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Messiah for the Islamic Republic: Masih Alinejad as Deus Ex Machina?

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Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

In September 2022, when the Woman, Life, Freedom protests erupted in Iran, many international commentators anticipated significant changes in the country. However, one and a half years later, there has been little meaningful transformation in Iranian society and politics. This paper argues that the activities of certain prominent Iranian opposition figures, notably Masih Alinejad, contributed to Iranians choosing to abstain from the protests. Through an extensive analysis of data from Google Trends, Wikipedia, and X, we demonstrate widespread cynicism among Iranians towards Masih Alinejad and her initiatives. Consequently, this study views her role as pivotal in safeguarding the Islamic Republic regime by presenting a bleak outlook for Iranians if the protests were to continue and succeed.

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Keywords: Iran; Masih Alinejad; Woman, Life, Freedom; Deus ex machina; Messiah.

Introduction

In early September 2022, Iran found itself at a critical juncture. President Ebrahim Raisi, having been in office for over a year, grappled with a deepening crisis of popularity. The administration was embroiled in a losing battle against structural incompetency, exacerbated by international sanctions that had effectively plunged the Iranian economy into recession. Corruption had reached alarming levels, while environmental degradation and persistent droughts painted a bleak picture for the nation's future. The negotiating teams had recently failed to reach a meaningful agreement with global powers and therefore another wave of inflation was imminent. Adding to the government's woes was the emergence of a new generation devoid of any ideological fervor, instead prioritizing pleasure, consumption, and personal liberty. This seismic

shift in societal values posed a significant challenge to the traditional pillars of the Islamic Republic. The government faced its most severe legitimacy crisis to date, compounded by the disillusionment of many former supporters from lower socio-economic strata who had either turned against it or remained unwilling to defend it.

In essence, Iran stood at a crossroads, with President Raisi's administration facing multifaceted challenges that threatened to erode its authority and stability. The need for decisive action and meaningful reforms was more urgent than ever, as the nation teetered on the brink of a profound crisis of governance and legitimacy. The specter of past uprisings loomed large, serving as a stark reminder of the potential consequences of further dissent. Iranians use internet extensively (Aeini et al., 2023) and many of them see internet as a vehicle for political activism (Wojcieszak & Smith, 2014). Just three years prior, a massive uprising had dealt a significant blow to the country's economy and legitimacy. Another wave of protests was the last thing the Islamic Republic government desired.

But another uprising was inevitable and everyone knew that. It would have been sparked by an incident sooner or later, and this time the protesters would be in millions and more furious. Mahsa Amini's death in police's detention in the middle of that September was enough to roll out another cross-country street protests; the protests were called Woman, Life, Freedom uprising and some political commentators said it could topple down the Iranian government.

Protests were not big enough as many among the government supporters and opposition figures expected and soon there were packets of -at most- several hundreds of angry teenagers who did know exactly what they wanted. Being in their fifties, Iranian security bodies understood that and put an end to the protests with a policy of carrot and stick.

How did all these happen? Where did the stored energy of the compressed spring dissipate? My argument in this paper is that after unfit people were named as leaders of the Woman, Life Freedom movement, most Iranians decided they should not join the protests, lest worse would befall them. One of these so-called leaders, I would argue, was Masih Alinejad.

Messiah for the Islamic Republic

Masoumeh Alinejad-Ghomikolayi who calls herself Masih Alinejad is a prominent Iranian journalist, author, and activist, celebrated for her unwavering endeavor to women's rights and freedom of expression. Born in a small village in northern Iran, Alinejad started to work with a group of young men to become political activists but soon she bore a child from one of them and had to marry him. Later he worked as a journalist before fleeing and seeking asylum in Europe.

Alinejad's activism gained widespread attention with her creation of the "My Stealthy Freedom" campaign in 2014. This - seemingly- US funded initiative encouraged Iranian women to share photos of themselves without the mandatory hijab, defying the strict dress code enforced by the Iranian government. The campaign quickly went viral, sparking a global conversation about women's rights and religious freedoms in Iran. Despite facing oppositions and surveillance from the Iranian authorities, Alinejad continued her advocacy efforts. She used her platform as a journalist and social media influencer to amplify her reach. Her reputation declined dramatically when in late 2010s it was revealed her efforts are well-funded by American security bodies. It has formally stated that from 2015 onwards, she has received hundreds of

thousands of dollars from the US government (USSpending, 2024). Moreover, after an alleged failed kidnapping plot by the Iranian security officers, a US court awarded her 3.3 million dollars in damages and the money was taken from confiscated Iranian assets (Middle East Eye, 2023). Before these divulSIONS, many people had talked about her with suspicion and now more people started to disliked her.

Formerly (see Shahghasemi, 2020), some scholars have shown how feminist activities on social media might produce unfavorable outcomes. After Woman, Life, Freedom movement broke out and the security forces started suppressing the protests, Masih Alinejad called herself the leader of the movement and blatantly said on September 24, 2022 she interviewed *The New Yorker* and said ““They hate me because I am mobilizing women against them” and added “I’m leading this movement” (Filkins, 2022). These assertions made many people in Iran angry who saw someone else was trying to expropriate their protests.

Moreover, in early January 2023 she addressed a crowd “in order to overthrow Iran, with all beliefs, with all opinions, we have a shared pain” (Alef, 2023). These assertions, and many others, convinced many Iranian protesters that the problem was not a system of governance, but a country as a whole. She had other controversial opinions expressed in the media or on her social network accounts about requesting a military attack on Iran, banning Iranian sports teams from participating in global tournaments, urging global powers to further sanction Iran, etc., that had an extremely negative effect on her popularity in Iran.

Despite being appointed as a leading figure in The Charter of Solidarity and Alliance for Freedom, Alinejad's lack of popularity contributed to the eventual dissolution of the Charter within months.

Her namesake, "Masih," which is the Persian equivalent of "Messiah," implies a liberator and savior of the people. However, Alinejad's unpopularity inadvertently played into the hands of the government, as many Iranians, when faced with a choice between supporting her cause or the Islamic Republic, reluctantly opted out of demonstrations. This study aims to explore how Iranian X users perceive Masih Alinejad amidst these controversies.

Methodology

We analyzed a dataset of Persian posts on X about Masih Alinejad. The posts were collected from the beginning of the Iranian calendar year 1402 (March 2023) until the beginning of Bahman (January 2024). Web scrapers gathered roughly 1.4 million posts, including more than 74,000 original posts and more than 1.1 million reposts. More than 248,000 unique users published or shared these posts. Figure 1 illustrates the daily trends in content dissemination about Alinejad.

