**Can Twitter Change the Iranian Legal Landscape for Women?**

This article explores the effectiveness of international social media (Twitter) campaigns, as a modern form of transnational advocacy networks, seeking domestic legal change in Iran for women’s rights. Using the spiral model of human rights change and second wave normative theories, the article critiques current thought on social media as an advocacy tool using evidence from two Iranian campaigns. Gathering empirical data from the #stopstoning and #letwomengotostadium campaigns, the research finds that Twitter campaigns may be linked to regression in some areas of women’s rights. Early evidence indicates that social media may lead to amplified government backlash, lack of campaign persistence, and foreign overshadowing of domestic voices, which all contribute to the ongoing problematization of the role of transnational advocacy networks in domestic human rights change.

Keywords: women’s rights, Iran, social media

**Introduction**

In a Tweet on August 23, 2007, @chrismessina wrote ‘how do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?’ The ‘pound’ or hashtag symbol quickly became the most widely used metadata social media sorting mechanism (“Chris Messina” 2017). One of the first global events to widely use the hashtag was the 2009 Iranian election (Welle 2017). Since then, relatively little empirical research has been done on the effectiveness of hashtag campaigns, in particular those campaigning for domestic legal change, and more specifically campaigning for domestic legal change for women’s rights.

This article explores the use of Twitter as a primary campaigning tool for women’s rights, laying out the context of social media, looking at relevant international relations theories and their critiques, and moving into two case studies in Iran - #stopstoning and #letwomengotostadium. This paper presents an evaluation of changes in the laws in Iran, namely the use of stoning as a form of capital punishment and a ban on women attending men’s volleyball matches. Although the number of intervening variables is too large to draw causational conclusions, initial data does suggest a correlation between the use of Twitter as a primary campaigning tool and a negative outcome in legal change. Legal change in this article is defined widely, to include legislation, government policies, judicial outcomes, and the institutionalisation of international legal norms.

**Social Media Today**

The advent of social media has fundamentally changed civil society’s actions, particularly individuals’ ability to participate in advocacy campaigns (Castells 2008). Yet the efficacy of this new form of activism, or as some call it ‘slactivism’, is hotly debated, and arguably under-researched. Proponents, such as Shirky and Howard, find that social media enhances the ability of civil society to influence agendas, expose abuses, and organise for change, all with positive long term outcomes (Shirky 2011; Howard and Hussain 2011). Sceptics, such as Gladwell and Morovoz, take the view that social media activism is not ‘real’ activism in the sense that there is no clear risk and that social networking sites have as much potential to be harmful as helpful (Gladwell 2010; Morovoz 2010). The work undertaken by Etling, Faris, and Palfrey has also found that ‘policymakers and scholars that have been most optimistic about the impact of digital tools have over-emphasised the role of information, specifically access to alternative and independent sources of information and unfiltered access to the internet’ (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010; Etling, Bruce, and Faris 2009).

37% of the world’s population, roughly 2.8 billion people, are active on social media sites. Active social media users increased by 21% in just one year (“Digital in 2017” 2017). Digging down into these numbers, however, vast inequalities (as expected) emerge. Only 42.9% of the developing world has household access to the internet, whereas 84.4% of those living in the developed world do (“Digital in 2017” 2017). Looking at the least developed countries, this number drops to just 14.7% (ICT 2017). Social media statistics are even more striking: only 14% of the population in Africa, 15% South Asia, and 7% in Central Asia are active on social media sites, juxtaposed against 66% in North America, 54% in Western Europe, and 57% in East Asia (“Digital in 2017” 2017). Therefore the majority of social media users are from the Global North, whereas many social media campaigns, particularly around women’s rights, target the Global South. The question thus emerges: is social media an ideal mode for transnational advocacy, breaking down physical borders and opening safe spaces for dialogue, or could it be going down a dangerous road of perceived foreign meddling and forced exportation of Western ideals and influence?

Human rights work has been done exploring the use of social media in civil and political rights, for example in the Arab Spring (Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar 2015; Fahmy 2016; Elyachar 2016), identifying potential incidents of human rights violations (Alston 2013; Satterthwaite 2013; Root 2013; Ratner 2013), and providing safe virtual spaces where physical ones do not exist (Abbasgholizadeh 2014; Naghibi 2011). However, little is being done to empirically explore the effects (or lack thereof) of transnational social media campaigns on domestic legal change in the sphere of women’s rights (Carpenter and Jose 2012; Chiluwa and Ifukor 2015; Dutta and Sircar 2013).

**Leading Theories: The Spiral Model of Human Rights Change**

According to the theories of legal change developed in the 1990s, social media would be an ideal modality for transnational groups to exert pressure on domestic governments to create change and improvements in domestic human rights. In 1997, Harold Koh described a ‘transnational revolution’, where he proffered a new theory of international norm compliance through a dynamic process of transnational interactions, whereby change occurred through state interaction with other states and foreign non-state actors (Koh 1997). His theory was published contemporaneously to the work being done by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink to develop a model to predict and explain how states move from non-compliance to compliance with human rights norms, with a distinct focus on non-domestic actors and their pivotal role in creating changes in laws (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). The model was built from a comparative case study approach, using several examples to identify patterns, conditions, and variables.[[1]](#footnote-1) Once those puzzle pieces were put together, the model could best be described as a spiral effect, hence it was named the ‘spiral model of human rights change’ (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). The model, in its simplest form, works through five stages: repression of rights, denial of any human rights issues, tactical concessions to quell non-domestic pressures, prescriptive status where states begin to engage with legal human rights instruments, and, finally, rule-consistent behaviour where human rights on the ground see improvements through soft laws, judiciary, and embedded norms (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013). The roles of the domestic society, the state, and international society, emphasising the importance of pressure from transnational advocacy networks[[2]](#footnote-2) as well as domestic groups are clearly defined through the patterns identified in the various case studies used. The model is based on norm theories utilising logics of consequences, appropriateness, arguing, and persuasion (Risse 2000). These concepts rest heavily on the role of transnational advocacy networks and tend to equate, and in some instances prioritise, the importance of the ‘top down approach’ (transnational) with that of the ‘bottom up approach’ (domestic) (Risse 2000; Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013; Risse 2013). The model was revisited again in 2013, after both criticism and global changes called for a rethink (Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013). Although the model was specified in more detail, the conclusion was still that the ‘spiral’ of internal and external pressure could be used to accurately predict and explain states’ internalisation of human rights norms (Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013).

