & Tavakoli 2006; Ghorashi & Boersma 2009). Work on diasporic demobilisation and feminist activism further demonstrates that transnational activism may decline, fragment or change form over time rather than simply intensify (Nasirpour, Barlow & Akbarzadeh 2022). These studies are important for the present article because they caution against treating diaspora actors as direct extensions of domestic society. Instead, diaspora actors may translate, amplify, reshape or contest domestic claims.

A fourth relevant literature concerns activist memory work and the cultural production of protest. Memory is not only transmitted through formal institutions or political statements; it is also produced through images, music, films, exhibitions, digital campaigns and commemorative performances. In the Iranian context, recent work on the Woman, Life, Freedom movement has shown how protest memory is produced through cultural and digital forms, including artistic narratives, social media practices and protest music (Mousavi 2024; Fadaee 2024; Rivetti & Saeidi 2023). Such work helps explain how the memory of Amini's death travelled beyond the original site of protest and became attached to broader claims about gender, bodily autonomy, state violence and accountability.

Taken together, these literatures provide the basis for the article's analytical approach. Memory studies explains why anniversaries become contested sites of meaning; security studies explains why states may seek to manage or securitise commemorative practices; diaspora studies shows that transnational mobilisation is internally diverse and politically contingent; and human rights literature explains how selected claims may be translated into internationally legible languages of accountability. The remaining gap is that these literatures are often discussed separately. Less attention has been paid to how anniversaries, as recurring temporal formations, mediate between domestic memory contestation, diasporic meaning-making and transnational human rights politics. This article addresses that gap by analysing the 2023–2025 anniversaries of Amini's death as recurring moments through which memory claims were reactivated, contested, translated and institutionally referenced across domestic, diasporic and international arenas.

Conceptual framework: Anniversary as a node of memory and global politics

This article conceptualises the anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death as temporal nodes of memory and global politics. An anniversary is not treated here as a simple calendrical return to the past, but as a recurring political occasion through which memory claims may be reactivated, contested, securitised, translated or institutionally referenced. The framework is therefore mechanism-oriented, but not deterministic. It does not assume that anniversaries automatically produce transnational mobilisation or international pressure. Rather, it examines the conditions under which anniversary cycles can connect domestic memory contestation, diasporic meaning-making and transnational human rights politics.

The starting point is the idea that time itself can become politically consequential. Hom's work on political timing suggests that when claims are made can shape their visibility, resonance and mobilisation potential (Hom 2017). Anniversaries are important because they create predictable occasions for renewed attention. They condense dispersed grievances around a recognisable date, enable coordination across different locations, and provide media and activist networks with a recurring temporal structure. This does not mean that anniversaries always generate political effects. Some commemorations may be silenced, fragmented, localised or contained. Their political significance depends on the interaction between memory work, state response, media visibility, diaspora capacity and institutional receptivity.

The framework operates through three conceptual layers: memory, security and norm translation. The first layer is the politics of memory. Collective memory is understood as a field of contestation in which actors struggle over what happened, who is responsible, who has the right to mourn and what political meaning should be attached to the past. In the case of Amini's anniversaries, state institutions and state-affiliated media may attempt to frame the event through narratives of stability, public order, foreign interference or official morality. By contrast, social, activist and diasporic actors may frame the same anniversary through narratives of injustice, state violence, gendered repression and demands for accountability. The anniversary thus becomes a recurring moment in which competing memory claims are made visible.

The second layer is securitisation and field control. Mälksoo's concept of mnemonic security is useful because it shows how states may seek to protect certain narratives of the past while delegitimising or criminalising alternative memories (Mälksoo 2015). In this sense, anniversary politics can become a security issue when commemorative practices are represented as threats to public order, national cohesion or regime legitimacy. This logic also resonates with securitisation theory, where political actors frame an issue as an existential threat in order to justify extraordinary measures (Wæver 1995). In the present framework, securitisa-

tion refers not only to direct repression, but also to broader attempts to control the field of commemoration through surveillance, discursive delegitimation, restrictions on gatherings, symbolic erasure and the management of public space.