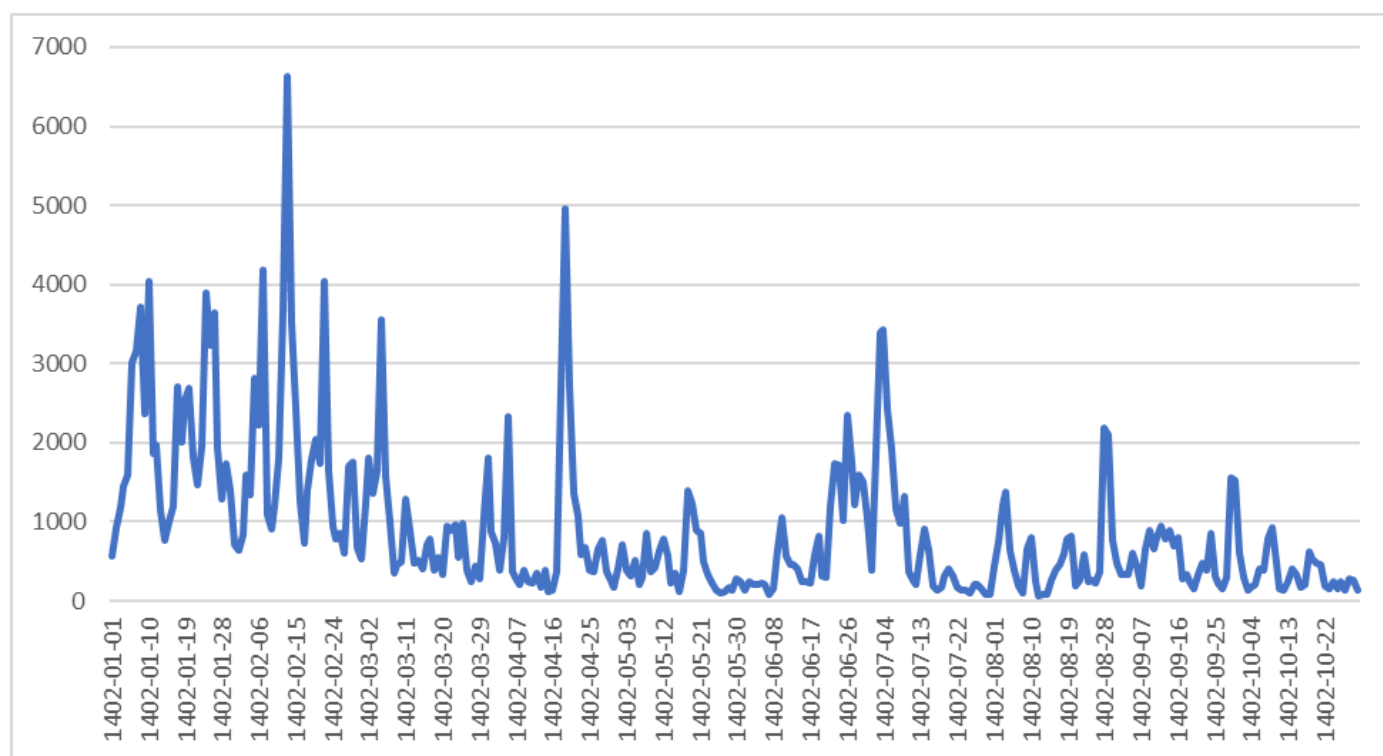


Figure 1. Daily trends in Persian content dissemination about Masih Alinejad

Another data source in this analysis was the search volume for the Alinejad's name using Google Trends. Google Trends shows the relative popularity of a search term over time from 2004 to the present day.

The third data source examined in this article was page view data for Masih Alinejad's Persian Wikipedia page. This data is publicly available on a website (pageviews.wmcloud.org).

Analysis of Google Trends Results

Google Search is a major tool for people to find information online. The search volume for a topic shows how many users in a specific region or timeframe are looking for related content. Google Trends offers two ways to analyze these searches: by "term" or by "topic."

Since Masih Alinejad is an Iranian-American journalist, Google Trends recognizes her as a topic. We analyzed data related to this topic, and the chart below illustrates the relative search volume for "Masih Alinejad" over the past five years.

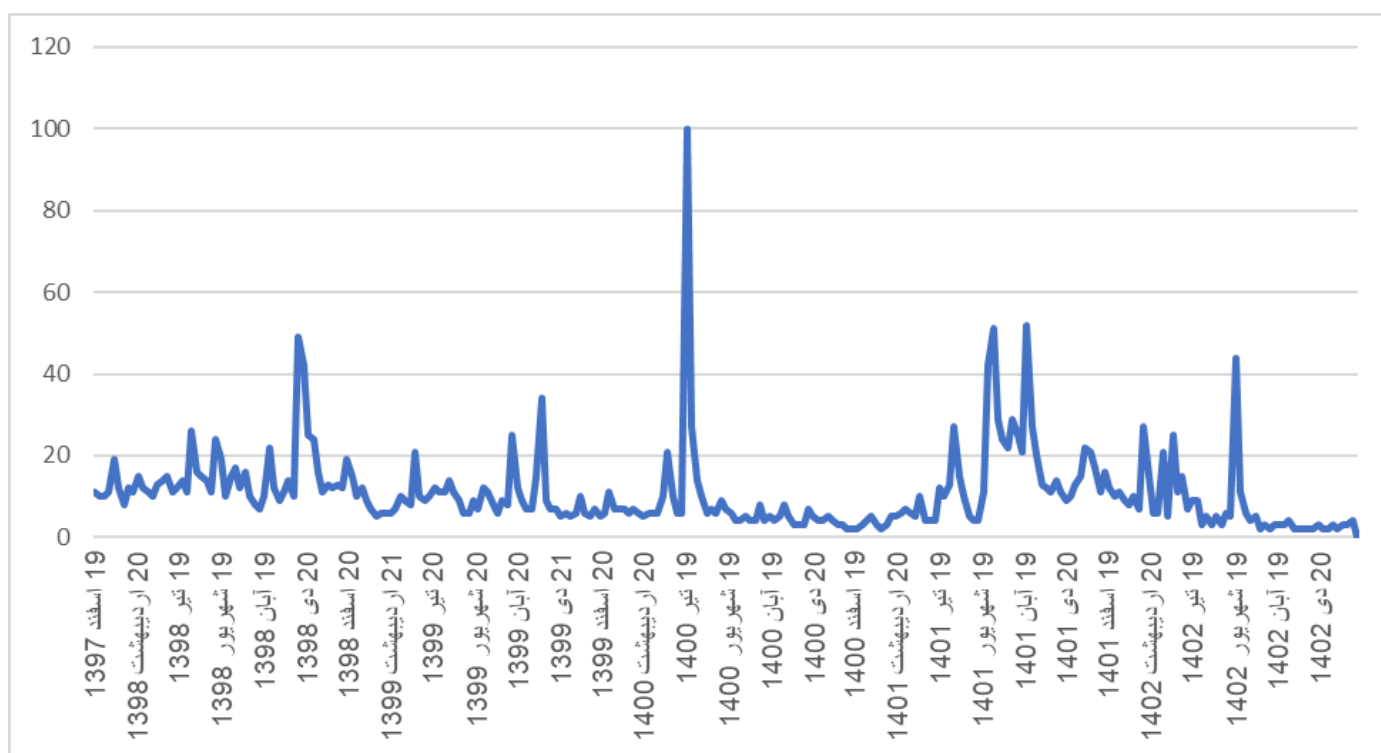


Figure 2. The relative search volume for "Masih Alinejad" over the past five years

The chart shows that searches for this individual spiked in July 2021, coinciding with rumors of a kidnap or assassination attempt. Additionally, her name saw a significant increase in searches by Persian-speaking users during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in September 2022. Table 1 illustrates which other topics coincided with these spikes in search volume for Masih Alinejad.