Also in the late 1990s, Andrew Moravcsik began work on applying liberal theoretical frameworks to these issues (Moravcsik 1997). His work was based on the primacy of domestic structures and actors in predicting and explaining state behaviours (Moravcsik 1997; Moravcsik 2000; Slaughter 2000; Slaughter 1995). Both he and Anne-Marie Slaughter applied this liberal theory to international human rights and international laws, respectively (Moravcsik 2000; Slaughter 1995). In more recent legal scholarship, a so-called ‘second wave’ of research into norms and normative change has resurrected this focus on domestic conditions, and criticised previous research (including the spiral model) for its Western bias and lack of weight given to domestic structures and actors in looking at normative change (Cortell and Davis 1996; Cortell and Davis 2000; Martin and Simmons 1998; Acharya 2004; Steinhilper 2015; Checkel 1999; Checkel 2001). Hence a body of literature has also emerged to deeply question the emphasis on transnational pressures, and instead calls for a concentration on domestic pressures.

This article utilises Moravcsik’s liberal theory framework, building upon the second wave constructivist work in norms, to problematize the spiral model of human rights change in a post-social media world. If the emphasis on transnational advocacy networks as specified in the spiral model was correct, then large scale, global social media campaigns would be highly effective in leading to domestic human rights change, as they present a significant amount of external pressure as called for in the spiral model. If, however, these social media campaigns fail to bring about the desired legal change, then perhaps the spiral model does over-emphasise the role of foreign actors in domestic human rights issues, particularly in a post-social media world where, as seen earlier in this article, foreign pressures are often over-represented over domestic.

This post-social media world brings a new set of dimensions to advocacy efforts, and in particular transnational advocacy efforts. These dimensions can be then mapped onto existing critiques of the spiral model as shown below.

Table 1. Spiral model critiques mapped onto social media elements.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Critique of spiral model** | **Element of social media** |
| Lack of focus on domestic actors/overemphasis on Western approaches (Schwarz 2004; Laursen 2000; Chase 2003; Goldsmith and Krasner 2003; Goodman and Jinks 2004; Simmons 2013) | Campaigns dominated by international actors; social media statistically driven by Global North users |
| Ignores the real threat of potential government backlash (Jetschke and Liese 2009; Goodman and Jinks 2004; Schwarz 2004) | Social media is organic and chaotic by nature, with little to no control or organisation tempering messages about domestic legal issues; can easily be interpreted as a threat to sovereignty, which often leads to backlash |
| Lack of long-term progression towards meaningful human rights change; states often get “stuck” at a particular point in the model (Jetschke and Liese 2009; Brysk 2009; Cizre 2001; Laursen 2000) | Social media campaigns tend to lack persistence and come and go far faster than long term meaningful legal change demands |
| Ignores important domestic capacity issues; governments may not be able to affect legal change due to contextual constraints (Goldsmith and Krasner 2003) | Campaign participants tend to know very little about the domestic contexts and may be pressuring a government to make legal changes that it is not capable of making due to capacity issues |
| Ignores the role of incentives in exerting pressure for legal change (Krebs and Jackson 2007; Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003) | Social media campaigns use only one incentive – reputational harm through naming and shaming; may not be enough to pressurise for legal change |

**Methodology**

In looking to whether governments ‘talk the talk’ (Hafner‐Burton and Tsutsui 2005), in other words institutionalise meaningful legal change beyond simply legislating, new research agendas seek to undertake textual analysis to evaluate whether legal change has occurred from a normative standpoint (Simmons 2013). Simmons states that further examination of the spiral model that has not yet been undertaken could include ‘actual textual analysis of a relevant corpus of government statements, press releases, documents, speeches, and debates that would demonstrate a change in the language governments use when discussing policies related to rights practice’ (Simmons 2013, 52–53). This kind of ‘theory-driven thematic analysis’ (Landman 2009) of normative human rights change can then be correlated with campaigns to create detailed evidence of the success or lack thereof (Dempsey and Meier 2017). Legal normative changes can thus be tracked and correlated against Twitter campaigns.

It is this methodological approach which I use to explore how international hashtag campaigns have affected domestic legal change in Iran. This particular strand of work is part of a larger project utilising statistical modelling and a greater number of campaigns across the globe, however the Iranian cases have, in the early stages of the research, proven to be exceptionally interesting and worth reporting in more detail. The case studies were chosen from a large scale mapping exercise, where campaigns meeting a specific set of criteria were amassed and evaluated for ripeness. Campaigns had to 1) explicitly use Twitter as the main driver of the campaign, 2) include a strong international element, 3) have a ‘viral’ effect, i.e. a minimum of 1,000 Tweets, 4) target domestic legal change (defining legal change as either enacting a new law, amend an existing law, enforce an existing law, or repeal an old law), and 5) focus on women’s rights. It is worth noting that many of the hashtag campaigns for women’s rights fell into the realm of awareness raising or creating safe spaces for dialogue. A large number of campaigns were therefore immediately excluded on criteria number four. From there, the list was reduced to include a range of geographic locations, campaign sizes, and women’s rights issues. Two campaigns in Iran were included in the final list - #stopstoning and #letwomengotostadium.

These selection criteria are critical in the success of the research design, addressing the early concerns of study validity. In particular, a recognised potential weakness of the research is parsing out the impact of the social media campaigning versus the impact of any non-social media campaigning. However, the selection criteria meant that only campaigns which were predominantly identified as hashtag campaigns and widely referenced as such were included in the study. For example, the study does not look at general campaigns to end stoning, but instead looks specifically at the impact and effects of the #stopstoning Twitter campaign and its targets, language, and timelines. By definition this indicates that other advocacy efforts, whilst perhaps present, were not the main pressure points as defined by the campaigns themselves. Twitter was the chosen strategic avenue for the advocacy efforts in the campaigns used in this study. The social media element of these campaigns based on the selection criteria can thus be strongly correlated with any changes across the dependent legal variables. The selected campaigns were *driven* by social media, not non-social media advocacy efforts. This is not to say that the non-social media activities did not have some influence, but the primary mode of influence used by these campaigns was Twitter.