The third layer is norm translation and internationalisation. Memory claims do not move into international politics by themselves. They require actors, infrastructures, frames and audiences. Transnational advocacy literature shows that, when domestic channels are blocked, activists may seek external allies and attempt to generate pressure through media, NGOs, international institutions and foreign governments (Keck & Sikkink 1999; Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999). However, this process is selective and contingent rather than automatic. Domestic claims may be amplified, reshaped, contested or disconnected from their original context as they circulate through diaspora networks and international arenas. When anniversary claims are translated into the language of human rights, they may generate reputational pressure, naming-and-shaming dynamics, agenda-setting and institutional referencing, even if they do not immediately produce policy change. At the level of norm dynamics, this process can also be understood through norm emergence and norm cascade, where visibility, persuasion and reputational pressure help claims move across institutional arenas (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).

Within this framework, three linking mechanisms are central. The first is competitive framing. Anniversaries create moments in which competing actors struggle to define the meaning of death, responsibility, mourning and justice. State and state-affiliated actors may frame commemoration as disorder, manipulation or foreign interference. Activist and diasporic actors may frame it as evidence of state violence, gendered repression and unresolved accountability. This mechanism is competitive because meanings are not simply transmitted; they are selected, contested and reformulated for different audiences.

The second mechanism is ritualised digital commemoration. This mechanism combines ritualisation and digital dissemination as mutually constitutive processes. Anniversaries provide recurring ritual moments through which memory is reproduced and stabilised. In the digital age, these rituals are also mediated through online platforms, where images, hashtags, statements, videos and commemorative performances circulate across borders. Digital infrastructures do not simply transmit memory; they shape its temporality, form and reach. They can synchronise dispersed actors, produce a sense of simultaneity, and reinforce shared mnemonic frames across domestic and diasporic spaces (Assmann 2014; Hom 2017).

The third mechanism is securitisation and field control. Anniversary cycles may prompt state institutions to restrict gatherings, control public space, delegitimise commemorative narratives or reframe memory claims as security threats. Yet securitisation does not necessarily produce internationalisation. In some cases, it may silence or fragment commemoration. In other cases, especially when visible

repression intersects with active diaspora networks, media access and normatively legible human rights frames, securitisation may increase the transnational visibility of memory claims.

Diaspora actors occupy an intermediary but not unified position in this framework. They are not treated as a single collective actor or as a direct extension of domestic society. Rather, they consist of diverse networks with different political orientations, resources, host-country opportunities, media access and relationships to domestic activism. Their role may include translating memory claims into internationally legible narratives, linking commemorative claims to parliaments and human rights institutions, and coordinating anniversary actions across cities. At the same time, diaspora mobilisation can also be fragmented, selective or internally contested (Adamson 2005; Koinova 2013; McAuliffe 2008; Khosravi 2018).