Table 1. Major themes Iranian users searched as related to Masih Alinejad

Year	The general topic	The search query
2019	The search for Masih Alinejad's Instagram page	روح الله زم
		اینستا بی بی سی
		مسیح علینژاد اینستا
		اینستاگرام مسیح علینژاد
		پیج مسیح علینژاد
		مسیح علیست
		علینژاد
		مسیح علینژاد
		پیج مسیح علی نژاد
		اینستاگرام مسیح
		لایو ریحانه پارسا و مسیح علینژاد
		مسیح علینژاد توئیتر
		مصاحبه ریحانه پارسا با مسیح علینژاد
		نویسنده

2020	The search for interviews between Masih Alinejad and Reyhaneh Parsa (an Iranian actress)	<p>سوی</p> <p>لایو ریحانه پارسا با مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>لایبخانه پارسا و مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>مسیح علینژاد با حجاب</p> <p>تویتر امید دانا</p> <p>ریحانه پارسا و مسیح علینژاد</p>
2021	<p>1- Claims about attempted kidnapping of Masih Alinejad</p> <p>2- Masih Alinejad's debate with Elaheh Hicks</p>	<p>ربودن مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>ربایش مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>رئیزی</p> <p>ربوده شدن مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>دستگیری مسیح علی نژاد</p> <p>تویتر رائفی پور</p> <p>الهه هیک علینژاد</p> <p>خوانندگی مسیح علینژاد</p>
2022	<p>1- Protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini</p> <p>2- Searching for the X pages of influential figures in the protests</p>	<p>مهسا امینی</p> <p>اعتراضات</p> <p>بدون تعارف مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>اغتصابات</p> <p>علی حسین قاضی زاده</p> <p>علی دایی</p> <p>تویتر سیما ثابت</p> <p>تویتر رادیو فردا</p> <p>تویتر صدای آمری</p>
2023	<p>1- Some media reports about Masih Alinejad.</p> <p>2- Alinejad's efforts to obtain compensation.</p>	<p>یاسمین پهلوی</p> <p>دستگیری مریم رجوی</p> <p>فخری خوروش</p> <p>غرامت مسیح علینژاد</p> <p>یلیان امپا</p> <p>آوات علی نژاد</p> <p>فخری خوروش بازیگر</p> <p>نازنین بنیادی</p>

Wikipedia Page

Since its inception as an online encyclopedia, Wikipedia has grown significantly and is now a key information resource for both the general public and researchers, serving as a primary source for diverse topics. Pageview data from a website like pageviews.wmcloud.org allows us to analyze user access to encyclopedia pages. In this section, we'll focus on the Persian Wikipedia page for Masih Alinejad and compare its viewership trends.

In the past five years, Masih Alinejad's name only appeared twice (in 2019 and 2022) among the top 500 pages of the Persian Wikipedia.

Table 2. *Masih Alinejad's Wikipedia page's appearance among the top 500 most visited pages on Persian Wikipedia.*

year	rank	visits
2019	363	248000
2022	226	499000

X

Our most important question in this study was the degree of popularity of Masih Alinejad among Iranian X users. Table 3 summarizes the overall statistics of posts collected for this study. This includes posts containing various spellings of "Masih Alinejad" in Persian within the defined timeframe.

Table 3. *overall statistics of posts collected about Masih Alinejad*

year	posts	reposts	users	average likes
2023-2024	74720	1175872	248215	4.4

In order to understand users' perception of Masih Alinejad, we employed three methods to analyze how users discussed Masih Alinejad on X:

Random Sampling and Encoding: We randomly selected posts and analyzed their topics and sentiments for Alinejad. Additionally, we tried to identify the users' political stance on Alinejad based on their other posts.

Hashtag Network Analysis: We examined the network of hashtags used in the posts to gain a broader understanding of the content.

Named Entity Recognition (NER): We counted how often words appeared in the posts and identified the most frequent attributes associated with Alinejad. We also analyzed user networks to find groups that posted about Alinejad and studied the topics they discussed.

Coding

Previous research indicates that the use of simple random sampling method is generally an acceptable and efficient approach for analyzing the topics of posts (Dagar, 2019). Accordingly, based on routine calculation a sample size of 378 was designated as enough. However, for further assurance, this number was increased to 500. Figure 3 illustrates the

topics obtained from the coding process of the posts.