The larger research project is also looking at several context variables, independent variables, and dependent variables. In understanding the Iranian campaigns in particular, and within the confines of this article, I will look at four dependent variables – legislation, soft law (i.e. policies, strategies, and government language), judicial outcomes, and evidence of the institutionalisation of legal norms through UN dialogues. Legislation is the clearest indication of legal change. Here, I examine the laws before the campaign and after the campaign, as written. However looking at legislation is not enough to fully examine legal change. Looking to soft law, and in particular government discourse, shows how the laws are ‘seen’ by government officials and whether they are likely to be enforced or not. Judicial involvement furthers that line of exploration, used to gauge how the legal system in Iran deals with cases and implementation of the laws. Finally, I analyse the entire catalogue of State and Committee reports in the UN human rights system to measure the representation of the relevant international norms, again using the spiral model to determine whether the government has fully institutionalised and internalised the human rights norms in question. For the #stopstoning campaign, a total of 108 NGO reports, 27 government documents and statements, and 93 UN Reports were collected and studied. For the #letwomengotostadium campaign, 88 NGO and media reports, 11 government documents and statements, and 94 UN Reports were collected and investigated.

Twitter data was collected manually, using the “Advanced Search” tab and searching for the relevant hashtags. Tweets were then loaded onto the screen to the maximum memory capacity of the browser (in this case, Chrome) and copied and pasted into a text file. This process was repeated for the date range of the first Tweet with the hashtag to 30th November, 2016. The process was also repeated using the “Latest” tab and the “Top” tab to ensure the largest number of Tweets possible were collected. Duplicates were then removed from the final data set. This project has been granted ethical approval by the University of East Anglia.

**#stopstoning**

Stoning is a type of judicial execution condemned by the majority of countries and NGOs. A small number of countries continue to use this practice through religious doctrine justifications. The Islamic Penal Code (Articles 172 and 198, combined with Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution), however, explicitly allows for death by stoning for a small handful of crimes, primarily involving adultery. The story that sparked the #stopstoning international campaign was that of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani. Sakineh was found guilty of adultery in 2006 and sentenced to death by stoning. Sakineh’s case, like many others, was compounded when her defence attorneys were also arrested and held without charge (Amnesty International 2010e; Amnesty International 2010c). According to Amnesty, Iranian officials have a ‘track record’ of bringing criminal charges against anyone attempting to defend individuals such as Sakineh (Amnesty International 2010e). Sakineh was eventually released and her sentence commuted. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the spokesperson of Iran Human Rights, said, ‘[w]e hope that the international attention that Mrs. Ashtiani’s case has received, will also be directed towards all the others sentenced to death by stoning and will continue until this barbaric punishment is removed from the penal law’ (“At Least 7 Stonings” 2017).

The first Tweet to use the #stopstoning hashtag was sent out on the 13 June 2010 in response to media coverage of Sakineh’s case (@Sonja\_Jo: “Iran: Demand judiciary halts stoning: Sakineh Mohammadi http://bit.ly/d7T2yy #Iran #StopStoning #SaveSakineh”). Between June 2010 and November 2016, a total of 1,093 Tweets were sent using the hashtag. While there were not many replies (93) or likes (275), there were 1,679 Retweets, showing a high level of consistent messaging. The most prolific Twitter user in this campaign was the organisation “Women Living Under Muslim Law”, active campaigners against stoning worldwide, choosing to use Twitter as a driver for their work in this particular campaign. While other advocacy tools were employed, these were underpinned and driven by the hashtag, with emphasis placed on social media. An individual woman “Sonja\_Jo” also remained an active participant. As an initial proxy for the number of foreign versus domestic voices, less than 10% (95) of Tweets were non-English. Of the top 100 most active participants in the campaign, 99% were from a foreign or unknown location. Although the hashtag is also sometimes used to advocate for changes in other countries practicing stoning, the predominant focus of this hashtag is the Iranian law.

**Before the campaign (prior to June 2010)**

***Legislation***

Stoning to death is a penalty prescribed for anyone committing adultery while married in Iran (Amnesty International 2008; Amnesty International 2010a; Extra-Legal Executions in Iran 2009; Hosseinkhah 2012; Nayyeri, Mohammad 2012). Under *Shari’a* law, sexual activity outside of marriage is considered to be *hadd* crime; sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married is *zina. Zina* is punished as a *hadd* crime which is 100 lashes or death by stoning (Nayyeri 2013, 10). The practice in modern times started with the 1979 Revolution, after which courts were allowed to use *Shari’a* law in sentencing (Hosseinkhah 2012). The Islamic Penal Code was then officially adopted in 1991 and explicitly allowed for death by stoning in Articles 83 (prescription of punishment), 63 (crimes), 102/104 (methods), and 68/71/74/81/105 (burden of proof) (Hosseinkhah 2012; Terman and Fijabi 2010, 18–19; Justice for Iran 2012). Although stoning is prescribed for both men and women, the majority of stoning sentences are against women, who are generally more vulnerable due to systemic discrimination, illiteracy, economic injustices, and social injustices (Amnesty International 2008, 6–7; Amnesty International 2010a, 3; Nayyeri 2013, 11; Hosseinkhah 2012; Hosseinkhah 2012; Terman and Fijabi 2010, 8; International Federation for Human Rights 2009; Justice for Iran 2014).

A moratorium on stoning was passed in 2002, but it was ignored by many judges, and the moratorium did not affect the written law (Amnesty International 2009; International Federation for Human Rights 2009; Justice for Iran 2012). In September 2003, a law was passed which appeared to undermine the moratorium and actively allowed for the use of stoning (Amnesty International 2007). It was reported before the campaign that, due in large part to the Stop Stoning Forever work on the ground (i.e. not on social media), the new Penal Code (to be enacted in 2012) was going to remove executions by stoning (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2010, 10; Hosseinkhah 2012).

***Soft law***

The Iranian government has consistently displayed backlash against the West and foreign perspectives on Islam and in particular stoning: ‘[t]he real and fabricated images of stoning in the foreign media and their destructive impact on Islam and Iran are well-known and there is really no reason to discuss them’ (Baghi 2008). Immediately after the UN General Assembly voted with a vast majority in favour of a global moratorium on the death penalty on 18 December 2007, the Secretary of the Human Rights Headquarters of Iran's Judiciary, Mohammad Javad Larijani, called the initiative ‘part of the West’s wanton attempts to export to other countries ideological issues of their own particular interest’ (Extra-Legal Executions in Iran 2009). As reported in the US Department of State Annual Country Report in 2016, Justice for Iran states that ‘provincial authorities have been ordered not to provide public information about stoning sentences since 2001’ (“Country Reports” 2016). This discourse analysis shows that the Iranian government, even before the campaign, was particularly sensitive to Western ‘meddling’ in what are perceived to be sovereign domestic affairs.