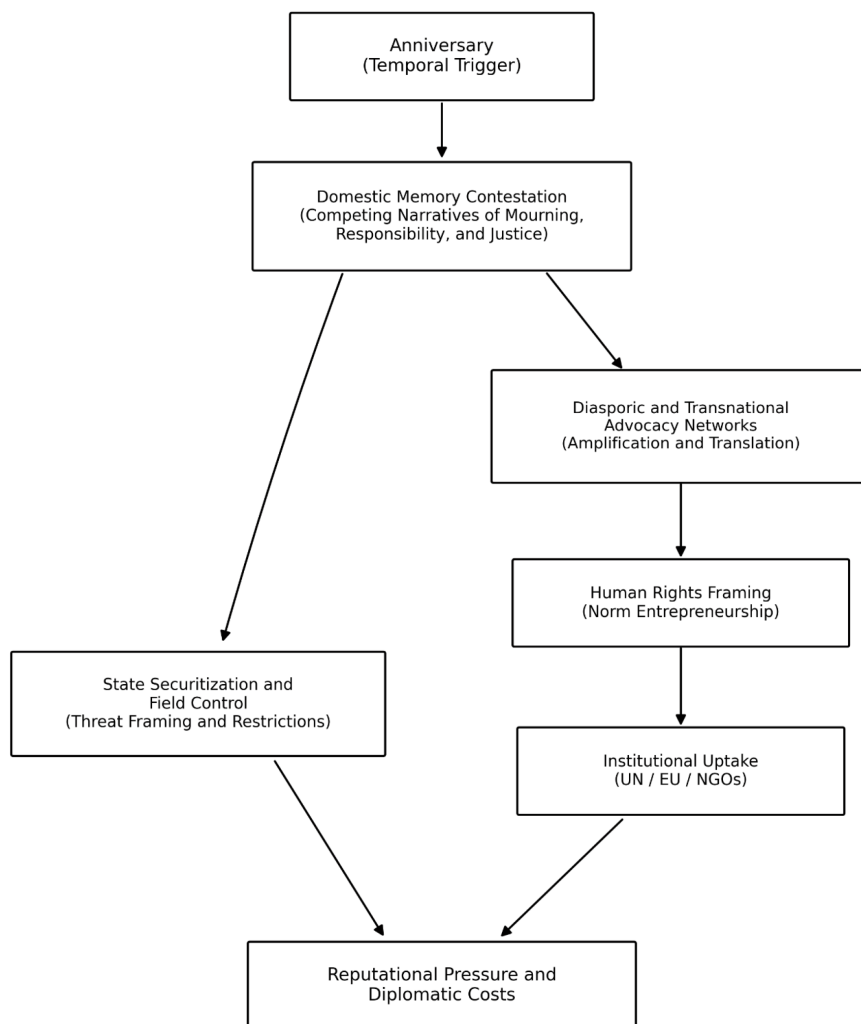
The framework therefore identifies several scope conditions. Anniversary politics is more likely to become transnationally visible when there are active diasporic or advocacy networks, access to media and digital platforms, relatively open political opportunity structures in host countries, and frames that can be translated into the language of human rights. Conversely, in the absence of these conditions, anniversaries may remain localised, suppressed or symbolically contained. Figure 1 presents this process as a set of analytical pathways rather than a fixed causal sequence. The anniversary functions as a temporal trigger that may reactivate memory contestation; state securitisation and diasporic mobilisation may then shape how, whether and to what extent these claims enter transnational human rights politics. The outcome is not automatic institutionalisation, but the possible accumulation of reputational pressure and renewed visibility around unresolved claims of accountability.

Research design and analytical strategy

This article adopts a mechanism-oriented qualitative research design to examine how the anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death became recurring temporal nodes in the politics of memory, securitisation, diaspora mobilisation and transnational human rights politics. The aim is not statistical representation, but the analytical tracing of processes through which anniversary cycles may reactivate memory claims, generate competing frames and produce reputational pressure in international arenas. This approach is consistent with qualitative case-study research in international relations, which focuses on tracing mechanisms and processual connections within historically specific cases (George & Bennett 2005; Beach 2020).

The empirical material consists of 58 publicly available documents collected between September 2023 and September 2025. The corpus is organised around three consecutive anniversary cycles: 2023, 2024 and 2025. The unit of analysis is therefore the anniversary cycle rather than Iranian protest politics in general.

Figure 1: Analytical framework of anniversary internationalization



Note: Arrows indicate possible analytical pathways, not a fixed or automatic causal sequence

Source: Author

This temporal design allows the article to compare how framing, securitisation, diaspora mobilisation and institutional referencing changed across repeated commemorative moments.

The documents were selected through purposive sampling. Materials were included when they directly referred to Jina Mahsa Amini, the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising, anniversary commemorations, public mourning, state responses, diaspora mobilisation, human rights accountability, or institutional reactions

by international actors. Materials were excluded when they were only general reports on Iran, repeated identical information, lacked a clear connection to the anniversary cycles, or did not contribute to tracing the mechanisms identified in the conceptual framework. Sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that additional documents no longer generated substantially new themes regarding framing, securitisation, transnational mobilisation or institutional uptake.

The data are grouped into four categories: official international statements and parliamentary materials ($n=18$), United Nations and human rights documents ($n=10$), diaspora and activist mobilisation materials ($n=12$), and international media coverage ($n=18$). In addition, state narratives were traced through publicly available official statements, where accessible, and through state-affiliated media outlets, such as IRNA, Fars News Agency and Tasnim. The classification of Tasnim as a state-aligned media actor is also consistent with the European Union's 2023 designation of Tasnim among entities sanctioned over serious human rights violations in Iran (Council of the European Union 2023b). A distinction is made between direct governmental or institutional statements and mediated representations of state positions in state-affiliated media. This distinction is important because the latter are treated as representations of state-aligned framing rather than as formal policy statements.