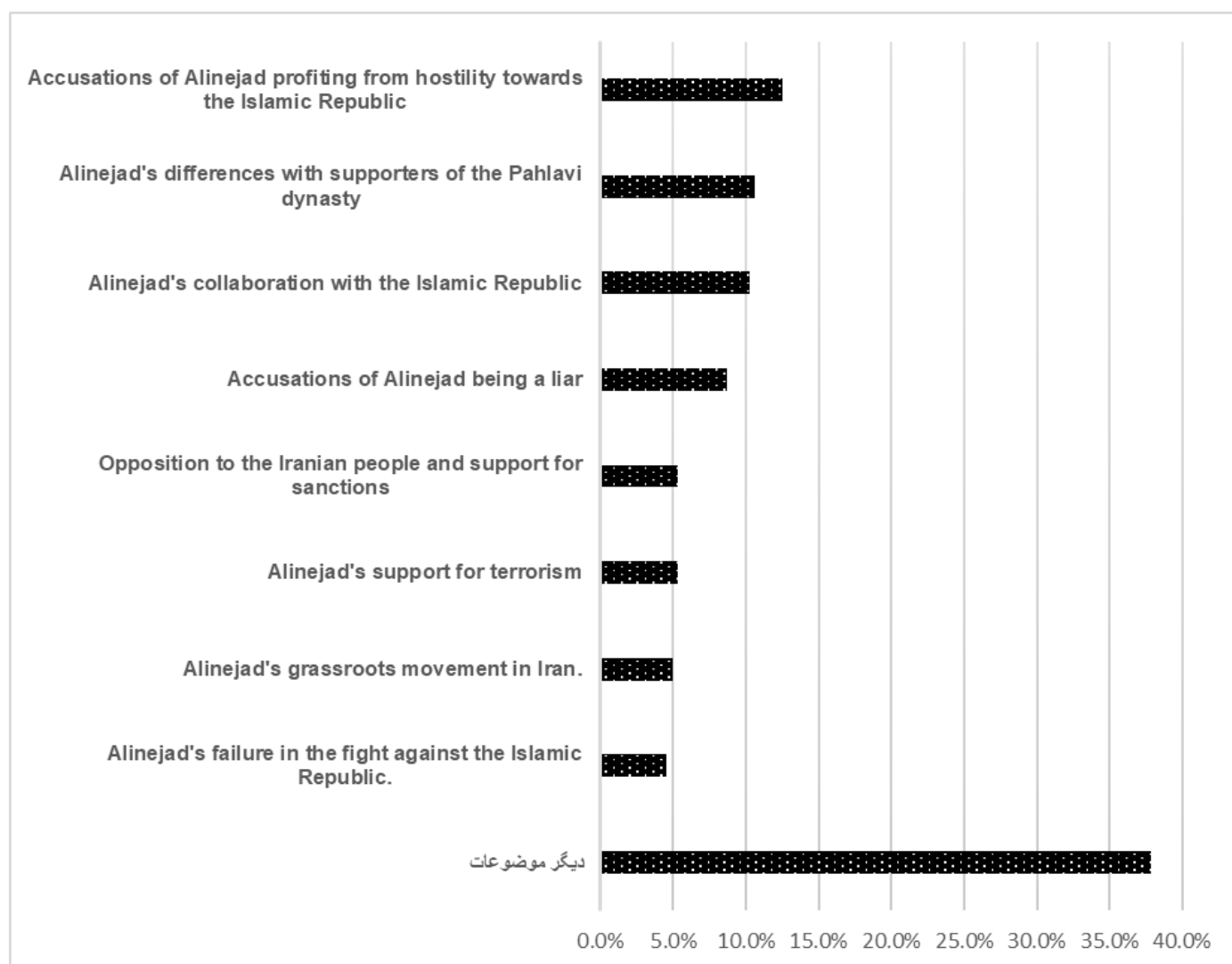


Figure 3. Topics of discussion about Masih Alinejad

Accusations of Alinejad profiting from hostility towards the Islamic Republic

The predominant topic of conversation on X concerning Masih Alinejad revolves around her endeavors to generate income through her anti-Islamic Republic government activities. Specifically, discussions often center on her pursuit of compensation from the Iranian government following a court ruling in the United States. Moreover, numerous posts critique her acceptance of financial assistance from individuals to sustain her campaign against the Islamic Republic. Nearly all discussions on this subject depict her in a negative light.

Accusations of Collaboration with the Islamic Republic

Another prominent subject of discussion on X involves allegations of Masih Alinejad collaborating with the Islamic Republic. These accusations typically originate from users aligned with the overthrow of the Iranian government, who

assert that Alinejad secretly maintains loyalty to the Islamic Republic and engages in collaboration with them. Some posts insinuate that this collaboration entails shared behaviors, although the details remain unclear. Discussions on this topic are predominantly critical of Masih Alinejad.

Conflicts with Monarchists Supporting the Pahlavi Family

This category of posts centers on the disagreements between Alinejad and supporters of the Pahlavi monarchy. Users express divergent viewpoints on this subject, with some disagreeing with monarchists while offering support to Alinejad. Conversely, others perceive Alinejad as a feminist and leftist figure, leading them to oppose her views.

Accusations of Lying

Users with contrasting political views, encompassing both proponents and detractors of the Islamic Republic, have levied accusations of dishonesty against Masih Alinejad on various fronts. At times, she is simply branded as a liar without specific reference to particular issues. Intriguingly, the segment of users opposing the regime who regard Alinejad as untruthful surpasses the number of regime supporters who share such sentiments.

Support for Terrorism

These posts allege that Alinejad supports terrorist groups or individuals affiliated with them. Critics with differing political perspectives have accused Alinejad of endorsing terrorism, primarily citing her support for Kurdish and leftist militant groups.

Opposition to the Iranian People and Support for Sanctions

This topic, primarily brought up by supporters of the Islamic Republic, revolves around Alinejad's endorsement of Iran sanctions and military strikes. These users argue that supporting such measures not only opposes the Islamic Republic but also inflicts harm on the Iranian people, who bear the brunt of sanctions and military attacks. Consequently, Alinejad is accused of being a traitor and of working against the interests of the Iranian people.

Alinejad's Failure in the Fight against the Islamic Republic

The content of these posts underscores Alinejad's perceived shortcomings in her efforts to combat the Islamic Republic. Users with diverse political perspectives have expressed the view that she has not made significant headway in this struggle. This sentiment has been echoed by users ranging from supporters of the Islamic Republic to its opponents.

Alinejad's Grassroots Movement in Iran

These posts engage in a debate regarding Alinejad's level of grassroots support within Iran. While some users argue that she lacks a substantial domestic following, others, particularly her supporters, assert that she enjoys popularity, particularly among Iranian women. This has emerged as a contentious issue between Alinejad's proponents and critics.

Analysis of User Attitudes towards Masih Alinejad

The chart below provides an overview of users' perspectives on Masih Alinejad based on coding.

