

Chapter 13: Iran



THE BASICS

Iran

Size	1,648 sq. km. Roughly the size of Alaska
Population	68.3 million
Age distribution	29% under 15 years old
Infant Mortality	44.2 children per 1,000 births
HIV/AIDS rate	0.01%
Ethnic distribution	Persian (51%), Azeri (24%), Kurds (7%), Arabs (3%), Others (15%)
Religion	Shiite Muslim (89%), Sunni Muslim (9%), Other (2%)
GNP per capita	\$8,700
Growth GNP	7.6%
Poverty rate	40% (estimate)
Literacy rate	79%
Currency	9.222 rial = US\$1 (2006)

The Accidental President

- Mahmoud Ahmadinejad election
- Iranian politics more nuanced than the view supported by casual observation or political rhetoric

TABLE 13.1 2005 Presidential Election

CANDIDATE	FIRST BALLOT	SECOND BALLOT
Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani	21.13	35.93
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	19.43	61.69
Mehdi Karroubi	17.24	
Mostafa Moeen	13.93	
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	13.89	
Ali Larijani	5.83	
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	4.38	
Blank or invalid votes	4.17	2.37

The Basics

- Persia vs. Iran
 - some reformers (like the Pahlevis) emphasized Persian roots and traditions
 - others emphasized Shiite values and traditions
 - ethnic diversity complicates simplistic divisions

The Basics

- Shiite vs. Sunni
 - Shiite dominance in Iran
 - established clergy and theological training
 - tradition of theological debate to reach truth
 - Shiism is not monolithic
 - before Islamic revolution, most clergy shunned politics

The Basics

- Persia vs. Shiism: two powerful traditions
- Social and economic conditions
 - huge oil reserves
 - income and wealth distribution is highly unequal
 - brain drain since 1979
 - challenges of the very young population

The Basics

- The Status of Women
 - Islamic debate about roles of women
 - women suffered from Islamic revolution changes
- Key questions
 - Why is economic development difficult?
 - Why is Iran a theocracy?
 - Does Iran's isolation limit the development of democracy?

The Evolution of the Iranian State

- Before Islam
 - origins of Persia are both religious and political: Zoroaster and Cyrus the Great
 - invaders: Alexander, Parthians

TABLE 13.2 Turning Points in Iranian History
before 1900

YEAR	EVENT
550 BC	Cyrus comes to power
332 BC	Defeat by Alexander the Great
560 AD	Accession of Khosrow I
638 AD	Arab victory; introduction of Islam
1219 AD	Invasion by Mongols
1501 AD	First safavid shah named
1896 AD	Assassination of Nasir ed-Din Shah

The Evolution of the Iranian State

- The Arrival and consolidation of Islam
 - Sassanian defeat by Arab Muslim forces (637 CE)
 - Mongol invasion (1219 CE)
 - Safavid revival in early 16th century
 - traditions of Persian kingship and Shiite Islam joined to create a tradition of charismatic and just leadership
 - 20th century democratic movement (1905–1911)

TABLE 13.3 Iran: 1900–1979

YEAR	EVENT
1905	Start of Constitutional Revolution
1911	End of Constitutional Revolution
1925	Reza Khan becomes shah
1941	Muhammad Reza Pahlavi becomes shah
1953	Overthrow of Mossadeq government
1979	Islamic Revolution

The Evolution of the Iranian State

- The Last Shahs
 - defeat of Constitutional Revolution led to increased British and Russian influence
 - Soviet inspired republic in north (1918)
 - ascendancy of Reza Khan as shah
 - 1941 British and Soviet takeover: new shah Mohammad Reza Shah
 - nationalization and leadership of Muhammad Mossadeq
 - US supported coup to reinstate the Shah
 - White Revolution (1963) to modernize and westernize Iran
 - Khomeini organized Shiite resistance to Shah

The Evolution of the Iranian State

- The Islamic Republic
 - Khomeini as Supreme Leader
 - consolidation of power and purges
 - occupation of US embassy
 - Iran-Iraq war
 - increased levels of repression within Iran