The absence of direct fieldwork or interviews with domestic activists is a limitation of the study. Given the security risks and access constraints associated with protest politics in Iran, the article relies only on publicly available materials. Domestic activism is therefore analysed indirectly through its public traces in statements, commemorative practices, media reporting, human rights documentation and transnational advocacy materials. This choice reflects both ethical caution and the article's focus on public processes of narrative circulation and internationalisation.

The analytical method is qualitative thematic content analysis. Following Braun and Clarke's approach, the analysis involved familiarisation with the material, initial coding, theme development, review of themes across the three anniversary cycles, and interpretation in relation to the conceptual framework (Braun & Clarke 2006). The initial coding framework was deductively informed by the article's theoretical model and included themes such as competitive framing, threat framing, securitisation of memory, human rights language, reputational pressure, institutional referencing and diplomatic cost articulation. At the same time, the coding process remained open to emergent themes, particularly where the documents revealed unexpected shifts in narrative emphasis or institutional response.

The corpus includes both Persian- and English-language materials. Persian materials were read in the original language by the author and translated into

English for analytical and reporting purposes where necessary. In translating politically sensitive terms, attention was paid to preserving contextual meaning rather than producing literal equivalents. This was particularly important for terms related to threat framing, public order, morality, foreign interference, mourning and accountability. The combination of different source types enables triangulation across state-aligned narratives, diasporic mobilisation, media circulation and international institutional responses.

The internationalisation of Mahsa Amini anniversaries

This section analyses how the 2023–2025 anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death became recurring moments of memory contestation, diaspora mobilisation, securitisation and institutional referencing. The analysis is organised around three anniversary cycles. This structure follows the article's methodological choice to treat the anniversary cycle, rather than Iranian protest politics in general, as the unit of analysis. Across the three cycles, the empirical material shows a gradual movement from initial international attention in 2023, to more stable institutional referencing in 2024, and finally to the consolidation of Amini's memory as a recurring point of human rights discourse in 2025.

The analysis does not assume that anniversaries automatically produce international pressure. Rather, it examines how commemorative dates created recurring opportunities through which existing claims about state violence, gendered repression and accountability were renewed and made visible. Claims regarding securitisation, diaspora mobilisation and institutional uptake are therefore interpreted through publicly available documentary evidence, including state-affiliated media, international media, diaspora and activist materials, and official institutional documents.

The 2023 anniversary: Initial activation of internationalisation

The first anniversary of Amini's death in September 2023 marked the initial consolidation of the anniversary as a temporal node of political contestation. It was not simply a repetition of mourning, but the first major commemorative moment in which domestic memory conflict, diaspora mobilisation and international human rights discourse became simultaneously visible.

At the domestic level, state-affiliated and state-aligned media framed the anniversary through the language of public order, stability, hostile media and the failure of protest calls. Coverage by outlets such as IRNA and Fars News Agency presented the anniversary less as a legitimate moment of public mourning than as a politically sensitive event connected to unrest, opposition mobilisation or foreign interference (IRNA 2023; Fars News Agency 2023a,b). This framing indicates the emergence of what can be described as preventive securitisation: the anniversary was anticipated and governed as a potential moment of political reactivation.

International media reports around the same period documented heightened security presence, restrictions on gatherings, and attempts to prevent renewed mobilisation around Amini's grave in Saqqez and in major urban centres (Reuters 2023; Associated Press 2023; Al Jazeera 2023). These reports are not treated here as direct official statements of state intention. Rather, they help triangulate the broader pattern through which the anniversary was governed as a security-sensitive temporal event. From the perspective of securitisation theory, the anniversary became an object of anticipatory control. From the perspective of mnemonical security, the state response suggests an attempt to contain a competing memory that could challenge political legitimacy (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Mälksoo 2015).

At the transnational level, the 2023 anniversary showed a high degree of diaspora synchronisation. Reports and organisational materials documented commemorative gatherings and protest actions in several European and North American cities, including London, Berlin, Paris, Rome and Toronto (Associated Press 2023; El País 2023). These events demonstrate that the anniversary date itself provided a temporal infrastructure for dispersed actors. Rather than acting independently, diaspora groups and solidarity networks were able to organise mourning, protest and claims-making around a shared calendar moment.

