

## Topic Page: [Iran](#)

Definition: **Iran** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

### 1.

a republic in south-western Asia, on the Persian Gulf; a monarchy until 1979 when Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was deposed and an Islamic republic instituted.

1<sup>648</sup>~000 km<sup>2</sup> Persian (Farsi), also Turkic, Kurdish and other minority languages Iranian rial Tehran

Official name Islamic Republic of Iran Formerly Persia



Image from: [The shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, persecuted the... in Encyclopedia of Politics](#)

Summary Article: **Iran**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(Ērān', ĩrān'), officially Islamic Republic of Iran, republic (2015 est. pop. 79,360,000), 636,290 sq mi (1,648,000 sq km), SW Asia. The country's name was changed from Persia to Iran in 1935. Iran is bordered on the north by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea; on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; on the south by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; and on the west by Turkey and Iraq. The Shatt al Arab forms part of the Iran-Iraq border. Tehran is the capital, largest city and the political, cultural, commercial, and industrial center of the nation.

### Land

Physiographically, Iran lies within the Alpine-Himalayan mountain system and is composed of a vast central plateau rimmed by mountain ranges and limited lowland regions. Iran is subject to numerous and often severe earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The Iranian Plateau (alt. c.4,000 ft/1,200 m), which extends beyond the low ranges of E Iran into Afghanistan, is a region of interior drainage. It consists of a number of arid basins of salt and sand, such as those of Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut, and some marshlands, such as the area around Hamun-i-Helmand along the Afghanistan border. The plateau is surrounded by high folded and volcanic mountain chains including the Kopet Mts. in the northwest, the Elburz Mts. (rising to 18,934 ft/5,771 m at Mt. Damavand, Iran's highest point) in the north, and the complex Zagros Mts. in the west. Lake Urmia, the country's largest inland body of water, is in the Zagros of NW Iran. Narrow coastal plains are found along the shores of the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and the Caspian Sea; at the head of the Persian Gulf is the Iranian section of the Mesopotamian lowlands. Of the few perennial rivers in Iran, only the Karun in the west is navigable for large craft; other major rivers are the Karkheh and the Sefid Rud.

The climate of Iran is continental, with hot summers and cold, rainy winters; the mountain regions of the north and west have a subtropical climate. Temperature and precipitation vary with elevation, as winds bring heavy moisture from the Persian Gulf. The Caspian region receives over 40 in. (102 cm) of rain annually. Precipitation occurs mainly in the winter and decreases from northwest to southeast. Much of the precipitation in the mountains is in the form of snow, and meltwater is vital for Iran's water supply. The central portion of the plateau and the southern coastal plain (Makran) receive less than 5 in. (12.7 cm) of rain annually.

In addition to Tehran, important cities include Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Rasht, Hamadan, Abadan, Shiraz, and Ahvaz.

## People

Iran's central position has made it a crossroads of migration; the population is not homogeneous, although it has a Persian core that includes over half of the people. Azerbaijanis constitute almost a quarter of the population. The migrant ethnic groups of the mountains and highlands, including the Kurds, Lurs, Qashqai, and Bakhtiari, are of the least mixed descent of the ancient inhabitants. In the northern provinces, Turkic and Tatar influences are evident; Arab strains predominate in the southeast. Iran has a large rural population, found mainly in agrarian villages, although there are nomadic and seminomadic pastoralists throughout the country.

Islam entered the country in the 7th cent. A.D. and is now the official religion; about 90% of Iranians are Muslims of the Shiite sect. The remainder, mostly Kurds and Arabs, are Sunnis. Colonies of Zoroastrians (see Zoroastrianism) remain at Yazd, Kerman, and other large towns. In addition to Armenian and Assyrian Christian sects, there are Jews, Protestants, and Roman Catholics. Attempts have been made to suppress Babism and its successor, Baha'i, whose adherents constitute about 1% of Iran's population; Sufism has also suffered from government restrictions under the Islamic republic. Other religious movements, such as Mithraism (see under Mithra) and Manichaeism, originated in Iran.

The principal language of the country is Persian (Farsi), which is written with the Arabic alphabet and spoken by about 60% of the people. Other groups speak Turkic dialects (25%), Kurdish, (10%), and Turkish, Armenian, and Arabic. Among the educated classes, English and French are spoken.