***Judicial outcomes***

Stonings are often times not officially reported, however Amnesty International, Iran Human Rights, and the National Council of Resistance in Iran provide reliable and verified reports of stonings. Examining the number of reported stonings before and after the campaign does show an increase in the use of the practice, and, based on NGO reports, in a provincial show of defiance defending Islam and Sharia Law against Western pressure to change. Although not directly relevant to the campaign, we also see a correlated increase in the number of executions of women by hanging.

Table 2. Reliable Reports of Stonings in Iran, 2001-2017

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Amnesty International Reports: Stonings | Iran Human Rights Annual Reports: Stonings | Iran Human Rights Annual Reports: Women executed by hanging | NCRI reports |
| 2001 | **2 or 3 women stoned** |  |  |  |
| 2006 | **1 woman** and 1 man stoned |  |  |  |
| 2008 | 1 man stoned | 2 men stoned to death  1 escaped | 4 women hanged |  |
| 2009 |  | 1 man stoned to death | 13 women hanged |  |
| 2010 |  | No reports of stonings | 8 women hanged |  |
| *TOTAL* | *4 women stoned over a 10 year period* | | | |
| ***CAMPAIGN STARTS*** | | | | |
| 2011 |  | No reports of stonings | 15 women hanged |  |
| 2012 |  | **4 women stoned** | 9 women hanged |  |
| 2013 |  | No reports of stoning | 30 women hanged | **2 women stoned** |
| 2014 |  | No reports of stoning | 26 women hanged | 26 women hanged |
| 2015 |  |  | 19 women hanged | 18 women hanged |
| 2016 |  |  |  | 9 women hanged |
| 2017 |  |  |  | 4 women hanged Jan-Mar |
| *TOTAL* | *6 women stoned over a 7 year period* | | | |

Before the campaign, Stop Stoning Forever reported that they had saved 13 women and 2 men from executions by stoning (Amnesty International 2010a, 7). As described by the leaders of those campaigns, these successes did not stem wholly from international pressure, naming and shaming, or large scale public movements against stoning (Amnesty International 2010a, 8). Pressure played a part in the campaigns, but through organised, strategic, and well-informed actions. This approach, which arguably saw some success, is markedly different from the global Twitter campaign.

***Normative evidence from legal UN dialogue***

Iran is party to the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).[[3]](#footnote-3) Iran does not allow for any individual complaints and consistently deposits reservations regarding the supremacy of Islam (OHCHR 2017). In general, most of the Iranian national reports reiterate this supremacy of the beliefs of Islam and Islamic law, while many of the committee reports indicate that Iran is not fully engaging with the human rights processes – submissions are missing, questions left unanswered, and answers to specific issues are superficial.

As far back as 1991, a CESCR committee report asked for information on the situation of women in penal and civil codes (CESCR 1991). The response was that the codes were in accordance with the teachings of Islam and in no way were women considered second class citizens. When asked to provide further evidence and information in oral statements, the Iranian representative called into question the independence and activity of the committee itself and made remarks concerning the targeting of Iran in political warfare and exaggerated accusations (CESCR 1993b; CESCR1993a).

By 1993 the specific issue of the death penalty is addressed more and more. The Human Rights Committee (‘HRC’), who monitor the implementation of the CCPR, raise serious concerns about the death penalty, specifically as a punishment for adultery (HRC 1993b, para. 8). Iran responded with a detailed description of the law and how it was in line with the Covenant. In particular the government addressed concerns about women and rape cases, and assured the Committee that there was nothing to worry about as the judicial system had plenty of checks and balances to protect victims (HRC 1993a). This shows a deflection technique from the government.

By the early 2000s, the Iranian reports begin to take a slightly less defensive tone in relation to women’s rights norms. A very interesting perspective was shared by the State in their 2003 periodic report to CERD: ‘[t]he most important area of cooperation with United Nations agencies was the empowerment of women…[w]omen were being encouraged to participate in organizations such as gender networks and women's NGOs’ (CERD 2003a). While this on the surface appears to show some State recognition that empowerment of women is an important topic, later in report Committee notes ‘with regret’ that Iran still had not become a party to CEDAW (CERD 2003a, para. 57) (this remains true).

In 2005, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences (hereinafter ‘SR on VAWG’) completed a mission to Iran. Her report recaps the role of women in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the associated backlash against Western capitalism. She confirmed what government discourse indicated in previous reports – that women do have access to education, employment, and health care, but that it is very much under ‘strict surveillance and within well-defined boundaries’ (SR on VAWG 2006, para. 25). Specifically regarding stoning, she goes on to report that:

While the Special Rapporteur welcomes the directive of the chief of the judiciary, issued in December 2002, ordering a moratorium on execution by stoning, she is concerned that the legal provision for stoning remains. Furthermore, she continues to receive information that despite this directive, stoning is still handed down as a punishment by some courts**,** although none were carried out (SR on VAWG 2006, para. 43).

In 2008, the SR on VAWG issued an urgent appeal regarding stoning of women. The Iranian government responded with:

The Holy religion of Islam attributes great importance to the issue of safeguarding the security and morality of society, and particularly to the fundamental institution of the family. To that end, and in order to secure the cleanliness and purity of the generation it has prescribed the very heavy punishment of ‘Hadde Rajm’ (Prescribed Punishment of Stoning), for married individuals, as a deterrent that would contribute towards the realization of the sacred goal of the family (SR on VAWG 2009, para. 302).

These reports uncover the Iranian government’s seeds of resistance and backlash against Western interference before the campaign, with a general stagnation of movement towards rule-consistent behaviour relating to the use of stoning against women. Although we do see a slight softening of the government defensiveness in later reports, hard evidence contradicts this finding and reiterates that, on the ground in Iran, there was no openness to ceasing the practice of stoning.