This pattern corresponds to Hom's argument that timing is itself politically meaningful (Hom 2017). The first anniversary enabled transnational actors to act simultaneously across different locations, thereby transforming a domestic commemorative date into a globally visible moment of mobilisation. The dominant frames used in diaspora and advocacy discourse connected Amini's death to women's rights, bodily autonomy, state violence and fundamental freedoms (Amnesty International 2023; Associated Press 2023). In the language of transnational advocacy network theory, the anniversary activated both symbolic politics and information politics: activists and advocacy networks selected, circulated and translated the case into a language that was accessible to international publics and institutions (Keck and Sikkink 1999).

At the international institutional level, the 2023 anniversary coincided with renewed references to Amini's death and the wider human rights situation in Iran. European and international actors referred to the anniversary in relation to repression, women's rights, fundamental freedoms and accountability concerns (Council of the European Union 2023a; European Parliament 2023). The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, although not created by the anniversary itself, formed part of the wider institutional background through which claims about the 2022 protests and their aftermath were documented and assessed (United Nations Human Rights Council 2024).

The 2023 cycle therefore shows the initial activation of internationalisation. The anniversary did not produce immediate policy change, nor did it directly

generate new international mechanisms. Its significance lies in the convergence of three processes: preventive securitisation within Iran, diaspora synchronisation across transnational spaces, and early normative uptake within international human rights discourse. The anniversary became a recurring reference point through which Amini's death moved from a domestic protest event into a wider field of reputational pressure.

The 2024 anniversary: Institutional deepening and stabilisation of reputational pressure

The second anniversary in 2024 indicates a more sustained and institutionally embedded phase. Whereas the 2023 anniversary marked the first major return of commemorative politics, the 2024 cycle shows that the anniversary had become a predictable political and institutional reference point. Three developments are particularly visible: the routinisation of domestic securitisation, the professionalisation of diaspora mobilisation, and the deeper incorporation of the case into international human rights mechanisms.

At the domestic level, the 2024 anniversary suggests a movement from reactive securitisation to pre-emptive management of commemorative time. Reports published before the anniversary referred to restrictions around the Amini family, concerns over access to the burial site in Saqqez, and a broader security sensitivity surrounding possible commemorative gatherings (RFE/RL 2024; Iran International 2024a). The importance of these reports lies not in proving a single unified state strategy, but in identifying an observable pattern: by 2024, the anniversary had become a calendar risk around which public space, family commemoration and protest potential were monitored and managed.

This confirms the framework's argument that anniversaries can become security-sensitive temporal nodes. The anniversary was not only remembered; it was anticipated, governed and contained. Yet the 2024 cycle also shows the limits of securitisation. Associated Press reporting before the second anniversary noted the persistence of women's everyday resistance to compulsory hijab in Iranian cities, despite expanded repressive measures and renewed efforts to enforce dress laws (Gambrell 2024). This suggests that anniversary politics did not operate only through spectacular street mobilisation. It also interacted with ongoing forms of everyday defiance that kept the memory of Woman, Life, Freedom socially present.

At the transnational level, the 2024 cycle demonstrated a more routinised form of diaspora mobilisation. Reports documented rallies and commemorative actions by Iranian diaspora communities and human rights advocates in European cities ahead of the second anniversary, with Woman, Life, Freedom remaining the central symbolic frame (Iran International 2024b). Compared with 2023, these actions appeared less episodic and more integrated into a recurring repertoire of anniversary mobilisation.

The framing of diaspora activism in 2024 also became more explicitly connected to accountability and impunity. Rather than presenting the anniversary only as a memorial for Amini, diaspora and advocacy narratives increasingly linked her death to broader patterns of repression, gender-based violence, compulsory veiling and the absence of legal accountability for abuses committed during and after the 2022–2023 protests. This shift illustrates the mechanism of norm translation: a specific death in custody was repeatedly reframed as part of a wider human rights problem. In this sense, the anniversary helped stabilise the connection between memory and accountability.

The clearest sign of institutional deepening in 2024 was the stronger connection between the anniversary and formal human rights mechanisms. In March 2024, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran reported to the Human Rights Council on serious violations connected to the 2022 protests, including patterns of repression and the use of force against protesters (United Nations Human Rights Council 2024). More directly, on 13 September 2024, immediately before the second anniversary, the Fact-Finding Mission issued an update on the situation of women and girls in relation to the September 2022 protests and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement (OHCHR 2024). This timing is analytically significant. It does not mean that the anniversary caused the Fact-Finding Mission or its mandate. Rather, it shows how the anniversary became a moment for renewing institutional attention to ongoing accountability concerns.