TABLE 13.4 Key Events in the Islamic Republic

YEAR	EVENT
1979	Khomeini becomes supreme leader
1980–88	War with Iran
1989	Death of Khomeini
1997	Election of Khatami
2004	Victory by conservatives in Majlis election

The Evolution of the Iranian State

- The Islamic Republic
 - Rafsanjani's presidency
 - Rafsanjani a pragmatist
 - Khomeini (new Supreme Leader) more conservative
 - Khatami's presidency: moderate stressing development of civil society
 - Khomeini's reassertion of power
 - 2004 majlis election
 - 2005 election of Ahmadinejad

The People and Politics

- Political Culture
 - no homogeneous political culture
 - cleavages within Shiism
 - division between rural and urban poor and urban middle class and wealthy
 - unpredictable evolution of huge youth cohort

The People and Politics

- Protest and challenges to the Islamic Republic
 - 1999, 2003, and 2007 (mostly students)
 - no organized democratic movement
- Elections and the prospects for Democracy
 - freest electoral system in Middle East
 - eight presidential and seven legislative elections
 - dozens of parties
 - unelected Guardian Council blocks democracy

TABLE 13.5 Presidents of Iran since 1979

NAME	YEARS IN OFFICE
Abolhassan Bani-Sadr	1979–80
Muhammad Ali Rajai	1980–81
Ali Khamenei	1981–89
Hashemi Rafsanjani	1989–97
Mohammad Khatami	1997–2005
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	2005–

The People and Politics

- The Iranian state
 - Unelected elements
 - Supreme Leader: controls military, media, judiciary, and clerical hierarchy
 - Guardian Council: approves all candidates and legislation
 - Expediency Council: mediates between majlis and Guardian Council
 - judiciary

The People and Politics

- The Iranian state
 - Elected Institutions
 - president
 - Assembly of Experts
 - Majlis
 - The Routinization of Charisma: combination of Persian and Shiite traditions seems to require charismatic leadership

Public Policy

- Faith and gender
 - theocracy
 - treatment of women is a telling sign of state of affairs
- The Economy
 - average wealth equal to Mexico or Russia
 - dependence on export of oil
 - poverty, inflation, and unemployment of youth are unsolved problems
 - bonyads, created from seized property of former regime leaders and powerful

Public Policy

- Iran and the United States: Toward the Next War?
 - US involvement since '53 coup
 - hostile policies from US
 - attacks during embassy occupation
 - opposition during Iran-Iraq war
 - “axis of evil” label
 - ambiguity of nuclear power/weapons
programeconomic influence

- Feedback: media all but completely controlled by government
- Conclusion: Uncertainty
 - internal and external forces ambiguous
 - reaction of huge youth cohort to change or lack of change unpredictable
 - attitudes of leadership uncertain

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the key moments of the historical formation of Persia and Iran.
- Recognize the importance of complex religious and political challenges in process of understanding of Iranian politics and society. Define the following: Shiites, Sunni, Muslim, Arab
- Discuss the complicated evolution of Iranian politics.
- Comprehend the importance of religious intolerance and challenges in the Iranian state throughout the history.
- Discuss the role of theocracy in the process of Iranian political development.
- Understand the evolution of Iranian state in 20th century and define key elements of revolutions in Iran. Briefly discuss the role of the following leaders: Mahmoud Ahamdinejad, Ayatollah Ali Khameni, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Rafsanjani, Shah Mohamed Reza, Shah Reza

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define Iranian geography and current economic challenges.
- Understand the process of political, economic and social developments of Iran.
- Understand the role of Constitutional Revolution and White Revolution in Iran.
- Discuss the key elements of Iranian state institution. Define the following: Assembly of Experts, Expediency Council, Guardian Council, Majlis, Supreme Leader
- Understand the specifications of Iranian political culture and participation.
- Understand the challenges of democratization in Iran.
- Comprehend the challenging process of the development of Iranian international positioning as an important regional and international challenges of international stability and nonproliferation.