**During and after the campaign (after June 2010)**

***Legislation***

Work on the New Islamic Penal Code began in 2007, in anticipation of the 2012 expiry date for the 1991 Code. It was approved in 2011, after the campaign had begun. Whilst stoning has been explicitly removed from the new penal code, this does not mean that stoning is outlawed. Rather, the code is silent on the matter, which therefore allows judges to interpret *Shari’a* law as they choose. In this way, execution by stoning is still very much legal in Iran. The crime of adultery is remains *hadd* within the Penal code, although the crime of *zina* is no longer specifically mentioned (Hosseinkhah 2012; Nayyeri, Mohammad 2012; Human Rights Watch 2014; Justice for Iran 2014; “Iran’s New Penal Code” 2013; “20-Year Conduct since Beijing” 2015, 30). This is arguably a significantly worse outcome for women – now the subjective views of judges, particularly in the provinces where gender discrimination is more rife, can be used freely against them.

The Iranian authorities confirmed in their comments on the latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the human rights situation in Iran that stoning is the punishment outlined in *Shari’a* law for adultery, and stated that this punishment ‘is effective in deterring crimes and protecting morality’ (Amnesty International 2016). Ali Shahrokhi, Head of the Judicial and Legal Commission of the Islamic Consultative Council has stated ‘the Judicial Commission of the Majlis came to the conclusion that it is in the best interest of the regime if certain [penalties] under the law of Hudud, namely stoning, are not *referenced* in the Code’(Hosseinkhah 2012, emphasis added). Note 4 of Article 221.5 of the 2007 draft stated: ‘[if] the enforcement of stoning should create disturbance and prove damaging to the regime, the verdict of stoning…could be changed to execution’; this was completely removed from later drafts(Hosseinkhah 2012). Given that stoning was explicitly mentioned in the previous draft of the new code, activists were initially of the mind that the punishment was removed. However, it is clear both from in depth legal analysis and reports of the continued use of this form of punishment, it is still being utilised by local judiciaries. Yet now the law is codified in a way which legitimises this subjective use (Hosseinkhah 2012; IHR 2012).

The spokesman for the Iranian Parliament’s Justice Commission, Mohammad Ali Esfenani, told reporters that removing stoning from the Penal Code was explicitly linked to the negative international attention which stemmed from and was bolstered by the hashtag campaign. He said ‘[s]ome people in the international arena have a very biased view of stoning and used it against Iran. They meant that stoning is a violation of human rights.’ He added ‘[s]toning is only removed from the law but it still exists in Sharia and cannot be removed from the Sharia’ (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2012, 17). Although it is impossible to establish a clear causal link, the evidence indicates that the campaign led to heighted Western attention and that attention pushed the government into a defensive position. Rather than explicitly calling for the reduced usage of stoning as the earlier draft indicated, the government’s approach gave a green light to judges to hand down a sentence of stoning when they see fit, pushing stoning out of the view of the Western media but not out of practice.

***Soft law***

After the height of the campaign, Mohammad Javad Larijani, the head of Iran’s Human Rights Committee, dismissed the focus on the stoning sentence as Western ‘propaganda’ (“Ashtiani Freed” 2014). When Sakineh was given leave from prison in 2014, a judiciary spokesperson said it was a sign of ‘our religion's leniency towards women’ (Foundation 2017).

The political group NCRI’s (National Council of Resistance in Iran) Women Committee reports that Rouhani ‘[i]n a tactical measure aimed mostly at international media for foreign consumption, appointed three women as presidential deputies to “handle” legal affairs, women's affairs, and environmental affairs’ (“20-Year Conduct since Beijing” 2015, 14). The report goes on to detail how the women’s affairs department is not given any power and in fact has to apply to other departments for implementation. ‘[W]omen’s rights…have always been violated by the unpopular and repressive regime of the mullahs and this has not changed for better…in the past two years (2013-2015), as manifested in the unprecedented execution of 57 women under Rouhani’ (“20-Year Conduct since Beijing” 2015, 25). Although the government is notably silent on the specific issue of stoning, the discourse alongside the NGO reports do not show any meaningful movement towards women’s rights in general, nor to the legitimisation of related women’s rights norms.

***Judicial outcomes***

As seen earlier in Table 2, the use of stoning appears to be used more after the height of the campaign. The stoning sentence was lifted for Sakineh, however ‘[t]his news does not go far enough,’ said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International. ‘We hope this is not merely a cynical move by the authorities to deflect international criticism, as this temporary suspension by the Head of the Judiciary could be lifted at any time’ (Amnesty International 2010d).

In 2011 in its Annual Death Penalty Report, Iran Human Rights noted that there was a larger than normal discrepancy between officially reported executions of women (3) and executions of women reported from unofficial but reliable sources (15). None of those cases involved stoning, however the NGO notes that ‘[t]his trend might indicate that the Iranian authorities do not announce execution of the women prisoners in order to avoid international attention since the international opinion seems to be more sensitive to execution of women’ (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2011). It is therefore possible that the campaign and the international attention led to more covert use of stoning sentences, further away from the Western media but also further away from NGO interventions which in the past saw some level of success.

According to reliable reports from the Meli-Mazhabi website (well-known opposition group) and the Iran Human Right Document Center, four women were stoned to death in November 2012, for charges including adultery and drug offences (Melimazhabi.com 2012; “Country Reports” 2012). In 2013, NCRI reported that 2 women were stoned to death. Iran Human Rights then reports that a woman was sentenced to death by stoning in 2015 (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2015) and a man and a woman have been sentenced to stoning as recently as February 2017, on the charge of adultery (“Man and Woman Sentenced” 2017; “NCRI Monthly Report” 2017) (note that these most recent sentences, as far as we know, have not yet been carried out). In 2016, AI is aware of at least one woman currently facing death by stoning (Amnesty International 2016b). In short, between 2001 and 2010, there were reports of 4 women stoned to death. From 2010 to 2017, there were reports of 6 women stoned to death. If we take the ratio of stonings over time, this actually represents a 92% increase in reported stonings of women (4 over 9 years compared to 6 over 7 years). Although these numbers are small, the reported increase almost certainly indicates an associated increase in stonings which are carried out under the radar.

***Normative evidence from legal UN dialogue***

Notably, Iran joined the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2011 and was appointed to the committee in 2014. On the surface, this would be considered evidence of prescriptive status as specified in the spiral model. However upon deeper analysis Iran does not seem any closer to rule-consistent behaviour or norm internalisation relating to women’s rights. Iran has not, for example, signed or ratified CEDAW.

Iran was in active dialogue with the CERD Committee at the time of Sakineh’s case. The state reports still echoed a focus on education, employment, and health care for women (CERD 2011, para. 6). The Committee specifically asked Iran to address the issue of Sakineh’s case (CERD 2011, paras. 38, 47, 50). In response, a Iranian delegate noted that the case did not fall within the scope of the Committee’s mandate and said that ‘[t]he media had politicized the case and used it as an opportunity to disseminate negative propaganda about his country’ (CERD 2010, para. 5).