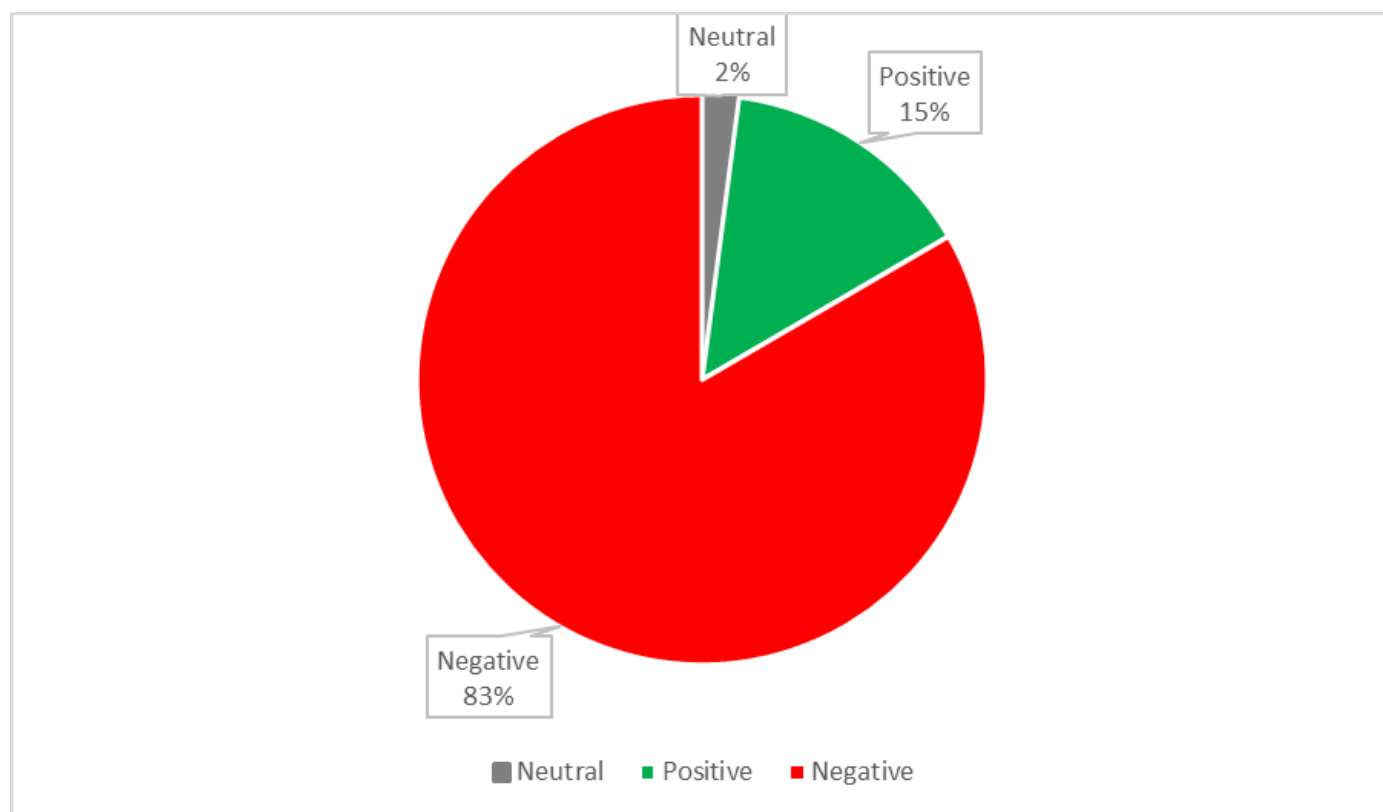


Figure 4. Users' perceptions on Masih Alinejad are mostly negative

Overall, the analysis indicates a diverse range of opinions regarding Masih Alinejad, spanning from support to criticism and skepticism but as you can see in the above diagram, Masih Alinejad is a highly unfavorable public figure among Iranian X users. Moreover, our findings in this section suggest a polarized discourse surrounding her persona and activities.

Positive Attitudes: A small portion of users demonstrates positive attitudes towards Masih Alinejad. They may view her as a courageous activist, an advocate for women's rights, and a voice against oppression. These users often express admiration and support for her efforts in challenging the Iranian government and promoting freedom of expression.

Neutral Attitudes: Some users maintain neutral attitudes towards Masih Alinejad. They may acknowledge her activities and contributions without necessarily expressing strong opinions or sentiments either in favor or against her. These users might perceive her as one among many activists or public figures without forming definitive judgments. Moreover, we should note, only 2 percent of users fall into this category.

Negative Attitudes: A significant portion of users (83 percent) exhibit negative attitudes towards Masih Alinejad. They criticize her for various reasons, such as alleged collaboration with foreign agents, spreading misinformation, or acting against the interests of Iran -and not a certain way of governing the country. These users often express skepticism,

distrust, or outright hostility towards her, questioning her motives and credibility.

This chart indicates that the majority of posts published on the Iranian X about Masih Alinejad have been negative, critical, or opposing her views and actions. On the other hand, 15% of the posts have shown a positive attitude towards her, praising or defending her actions.

This chart illustrates the political leanings of users who have posted about Masih Alinejad.

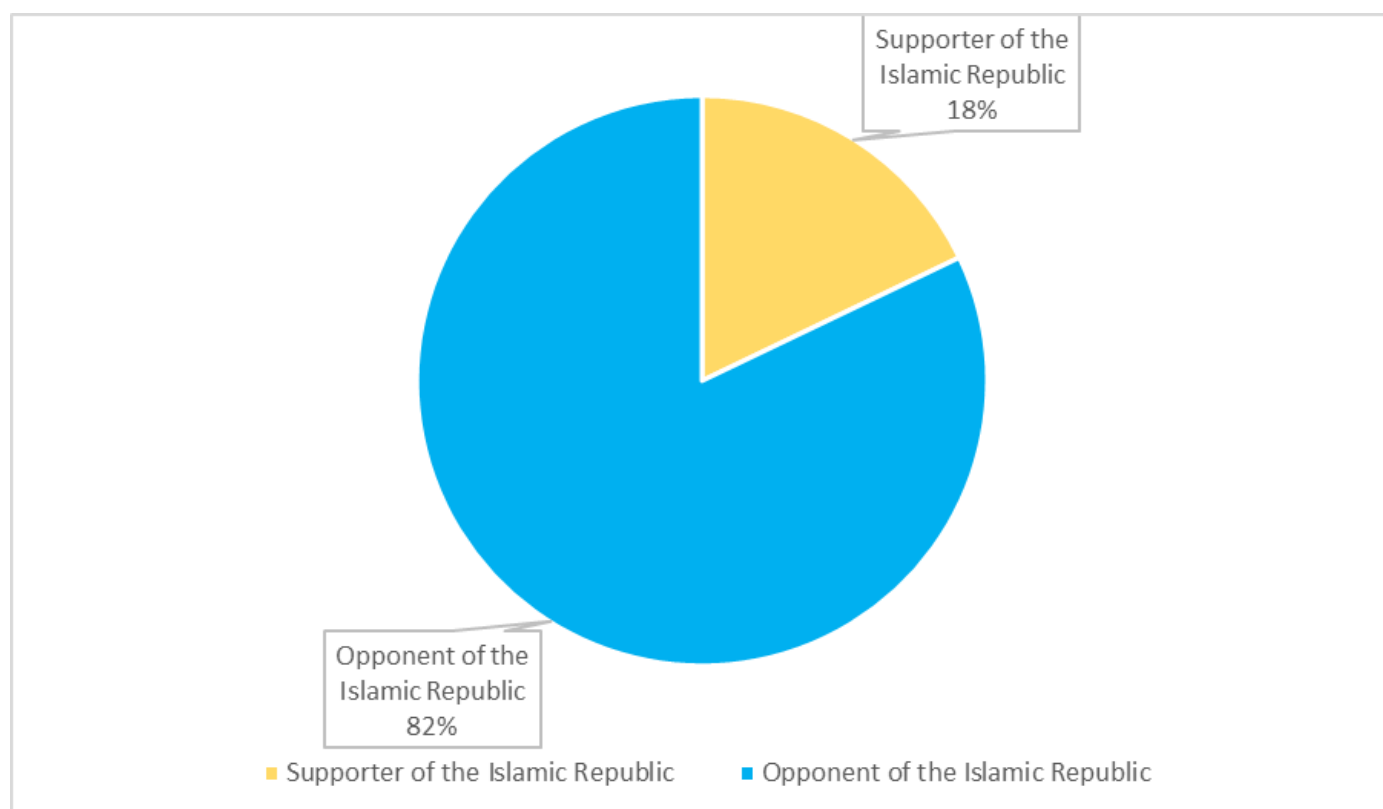


Figure 5. *Who posted about Masih Alinejad*

The chart in the figure 5 shows that 82% of users who posted about Alinejad had a political stance against the Islamic Republic system, while only 18% of the content generated about her was published by users who support the regime. In addition, the chart complements the chart in the figure 4 by indicating the specific political orientation of users and their respective attitudes toward Masih Alinejad.