Other institutional sources confirm this pattern. The UK House of Commons Library's September 2024 analysis framed the second anniversary in relation to compulsory dress laws, the UN Fact-Finding Mission, protest deaths and the broader human rights situation in Iran (UK House of Commons Library 2024). The European Union also renewed its official position on 16 September 2024. The statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU honoured the memory of Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement while linking the anniversary to women's rights, fundamental freedoms, repression, executions and the wider human rights situation in Iran (Council of the European Union 2024). The European Parliament also marked the second anniversary during the opening of its 16–19 September 2024 plenary session, where President Roberta Metsola stated that Parliament continued to stand with those fighting for equality, dignity and freedom in Iran (European Parliament 2024).

The 2024 cycle therefore shows a deepening of reputational pressure. The anniversary did not produce immediate behavioural change by the Iranian state. However, it became embedded in a more structured field of reports, institutional statements, parliamentary analysis and diplomatic messaging. A joint statement issued by several governments on the second anniversary similarly linked Amini's death to the continuing consequences of the 2022–2023 crackdown and the need for accountability (Joint Statement 2024). In terms of the spiral model of human

rights change, this phase corresponds not to compliance, but to the stabilisation of naming, documentation and reputational pressure (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999).

Overall, the 2024 anniversary demonstrates how commemorative repetition can transform an anniversary from a symbolic date into an institutional rhythm of human rights politics. Domestically, the date was treated as a predictable security-sensitive moment. Transnationally, diaspora mobilisation became more coordinated and accountability-oriented. Institutionally, the anniversary became linked to EU statements, UK parliamentary analysis, OHCHR updates and the work of the UN Fact-Finding Mission. The second cycle therefore marks a shift from initial internationalisation to institutional deepening.

The 2025 anniversary: Consolidation of internationalisation and global discursive presence

The third anniversary in 2025 shows the consolidation of Amini's anniversary as a recurring reference point in global human rights discourse. Unlike 2023, the significance of the 2025 cycle did not lie in the initial emergence of international attention. Unlike 2024, it did not primarily lie in the deepening of new institutional links. Rather, its importance lies in the routinised reactivation of already existing networks, narratives and accountability claims.

At the transnational level, the 2025 anniversary demonstrated the persistence of commemorative mobilisation across diaspora communities. Reports ahead of the anniversary documented calls for coordinated demonstrations in more than twenty cities worldwide, including major urban centres in Europe and North America (Iran International 2025a). Follow-up reporting during the anniversary period also described rallies by Iranian communities abroad under the continuing slogan of Woman, Life, Freedom (Iran International 2025e). These events suggest that by the third anniversary, diaspora mobilisation had become ritualised. The anniversary date itself provided a recurring calendar structure for protest, mourning and accountability claims.

This pattern strengthens the article's argument that anniversaries can function as infrastructures of synchronisation. The political significance of the anniversary was not limited to what was remembered, but also included the ability of dispersed actors to act at the same time across different spaces. Through repetition, the date enabled diaspora actors to reconnect local commemorative practices to a shared global frame. This process illustrates the mechanism of ritualised digital commemoration: memory was reproduced through gatherings, slogans, online circulation, images, statements and renewed campaign activity.

The 2025 anniversary also indicates that the Woman, Life, Freedom movement remained present in activist and human rights discourse even though the form of mobilisation had changed since the mass protests of 2022–2023. This continuity was also reflected in a joint statement by twenty-four Iranian labour, social and

support organisations, which framed the Woman, Life, Freedom movement as an unfinished struggle for political and social change (Iran International 2025c). Media reports around the third anniversary referred to continuing protest actions, statements and symbolic acts connected to Amini's death and the wider uprising (Iran International 2025f). These sources should not be read as comprehensive evidence of nationwide mobilisation. Rather, they show that the anniversary continued to function as a point of return for articulating claims of justice, bodily autonomy and accountability. In addition, families of victims and survivors used the anniversary to call for international action, linking memory and mourning to demands for accountability and pressure on the Iranian authorities (Iran International 2025b).