The CESCR 2012 list of issues asked about domestic violence, dress codes, and general gender equality provisions (CESCR 2012). The state response was, in the context of UN reports, dramatic: ‘the phrase “the most discriminated and marginalized individuals and groups” in this question is a fictitious and irrelevant claim’ (CESCR 2013, para. 5) (this was in response to general anti-discrimination questions). To use words such as ‘fictitious’ and ‘irrelevant’ when answering a question from a UN human rights committee is extremely rare and strident. This kind of language and discourse is hardly ever used by States; the tone indicates a deep hostility towards the process as compared to other similar reports and the language contained within. Later, in relation to marital rape, the government stated ‘[m]arital rape is a concept that goes beyond commitments of the State party to the Covenant. Moreover, there is no international agreement or consensus on the wording of this concept and the “marital rape” is beyond the scope of the Covenant’ (CESCR 2012, para. 39). Again, this use of strong language and defiant tones indicates a stronger backlash against Western norms and institutions than those seen in the reports prior to the campaign. Although again it is not possible to pinpoint this change on the campaign itself, discourse analysis does show that the backlash is in response to Western media, and this hashtag campaign was one of the most visible activities of Western media pressurising the Iranian government to change laws during this time period. This is reflected in the catalogue of NGO reports and media reports reviewed as part of this study.

The General Assembly passed a resolution in 2013 specifically addressing the use of the death penalty and stoning, as well as ‘pervasive gender inequality and violence against women’ (General Assembly 2013, para. h). The Iranian government was called upon to abolish the death penalty. A March 2014 report from the SR on the Situation in Iran brings to light an increase in executions, and specifically notes that in 2013 at least 28 women were hanged publicly. The report also corroborates that the new penal code still allows for the death penalty, specifically stoning, in crimes of adultery (Human Rights Council 2014a). The Special Rapporteur reports later that year: ‘[t]he possible imminent executions of Reyhaneh Jabbari and Raziah Ebrahimi are also of concern. Both women were convicted of murdering men who they allege physically and/or sexually assaulted them before or during the incidents in question’ (Secretary General 2014, para. 11). This kind of visibility of the issue of stoning in the UN dialogue increased during and after the campaign and the related media attention.

Two of the main concerns in the most recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) are the use of the death penalty and laws which continue to segregate or discriminate against women (Human Rights Council 2015, paras. 3–4). ‘Recent legislative attempts made by Parliament appear to further restrict the right of women to their full and equal enjoyment of internationally recognized rights’ (Human Rights Council 2015, para. 67).

In 2016, the SR on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran specifically mentions that the new penal code still allows for stoning, and that there was a stoning sentence for adultery handed down in 2015. The government claimed that the sentence had been commuted, however, ‘notes that criminalization of the aforementioned acts is consistent with its interpretation of Islamic law and that the punishments are effective deterrents’ (Human Rights Council 2016, para. 15).

**The Impact of #stopstoning**

In sum, the penal code in Iran changed after the campaign had begun; while this presented a clear opportunity for the government to repeal the use of stoning, instead the law was written in a way that allows judges, and in particular provincial judges, to hand down stoning sentences more freely and with more subjectivity, which may be reflected in the reports that are coming through regarding stonings. Probing deeper into soft law, analysis of government statements and documents shows little change to policies, strategies, or state attitude to the use of stoning. Although numbers are small, there was a marked increase in the reported number of women stoned to death during and after the campaign. Finally, an in depth analysis of the catalogue of UN reports, the Iranian government becomes more openly hostile to Western influences and more defensive of Iranian interpretation of Islam and the right to allow stonings to occur in the discourse and language used by the State in dialogue with human rights experts. Overall, the analysis indicates a regression which timelines and government statements suggest is based, at least in part, on the social media attention. It can also be concluded with some certainty that the campaign did not achieve its goals of pressuring the government to cease the practice of stoning, both in law and practice.

**#letwomengotostadium**

Women in Iran have not been allowed to attend certain male sporting events since the 1979 Islamic revolution. A particular ban on attending men’s football matches was put in place in 1979. That ban was then extended in 2012 to men’s volleyball matches. The ban is intended to protect women from foul language and the potentially uncouth environment in these kinds of sporting events. However, volleyball had always been seen as quite a family friendly sport and the ban sparked much domestic and international outrage (Human Rights Watch 2015b).

The #letwomengotostadium campaign began in 2014, just before a large international volleyball tournament was to be held in Tehran. Despite huge media attention and large scale protests, no women were allowed in the Azadi (which ironically means ‘freedom’) Stadium that year; amidst several arrests was one British Iranian woman whose imprisonment and case garnered much international attention (“Volleyball Federation” 2017; Dehghan 2015; Human Rights Watch 2014b). Although the President and the Vice President for Women’s Affairs announced in early 2015 that the ban would be lifted for the annual June tournament, just days before the sporting authorities reneged and said that women would not be allowed in (“Citizens Angry” 2015). Some foreign women were allowed in the stadium, but no Iranian women. The ban was again tested in February 2016 when another international tournament was held in Kish. The international volleyball association (FIVB) had stated that they would cease awarding tournaments to Iran if women were not allowed in, but again in the eleventh hour the Iranian authorities announced that women would continue to be banned and the FIVB backed off, claiming that cultural issues were outside its remit (“FIVB’s Nod” 2016). Women were allowed to watch from a rooftop café for a time, but even that was closed off by the end of the tournament. The FIVB came under pressure again in 2017 before the Kish Island February tournament; this time it took a hard line and said that they would cancel all international tournaments in Iran if women were not allowed to attend. Women were given special permission to go into the stadium for the February tournament on Kish Island in 2017 (Human Rights Watch 2017).

The true test came in June 2017 with the annual summer tournament in Tehran. Women were not allowed to attend. ‘We had heard that a few women were going to be allowed into the arena so that the authorities could claim they were not banning women,’ a female journalist in Tehran told the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI). ‘But the official website that offered tickets said there were none for women just minutes after they went on sale. I think this was a trick to silence women’ (“Some Female Sports Fans” 2017).