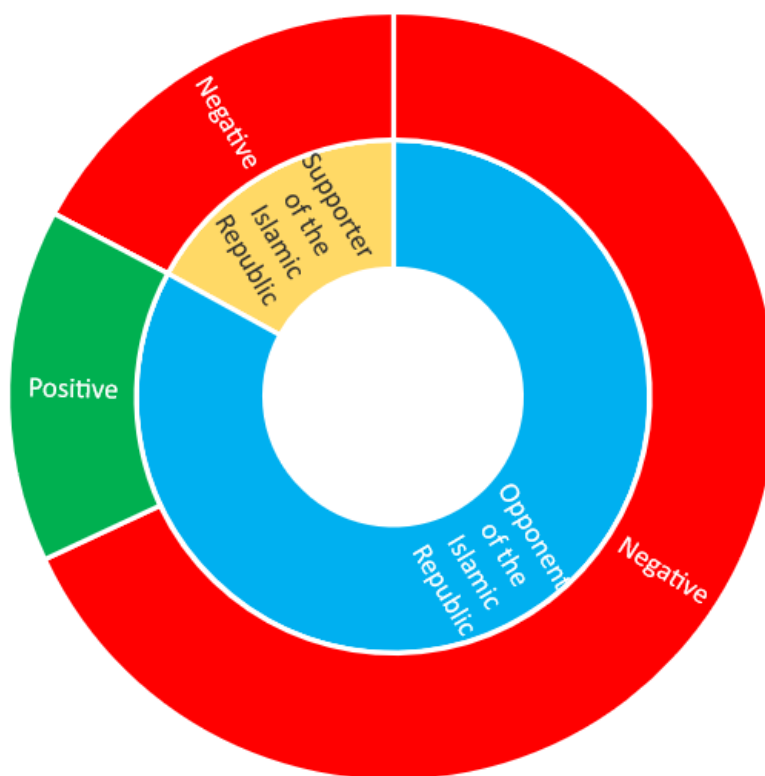


Figure 6. Masih Alinejad is disliked even among opponents of the Islamic Republic regime

This chart indicates that all posts generated by users supporting the regime are against Masih Alinejad. However, among opponents of the regime, she has relatively little popularity, and most of them have published posts with negative content about her.

The most frequent traits attributed to Masih Alinejad

Many messages and content produced about Masih Alinejad contain special adjectives that have been used to describe her. To identify the attributes used in posts, we employed a word count approach. First, we created a list of attributes associated with Masih Alinejad in posts by collecting and analyzing a sample. We also utilized existing datasets of positive and negative traits in the Persian language. Subsequently, using Orange software, we calculated the frequency of these words in all the texts, and the results are presented below.

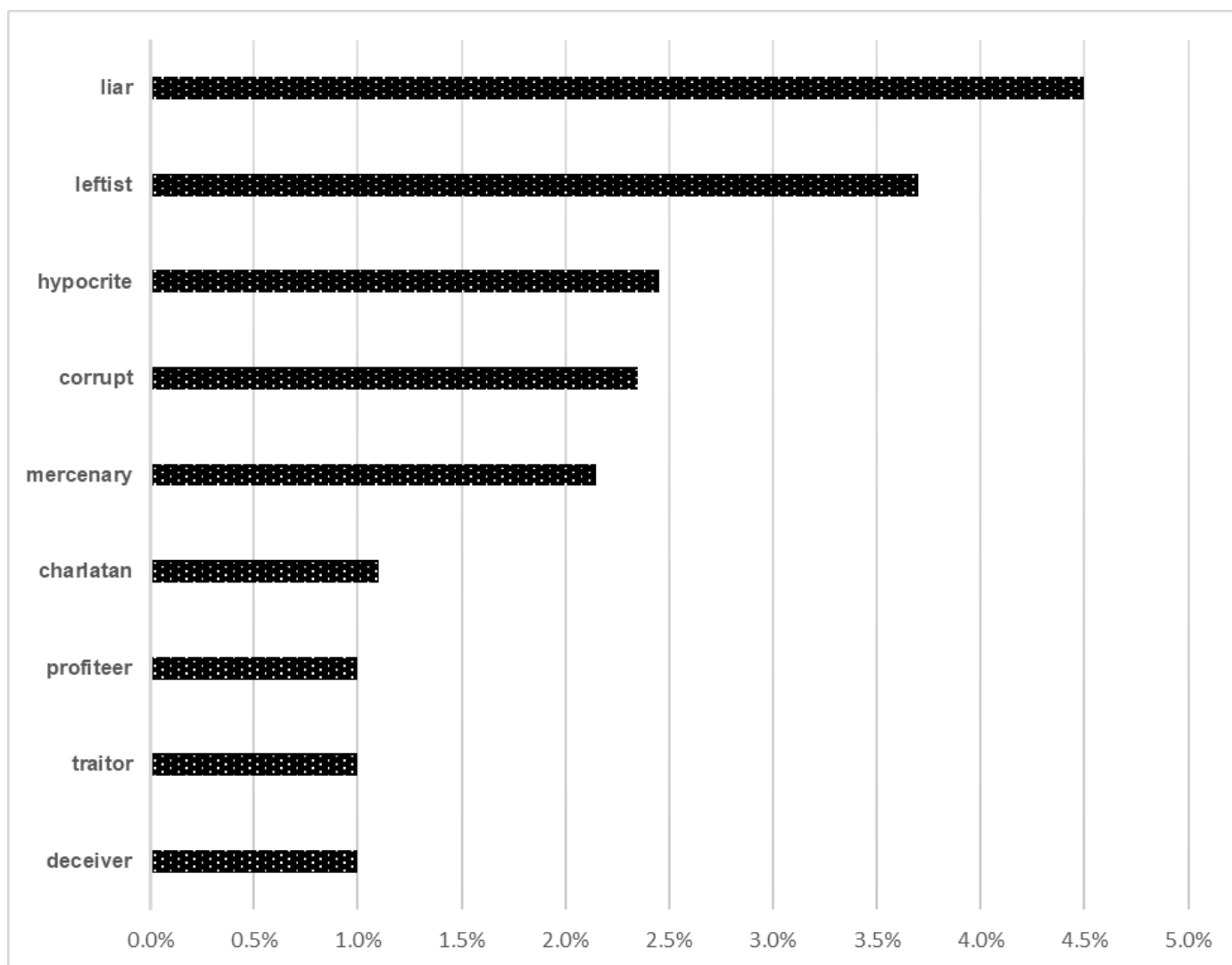


Figure 7. Traits most frequently attributed to Masih Alinejad

The chart in figure 7 paints a predominantly negative picture of how Masih Alinejad is portrayed on social media. Examining the most frequently used attributes associated with her, we see a clear trend towards criticism. The most common term by a significant margin is "liar," appearing in a staggering 4.5% of posts. This suggests a widespread perception of dishonesty surrounding Alinejad.

Other frequently used negative attributes include "leftist" or "left-leaning," "hypocrite," and "corrupt." These labels highlight various criticisms directed at Alinejad's political ideology, perceived inconsistencies in her actions, and accusations of moral failings. The sheer prevalence of these negative terms underscores the intensity of the criticism Alinejad faces on social media platforms.

Furthermore, this negativity aligns perfectly with the overall sentiment analysis conducted alongside this research. That analysis revealed a dominance of negative sentiment, with a striking 83% of posts expressing disapproval or criticism towards Alinejad. This convergence of evidence from attribute analysis and sentiment analysis strongly suggests that Alinejad is a hated personality on X.

It's important to consider the potential sources of this negativity. Some may stem from genuine disagreements with Alinejad's political views or actions. Others might be fueled by partisan loyalties, with supporters of the Iranian government or those opposed to her ideology using negative labels to delegitimize her positions. Further research could explore deeper in the demographics and motivations behind these negative portrayals.