Human rights reporting reinforced this continuity. Human Rights Watch's third-anniversary assessment framed the anniversary through the persistence of impunity after the crackdown on the protests and highlighted the continuing risks faced by survivors, women and activists demanding justice (Human Rights Watch 2025). This framing shifts the anniversary from commemoration alone to responsibility. The central question becomes not only how Amini is remembered, but why meaningful accountability has not followed.

The institutional background in 2025 further strengthened this accountability frame. In April 2025, the UN Human Rights Council extended and expanded the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, allowing it to continue monitoring, investigating, collecting and preserving evidence of serious human rights violations in Iran (Amnesty International 2025). OHCHR materials in 2025 similarly connected the Woman, Life, Freedom protests to justice, accountability and evidence preservation (OHCHR 2025b). These mechanisms were not anniversary-specific, but they shaped the context in which the third anniversary was interpreted. The anniversary functioned as a calendar moment for renewing attention to an already institutionalised accountability process.

The 2025 anniversary was also marked by official diplomatic references. The United States Department of State issued a statement on the third anniversary of Mahsa Zhina Amini's death, linking her memory to broader criticism of repression, executions and the silencing of dissent in the Islamic Republic (U.S. Department of State 2025). Such statements demonstrate that by the third anniversary, Amini's name had become part of an established diplomatic vocabulary for discussing the human rights situation in Iran. Similar diplomatic referencing was visible in statements by Australia and New Zealand, which used the third anniversary to reaffirm support for Iranian women and to condemn continuing human rights violations in Iran (Iran International 2025d). European media and parliamentary commentary similarly framed the third anniversary as a moment for renewed support for Iranian civil society amid intensifying repression (Euronews 2025).

This does not mean that the anniversary determined foreign policy. Rather, it shows that the anniversary had become a recurring reference point within foreign policy discourse. Amini's case and the slogan Woman, Life, Freedom functioned as symbolic shorthand for broader concerns about state violence, gender repression and human rights violations. In this sense, the 2025 cycle reflects a shift from episodic attention to discursive consolidation.

Taken together, the 2025 evidence suggests that the internationalisation of Amini's anniversary had entered a phase of consolidation. Diaspora rallies reproduced the memory transnationally, human rights organisations framed the anniversary through impunity and survivor justice, and official diplomatic statements reinserted the case into global human rights discourse. In terms of the spiral model of human rights change, this wave does not indicate compliance or behavioural transformation by the Iranian state. Rather, it shows the persistence of reputational and normative pressure through repeated naming, documentation and institutional referencing (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999).

The third anniversary therefore demonstrates how commemorative repetition can transform an anniversary from a symbolic memorial into a durable discursive and institutional device. Each annual cycle reactivated the case, updated the evidence and renewed the demand for accountability. The anniversary became a rhythm of return through which unresolved memory claims continued to circulate across domestic, diasporic and international arenas.

Conclusion

This article asked how the anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death mediated the relationship between domestic memory contestation, diasporic meaning-making and transnational human rights politics. The analysis of the three anniversary cycles from 2023 to 2025 shows that the anniversary was not merely a commemorative occasion or a symbolic repetition of mourning. Rather, it became a recurring temporal mechanism through which memory claims were reactivated, contested, translated and periodically reinserted into international human rights discourse. The central finding is that anniversaries can create structured opportunities for political return: they allow unresolved claims of injustice, repression and accountability to reappear at predictable moments and to circulate across domestic, diasporic and institutional arenas.

The first contribution of the article is therefore to conceptualise anniversaries as temporal nodes in global politics. Time is not treated here as a neutral background against which political events unfold, but as an active dimension of political mobilisation and internationalisation. The anniversary date condensed dispersed grievances into a recognisable moment, enabled transnational coordination and provided media, advocacy and institutional actors with a recurring occasion for renewed attention. In this sense, internationalisation did not result

from a single shock or linear causal sequence. It emerged through repetition, accumulation and periodic reactivation across three anniversary cycles.