The first Tweet using the hashtag #letwomengotostadium was sent on 15th June 2014: “Please ask @FIVBVolleyball to ask #Iranian government to allow #women to attend stadiums to watch volleyball matches. #letwomengotostadium”, sent by @femiran, an activist who specifically Tweets in both English and Persian, although she is located in New York. The second Tweet of the campaign was also sent out by @femiran, just moments later, in Persian but with the English hashtag. This campaign saw 7,173 Tweets from June 2014 to November 2016, with a much higher number of liked Tweets (48,633). Of particular note, nearly 60% of Tweets (4,202) were non-English, representing significantly more domestic participation, while 32% of the top 100 most active participants were from Iran. Although there were on the ground protests and efforts other than Tweets, these efforts all stemmed from the campaign. For example, at the protests, women held signs and banners with #letwomengotostadium printed on them. This shows that the hashtag element of the campaign was its focus.

**Before the campaign (prior to June 2014)**

***Legislation***

The ban is not of a legally binding nature, however all reports indicate that authorities adhere to it and it is treated as law by the police and the sporting authorities. The ban would need the central government to take specific action to lift it. At the same time, the 2004 Charter of Women’s Rights states that women have ‘[t]he right to have full and fair access to sports facilities, athletic training and appropriate recreational activities’ and ‘[t]he right to develop their athletic talents and to attend sports fields both at the national and international levels in a way as compatible with the Islamic standards’ (Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution 2004, paras. 53–54).

***Soft law***

Seeing political protests around sporting events is not new in Iran. Officials have been quoted as stating that the ban was ‘designed to shield women from men’s rowdiness in sport stadia and to pre-empt the temptation of genders mixing’ (Dorsey 2017). Very little information is available about the government’s reasoning in adopting the ban at this particular point in time, and there are no policies, strategies, or government statements about the issue which existed before the volleyball specific ban was put in place. All that is known for certain is that the football ban was extended to volleyball in an increasing effort of the hard-liners and religious conservatives to strengthen the role of Islam and to reinforce gender stereotypes.

***Judicial outcomes***

As the campaign launched simultaneously with the ban, there is no scope for judicial involvement specifically relating to women at volleyball matches prior to the campaign. Women had previously been arrested and detained for attempting to attend other male sporting events.

***Normative evidence from legal UN dialogue***

Similar normative evidence is applicable to this campaign as to #stopstoning in relation to the role of women and the general subordination of women under Iran’s interpretation of Islam. Although the Committees have regularly raised concerns about women’s access to all sports, the Iranian government almost routinely ignores these concerns and deflects the negative attention with reports of increasing access to gender segregated sports for women – though, using the words of the SR on VAWG, always under ‘strict surveillance and within well-defined boundaries’ (SR on VAWG 2006, para. 25).

In 1993 an HRC report raised concerns about a prohibition on women practicing sport in public (HRC 1993c, para. 13). Ironically, then in the 1998 CERD report, Iran mentions that they are a signatory to the Convention against Apartheid in Sport, using sport to combat racism (CERD 1998, paras. 6, 45, 46). This again is a deflection technique, diverting attention to rule-consistent behaviour of a different international human rights norm, in this case combatting racism.

In 2003, Molaverdi was one of the Iranian delegates to a CERD meeting, where she specifically cited work that had been done to increase women’s access to participating in (not watching) sports (CERD 2003b, para. 31). This perspective is reiterated through many reports, particularly in the 2010 HRC report where the government spoke at length about the provision and encouragement of sports for women and girls (HRC 2010). The 2010 UPR State report also discusses advancement in sports, stating that the number of sporting facilities have doubled in the past four years, and notes that ‘[t]he presence of women in the areas of publishing, arts, film production, sports and scientific Olympiads are among other important activities’ (Human Rights Council 2009, para. 97, 101).

In 2011 the HRC again (nearly 10 year later) expressed concern around a ban on women practicing sport in public (HRC 2011, para. 19). The government, once again, deflected the question by replying that women were enjoying success in national and international sports (HRC 2011, para. 50). Before the campaign the state reports and replies indicate a consistent approach to use women’s access to participate in controlled and gender-segregated sports as an example of the domestic institutionalisation of international norms alongside a lack of engagement with any concerns raised, questions the full breadth of this institutionalisation of norms allowing women equal access to enjoy sporting events.

**During and after the campaign (after June 2014)**

***Legislation***

The ban has been temporarily lifted in one instance, but remains in place after the June 2017 tournament. Notably, the 2016 Charter of Citizen Rights states that: ‘[c]itizens, particularly women, have the right to access sport, educational and safe recreational facilities, and be able to attend national and world sport arenas, ***while preserving Islamic-Iranian culture’*** (The Islamic Republic of Iran 2016, para. 89) (based on Iranian Constitution) (***emphasis added)***. It seems that the Iranian government carefully constructed the legal landscape to explicitly defer to Islamic law and culture, in this case ensuring that women can only attend sporting events if it does not go against Islamic principles. The government continues to take the position that women attending men’s volleyball matches does indeed violate Islamic values.

***Soft law***

In April 2014 Ayatollah Khameni was quoted as saying that the ‘West’s approach to women issue “profoundly deviant”…that “the Westerners have, for a variety of reasons, misunderstood the issues of women,” and try to export their views on the roles of women around the world through media.’ (“West’s Approach” 2014). This quote is oft-used by NGOs and watch-dogs in relation to the government’s approach to women’s equality issues and the ban on attending volleyball matches.

Many in government are publicly against the ban, but are supposedly bound by the power of the religious leaders. In June 2014, Molaverdi (Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs) announced in an interview that ‘[t]he President has called for further explanations regarding this matter [the volleyball ban]; therefore, the Minister of Sports and I are charged with investigating’ (Mouri 2014). However, this investigation never led to the lifting of the ban. Again in June 2015, central government announced that the ban would be lifted, when Molaverdi stated that ‘[a]ttendance of women and families in sports stadiums during volleyball matches has been confirmed, however, this plan has not reached the point of enforcement and notification [to relevant organizations] yet’ (“Prominent Activists” 2015). Later that month, a law enforcement spokesperson said that ‘women’s entry into sporting arenas remains illegal’ (“Women’s Entry” 2015) and the chairman of Tehran Islamic seminaries council, Ayatollah Rashad, stated that ‘given the improper physical and moral conditions of stadiums for women, their presence is not in the interest of society’ (“Not to the Interest of Society” 2015). Molaverdi then claimed that ‘her government decided not to push further on the matter because of the respect it has for the country’s religious authorities, some of whom had voiced their opposition to the presence of women at the volleyball matches’ (Human Rights Watch 2015a). The influence of the so called hard-liners was too great and the authorities reverted to the ban, despite these public assurances that it would be lifted. It was also reported that some religious groups distributed fliers at one large volleyball event, calling any women who wanted to attend ‘sluts and prostitutes’ (Wyatt 2015). At one point, Molaverdi was even publicly critical of the influence of the religious groups, posting her frustrations on Facebook (“Iran VP Scolds” 2017).