Graph analysis of hashtags network

Analyzing the network of hashtags through graph analysis offers valuable insights into social media dynamics. By examining connections between hashtags and their co-occurrences, this approach helps identify central themes, community structures, and influential topics within discussions. It reveals clusters of related topics, highlighting prominent or trending subjects in specific communities. Understanding community structure based on shared hashtags unveils how individuals or groups are interconnected by interests or affiliations. Detecting influential hashtags aids in targeting specific audiences or maximizing reach. Moreover, graph analysis tracks trends, virality, and engagement patterns over time, informing content strategy and campaign optimization. For businesses, it guides marketing efforts by identifying relevant hashtags and aligning with audience preferences. In essence, hashtag network analysis provides actionable insights for effective social media management, audience targeting, and content optimization strategies.



The Force Atlas network algorithm positions nodes in the graph based on their co-occurrence, while the color coding represents communities identified by a separate community detection algorithm. Accordingly, the proximity of points as well as their similarity in color indicate a high repetition of these hashtags alongside each other and existence of an underlying meaning in them. In fact, each region of the graph represents a set of posts published about Masih Alinejad

within the study period.

Table 4 presents a selection of identified hashtag clusters. The first column, 'Cluster ID,' assigns a unique identifier to each cluster. The second column, 'Top Hashtags,' lists the five most prominent hashtags (based on weight) within each cluster. Finally, the 'Topic' column describes the thematic focus of each hashtag cluster.

Table 4. A selection of identified hashtag clusters

Cluster number	Hashtags	Description
1	حامد_اسماعيلیون	This group of posts refers to influential figures in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, whose names appear next to Masih Alinejad.
	رضا_پهلوی	
	عبدالله_مهتدی	
	شاهزاده_رضا_پهلوی	
	توماج_صالحی	
	سپیده_قلیان	
	نه_به_جمهوری_اسلامی	
	بابک_یزدی	
	ناهید_شیرپیشه	
2	مهسا_امینی	This category of posts focuses on Masih Alinejad's activities in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. In these posts, the hashtag #مسیح_ملکه_ایران (Masih Queen of Iran) is seen, which is used by supporters of Alinejad.
	زن_زندگی_ازادی	
	irgcterrorists	
	جمهوری_اسلامی	
	مسیح_ملکه_ایران	
	حجاب	
	ارمیتا_گراوند	
	فائزه	
	حجاب_اجباری	
	المان	
	زن_قهرمان	
	مهسا_امینی	
3	علی_کریمی	This category of posts refers to media reports that have been published about Masih Alinejad.
	ایران_اینترنشنال	
	بی_بی_سی	
	رادیو_فردا	
	شبکه_من_و_تو	
	پستو_نیوز	
	ایران_فردا	
4	نتانیاهو	This category of posts has been published by users of the Restart movement. Its main focus is on humor, quoting Netanyahu who referred to Alinejad as the "Ester of our time."
	اصلاحطلبان	
	سلطنت_طلبان	
	کُروش_زمان	

	استر_زمان	
	همه_چیز_به_نفع_ری_استارت_است	
5	جاویدشاه	This category of posts has been published by supporters of the Pahlavi monarchy. Their main focus is on associating Masih Alinejad with the Mujahedin-e Khalq organization and its leader Maryam Rajavi.
	kingrezapahlavi	
	masihalinejad_blood_dealer	
	بابکوت_اینترنتشغال	
	انقلاب_ملی_ایران	
	مسیح_فرزند_مریم	
6	ایران	This group of posts accuse Masih Alinejad of collaboration with the security system of the Islamic Republic.
	نایاک	
	سپاه	
	پهلوی	
	کامبین_فروهر	
	ساواک	
	پرستو	

This analysis of hashtag networks surrounding Masih Alinejad reveals a multifaceted narrative landscape. Here are some key insights:

Support and Adoration: Group 2 highlights the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and the use of the hashtag #مسیران (#MasihQueenofIran), indicating support and even adoration for Alinejad by a specific group.

Media Scrutiny: Group 3 suggests that Alinejad is a frequent subject of media reports, reflecting her public profile and potentially sparking discussions and debates.

Humor and Allusions: Group 4 showcases a lighter side, with users employing humor and referencing Alinejad's comparison to a historical figure (#EsterofOurTime) by a prominent political leader.

Allegiance and Criticism: Groups 5 and 6 delve into criticisms and affiliations. Group 5 links Alinejad to the Pahlavi monarchy and the Mujahedin-e Khalq, suggesting attempts to discredit her by associating her with specific groups. Group 6 takes an even more critical stance, accusing her of collaborating with the Iranian regime.

Analysis of post Publishers' Network

In this section we will provide a visualization of the reposting network for posts related to this project. This network is a directed weighted graph, where nodes represent X users and edges represent repost relationships. The direction of the arrow on an edge indicates the flow of information, with the user at the tail of the arrow reposting the user at the head. The thickness of the edge represents the weight of the connection, which signifies the number of times one user reposted another.