The second contribution concerns the politics of memory and securitisation. The empirical analysis suggests that state and state-affiliated responses frequently framed the anniversary as a security-sensitive moment rather than as a legitimate occasion of public mourning. This was visible in threat-oriented framing, preventive restrictions and attempts to manage commemorative space. Yet the effects of securitisation were not uniform. In some instances, efforts to contain commemoration limited public mobilisation inside Iran; in others, reported restrictions and security measures contributed to the transnational visibility of the anniversary. This finding complicates a simple understanding of securitisation as successful control. In a transnational media environment, the attempt to suppress or delegitimise memory may also provide advocacy networks with further evidence for claims about repression, state violence and the denial of the right to mourn.

The third contribution relates to diaspora activism and transnational meaning-making. The article has not treated the Iranian diaspora as a single or homogeneous actor. Rather, diaspora mobilisation appeared as a diverse and uneven field of actors, networks, media platforms and advocacy organisations operating across different host-country contexts. The anniversaries provided these actors with a shared temporal infrastructure for coordination, but the meaning of the anniversary was not simply transferred from inside Iran to the outside world. It was translated, reframed, amplified and sometimes simplified through the language of women's rights, bodily autonomy, state violence and human rights accountability. This process confirms that transnationalisation is selective and mediated, not automatic. Domestic memory claims become globally legible only when they are attached to available normative vocabularies, communicative infrastructures and political opportunity structures.

The fourth finding concerns institutional uptake and reputational pressure. The analysis does not claim that the anniversaries created international mechanisms such as the UN Fact-Finding Mission, nor that they directly transformed the behaviour of the Iranian state. Rather, the anniversaries functioned as recurring calendar moments through which existing concerns about repression, gender-based violence and accountability were renewed, cited and made visible. In 2023, the anniversary contributed to initial naming-and-shaming and symbolic international attention. In 2024, the anniversary became more closely connected to formal reports, parliamentary assessments, EU statements and UN-related accountability mechanisms. By 2025, Amini's name and the Woman, Life, Freedom slogan had become recurring reference points in diplomatic and human rights discourse. The shift, therefore, was not from protest to immediate policy change, but from episodic attention to a more stable pattern of reputational pressure. This

interpretation is consistent with later human rights scholarship, which emphasises that international pressure often produces uneven, partial and delayed effects rather than immediate compliance (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 2013).

This pattern matters for international relations because it shows how memory disputes can enter global politics without necessarily becoming formal security crises or producing direct institutional change. Anniversaries can operate as devices of agenda renewal. They keep unresolved claims alive, give advocacy networks a repeated opportunity to update evidence and mobilise publics, and allow international actors to revisit a case within broader human rights assessments. The accumulation of reputational pressure is therefore temporal as well as normative. It depends on repetition, visibility and the ability of actors to connect memory to recognised categories such as accountability, impunity, gender repression and fundamental freedoms.

At the same time, the model developed in this article has clear scope conditions. Anniversaries do not always become internationalised. Some commemorations may remain local, be silenced or fail to attract transnational attention. The process identified in this article depends on several enabling conditions: active diaspora and advocacy networks, access to media and digital platforms, the ability to frame the issue in globally recognisable human rights terms, and a receptive international environment. Without these conditions, an anniversary may remain a domestic or symbolic event rather than becoming a recurring mechanism of transnational pressure. The case of Jina Mahsa Amini is therefore analytically significant not because it proves a universal model, but because it demonstrates how anniversary politics can operate when domestic memory contestation intersects with diaspora mobilisation and international human rights infrastructures.

The article also has limitations. It relies on publicly available documents and media materials rather than interviews or direct fieldwork with activists inside Iran. This choice was necessary given the security risks surrounding protest politics in Iran, but it also means that domestic activism is analysed through its public traces rather than through direct participant testimony. Future research could compare the Amini anniversaries with other Iranian commemorative traditions, such as *chehelom* practices during the 1979 revolution or the memory politics surrounding Khavaran, in order to clarify when anniversaries remain localised and when they become transnationally visible.

Overall, this article shows that anniversaries can become more than historical symbols. Under specific conditions, they function as temporal mechanisms through which memory, repression, diaspora activism and human rights politics intersect. The anniversaries of Jina Mahsa Amini's death did not automatically produce international pressure, but they repeatedly reopened the case, renewed claims of accountability and contributed to the accumulation of reputational

pressure on the Iranian state. From this perspective, commemorative time is not peripheral to global politics; it is one of the ways through which struggles over legitimacy, justice and political memory are sustained across borders.

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