***Judicial outcomes***

One of the most egregious aspects of this campaign was the reactionary arrest and lengthy detention of Ghoncheh Ghavami. A British-Iranian, she was initially arrested at the June 2014 tournament, but immediately released. A few days later she was summoned to the police station to purportedly collect her mobile phone. She was re-arrested, kept in solitary confinement for over a month and suffered alleged interrogations and mistreatment during her six month incarceration in prison in Iran (Human Rights Watch 2014b; Amnesty International 2014a; Amnesty International 2014b). It has not gone unnoticed that it was a *British*-Iranian woman who was arrested, immediately after the campaign caught so much Western attention. The Iranian government claimed that her arrest had nothing to do with volleyball (even though she was arrested protesting the volleyball ban at a volleyball match). International pressure led to her release in November 2014, six months after her initial arrest. Again, although direct causation is impossible to establish, given the timing of her initial arrest, release, and re-arrest, her citizenship, and correlation to the spike of Western social media attention indicates a strong association between her detainment and the government’s backlash to the campaign.

***Normative evidence from legal UN dialogue***

In 2016 the CRC address the issue squarely, raising concerns ‘that women and girls are forbidden from sports stadiums as this is considered to lead to “immoral consequences”, which is in violation of article 31 of the Convention’ (CRC 2016, para. 79). The 2015 UPR addressed the issue, but tangentially. The national report only discusses access to sports in light of religious minorities, not women (and again in a positive light). One NGO (JFI) reported concerns that women were discriminated against in sports because of the dress code and strict hijab rules, but not the issue of equal access to stadiums (Human Rights Council 2014b, para. 58). The UPR Working Group had two concerns about sports – Sri Lanka called for more allocations to youth sports, and Greece recommended that Iran ‘[t]ake adequate measures, such as the ratification of CEDAW, to enhance the equal role of women in society, in particular, in political, economic, social and cultural life, including sports’ (Human Rights Council 2014d). Finally, Iran’s Beijing+20 national report uses women’s participation in sport as evidence, in several places, of the work the country has done to promote and protect women’s rights (The Vice Presidency for Women & Family Affairs 2014).

Remarkably, the UN dialogue on women’s equal access to attend sporting events seems to have all but disappeared after the campaign. There is very little discussion on the matter, and when there is Iran continues the same deflection tactics that have been used for decades.

**The Impact of #letwomengotostadium**

In sum, the ban has not changed in its legal status. While women were allowed to attend one volleyball event, this seemed to be a one-off. As women were not allowed to attend the June 2017 international tournament, it seems that the ban is still firmly in place. Discourse analysis of soft law indicates that the debate over the ban, sparked by the hashtag campaign, has exposed and underscored the power that the hard-liners and religious groups have over the government, particularly as evidenced in statements from Molavaridi who at the time was the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs. The most visible backlash against the social media campaign and the media attention was the arrest, detention, and mistreatment of Ghavami, generally seen as a tactic of the government reacting to the Western interference in domestic religious issues. In depth identification of norms in the catalogue of UN reports indicates no change in the institutionalisation and internalisation of international norms relating to full gender equality in sport.

**Conclusion**

The documented backlash of the government against the Western influence and the Western driven media attention is, arguably, translating into a bleaker picture for women in Iran. It is worth noting that Twitter is officially banned in Iran, though many users and participants in these campaigns state their location as being in Iran. Choosing to use Twitter for a campaign in a country that bans Twitter indicates a strategic choice to draw from foreign, external pressure in advocating for change. However the results of this strategic choice are not clearly positive. In short, we see more women being stoned to death, more liberal and subjective use of stoning as a sentence, women being branded as ‘sluts’ and ‘prostitutes’ for wanting to attend a sporting event, and women being arrested, illegally detained, and mistreated for attempting to watch volleyball. Although still in the early stages of this research project, initial analysis does indicate that the #stopstoning campaign had a more negative impact than the #letwomengotostadium campaign; the stoning campaign also showed stronger evidence of the weaknesses identified in the spiral model. It was more dominated by international voices than domestic (based on language as a proxy) and showed a shorter and less persistent timeline of engagement than the volleyball ban campaign. The #letwomengotostadium campaign seemed to fail on the capacity weakness – central government showed an interest in responding positively to the campaign but lacked the ability to carry out meaningful change due to the influence and power of the hard-line conservatives. Both campaigns in some aspects were correlated to actions of backlash and defence against foreign intervention in domestic matters. Finally, neither campaign achieved the legal changes that they set out to achieve.

In this article, I have attempted to show that the advent of social media and the associated phenomenon of Advocacy 2.0 has exposed the cracks in our models of transnational advocacy whereby international actors (organisational and individual) exert pressure on domestic governments to institutionalise and internalise legal human rights norms. The weaknesses and critiques which rendered the models identified in non-social campaigns (which were methodical, reflective of domestic interests, and highly strategized and organised) are amplified when mapped onto social media, which by definition is organic, fast, and open to distortion and misinterpretation. In the future, these case studies will become part of the larger research project, looking at more campaigns, more countries, and more issues, with an aim to creating statistical models to test the relationships between the Twitter variables and the legal variables. Beyond that work, there is significant scope for extending the research into more social media sites and certainly more campaigns.

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1. The original model used case studies from Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, the Philippines, Chile, Guatemala, and Eastern Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Transnational advocacy networks are defined generally as groups working across state borders on a given issue, from a place of shared values and discourse, and made up of non-state actors. See, e.g., Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Kiel (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As a party to these Conventions, Iran is required to submit periodic periods on the implementation of the rights contained in the Conventions. Those reports are reviewed by the Committee of experts and a dialogue follows between the Committee and the State. The process culminates in a series of recommendations which form the basis of discussions for the next round of periodic reporting. 93 of these UN reports were reviewed in this research to understand how Iran is or isn’t moving towards international rule consistent behaviour relating to the stoning of women. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)