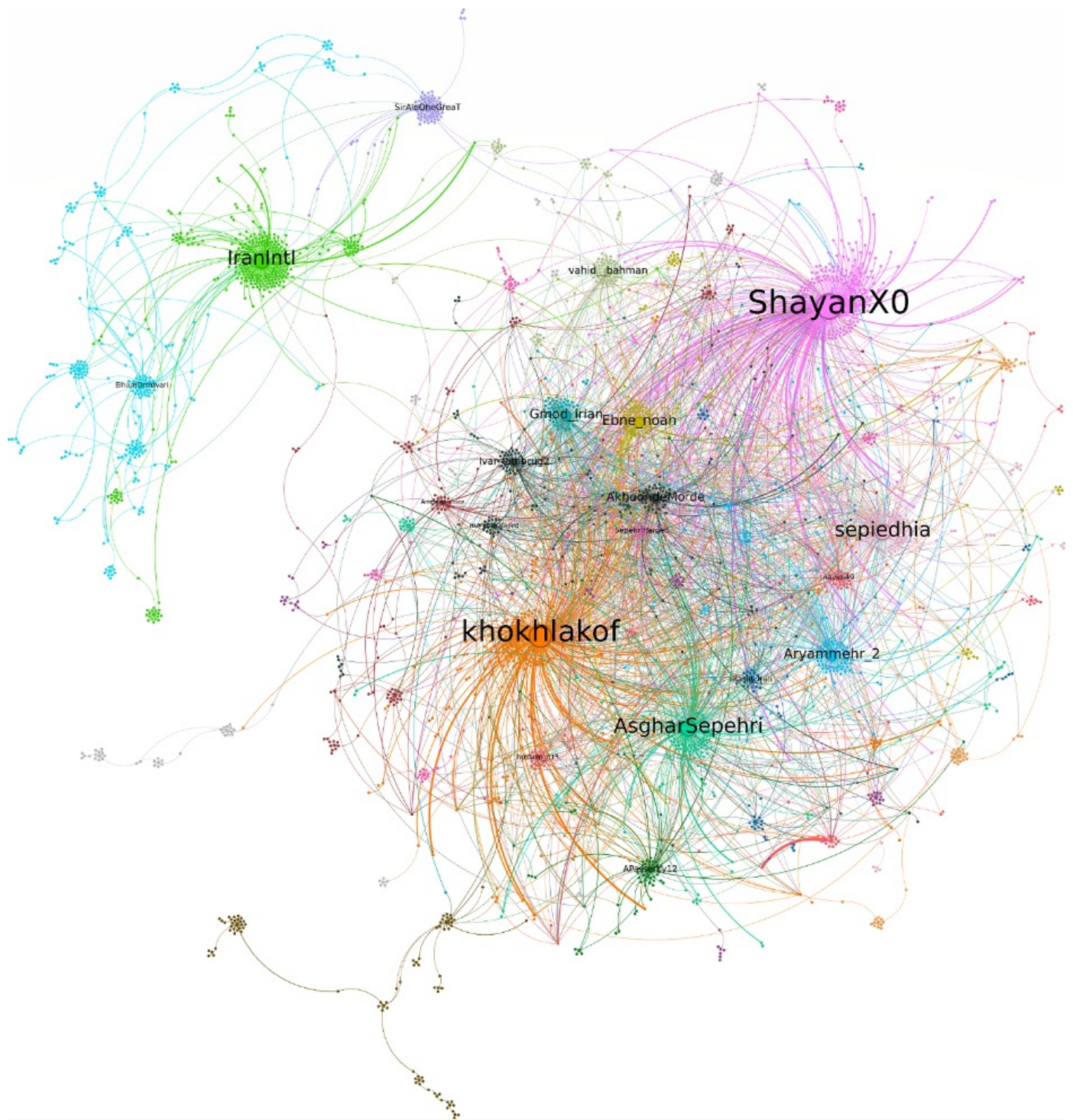


Figure 9. Reposting network for posts related to Masih Alinejad

This repost network highlights which users' posts have been reposted most, indicating greater visibility among others. It also identifies communities of users who reposted each other more frequently. To focus on the most active users in discussions about Masih Alinejad, we removed users with lower levels of repost activity from the network.

The repost network consists of 25 distinct communities, with 8 large communities exceeding 5% of the total members. To understand these communities better, we analyzed the posts of central users within each group. This helped us identify the types of content most commonly shared by each community. We also examined the hashtags used by members to

determine their preferred content categories.

Table 5. *Users on Masih Alinejad*

Cluster number	Main users	Description
1	Adisia18	These users are mainly monarchists who have been active against Masih Alinejad using the hashtag #masihalinejad_blood_dealer.
	ShayanX0	
	dozdroozroshan	
	fay1353	
	EB16CA	
2	Aufwied64973247	These users, who are distanced from the main network in the graph (green color on the left side), have published posts with a positive approach towards Masih Alinejad.
	IranIntl	
	amir_min1	
	sardar_pashaei	
3	Overthrower_	These users have been active on topics related to Masih Alinejad's collaboration with the Islamic Republic and her profiting from the fight against the Iranian government
	khokhlakof	
	KIRKBOX2	
	amir41147867	
4	ElhamOmidvari	These users are politically active against the Islamic Republic, defending Masih Alinejad more than others. Occasionally, due to factionalism among opposing groups, they may have some criticisms of her. This group is also identified on the left side of the graph with blue color.
	Nima_Challenger	
	AliEbrahimzade_	
	KavehZargari	
	zane_azadeh1	
5	Farfariid	These users, located in the central part of the graph, are predominantly present in most negative waves against Masih Alinejad, including allegations of collaborating with the Islamic Republic.
	samiirani	
	Ivar_lathbrug2	
	mardavich11	
	AkhoondeMorde	
6	AsgharSepehri	These users, with the aim of overthrowing the Islamic Republic, are more critical of Alinejad and less likely to accuse her of lying or corruption. However, they are also dissatisfied with her political actions.
	Gordaafareed	
	ArminRo1	
	popanjelina1	
7	sepiedhia	These users are earnestly involved in exposing allegations against Masih Alinejad on X, sharing documents and evidence against her.
	jn_toran	
	PahlaviReza	
	azarkhorramsha1	
	Froughryahooco1	

The repost network analysis surrounding Masih Alinejad offers insights into the various user groups engaging in

discussions about her. Here's a breakdown of some key communities:

Monarchist Opposition (Group 1): The green cluster on the left likely represents monarchists actively criticizing Alinejad, possibly due to her opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy. Their weapon of choice appears to be the hashtag #masihalinejad_blood_dealer.

Supportive Outliers (Group 2): The isolated green cluster on the left containing positive posts suggests a small, independent group that advocates for Alinejad.

Collaboration Accusations (Group 3): This group actively posts about Alinejad's alleged collaboration with the Iranian regime and potential financial gains from her activism.

Critical Defenders (Group 4): The blue group on the left likely represents politically active users who strongly defend Alinejad against the Islamic Republic. While critical of her actions at times due to internal disagreements.

Centralized Detractors (Group 5): Located at the network's core, this group appears to be the most prolific in spreading negativity towards Alinejad, including accusations of collaboration with the Iranian regime.

Dissatisfied Leftists (Group 6): This group, potentially located on the periphery of the network, criticizes Alinejad's political actions while expressing a stronger focus on overthrowing the Islamic Republic compared to other critics.

Evidence-Based Exposé (Group 7): These users actively share documents and evidence to substantiate their accusations against Alinejad, suggesting a potentially well-organized effort to expose her alleged wrongdoings.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite significant media coverage, the data collected from various web sources in this study suggests that despite having more than 8 million followers on Instagram and more 700K followers on X, Masih Alinejad is possibly the most hate Iranian user on social media. Two primary groups appear to be the most vocal critics of Alinejad: supporters of the Islamic Republic and followers of the Pahlavi monarchy. While these groups may disagree on their reasons for opposing Masih Alinejad, they are united on hating her. In contrast to the critical viewpoints, some users express admiration and praise Alinejad's advocacy for women's rights in Iran. This group, forming a distinct cluster within the repost network, appears to primarily consist of individuals sympathetic to separatist movements. The content shared by these users often centers on defending leftist movements in Kurdistan, opposing the Islamic Republic, and criticizing supporters of the Pahlavi monarchy. Nevertheless, as this study shows, her supporters are much less in number than her haters.

In literature and pop culture, the *deus ex machina* technique is often attributed to untalented or lazy authors and screenwriters who struggle to find a plausible resolution for their plots, resorting instead to improbable forces that conveniently solve all problems (Cain, 2010; Johnston, 2017; Domaratzki & Kidane, 2022; Kloppenborg, 2004). Surprisingly, this narrative approach seemed to work for the Iranian Islamic regime during the Woman, Life Freedom movement. Masih Alinejad and similar figures emerged as an unexpected force, aligning with the regime's interests, and

became its Messiah. They presented Iranians with a stark choice between order and chaos, as described by Peterson (2017), and most opted to postpone transformative change for a more practical approach. Consequently, the Iranian government swiftly managed the movement, bringing an early end to protests that were anticipated to overthrow the regime and catalyze even broader change.

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