## Economy

About 10% of the land in Iran is arable; agriculture contributes just over 11% to the GDP and employs a third of the labor force. The main food-producing areas are in the Caspian region and in the valleys of the northwest. Wheat, the most important crop, is grown mainly in the west and northwest; rice is the major crop in the Caspian region. Barley, corn, sugar beets, fruits (including citrus), nuts, cotton, dates, tea, hemp, and tobacco are also grown, and livestock is raised. Illicit cultivation of the opium poppy is fairly common.

The principal obstacles to agricultural production are primitive farming methods, overworked and underfertilized soil, poor seed, and scarcity of water. About one third of the cultivated land is irrigated; the construction of multipurpose dams and reservoirs along the rivers in the Zagros and Elburz mts. has increased the amount of water available for irrigation. Agricultural programs of modernization, mechanization, and crop and livestock improvement, and programs for the redistribution of land are increasing agricultural production.

The northern slopes of the Elburz Mts. are heavily wooded, and forestry products are economically important; the cutting of trees is rigidly controlled by the government, which also has a reforestation program. In the rivers entering the Caspian Sea are salmon, carp, trout, and pike; the prized sturgeon (and caviar) of the Caspian Sea have been hurt by pollution and overfishing.

Of the variety of natural resources found in Iran, petroleum (discovered in 1908 in Khuzestan province) and natural gas are by far the most important; oil accounts for 80% of export revenues. The chief oil fields are found in the central and southwestern parts of the Zagros Mts. in W Iran. Oil also is found in N Iran and in the offshore waters of the Persian Gulf. Major refineries are located at Abadan (site of the

country's first refinery, built 1913), Kermanshah, Tehran, and Bandar Abbas. Pipelines move oil from the fields to the refineries and to such exporting ports as Abadan, Bandar-e Mashur, and Khark Island. Domestic oil and gas, along with hydroelectric power facilities, provide the country with power.

Textiles are the second most important industrial product; Tehran and Esfahan are the chief textile-producing centers. Other major industries are sugar refining, food processing, and the production of petrochemicals, cement and other building materials, and machinery. Iron and steel and fertilizer are also produced. Traditional handicrafts such as carpet weaving and the manufacture of ceramics, silk, and jewelry are important to the economy as well.

Besides crude and refined petroleum, Iran's chief exports are chemical and petrochemical products, fruits, nuts, carpets, hides, and iron and steel; its chief imports are industrial raw materials, capital goods, foodstuffs, consumer goods, technical services, and military supplies. Iran's chief trading partners are China, Japan, Germany, Italy, and South Korea. Khorramshahr, on the Shatt al Arab, is the country's chief general cargo port; Bandar-e Anzali is the chief Caspian port.

## **Government**

Iran is a theocratic Islamic republic governed under the constitution of 1979 as amended. Appointed, rather than elected, offices and bodies hold the real power in the government. The supreme leader, who effectively serves as the head of state, is appointed for life by an Islamic religious advisory board (the Assembly of Experts). The supreme leader oversees the military and judiciary and appoints members of the Guardian Council and the Expediency Discernment Council. The former, some of whose members are appointed by the judiciary and approved by parliament, works in close conjunction with the government and must approve both candidates for political office and legislation passed by parliament. The latter is a body responsible for resolving disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council over legislation. The president, who is popularly elected for a four-year term, serves as the head of government. The unicameral legislature consists of the 290-seat Islamic Consultative Assembly, whose members are elected by popular vote for four-year terms. Administratively, Iran is divided into 30 provinces.

## **History**

### *Early History to the Zand Dynasty*

Iran has a long and rich history. For a detailed description of the Persian Empire, see Persia. Some of the world's most ancient settlements have been excavated in the Caspian region and on the Iranian plateau; village life began there c.4000 B.C. The Aryans came about 2000 B.C. and split into two main groups, the Medes and the Persians. The Persian Empire founded (c.550 B.C.) by Cyrus the Great was succeeded, after a period of Greek and Parthian rule, by the Sassanid in the early 3d cent. A.D. Their control was weakened when Arab invaders took (636) the capital, Ctesiphon; it ended when the Arabs defeated the Sassanid armies at Nahavand in 641. With the invasion of Persia the Arabs brought Islam. The Turks began invading in the 10th cent. and soon established several Turkish states. The Turks were followed by the Mongols, led by Jenghiz Khan in the 13th cent. and Timur in the late 14th cent.

The Safavid dynasty (1502–1736), founded by Shah Ismail, restored internal order in Iran and established the Shiite sect of Islam as the state religion; it reached its height during the reign (1587–1629) of Shah Abbas I (Abbas the Great). He drove out the Portuguese, who had established colonies on the Persian Gulf early in the 16th cent. Shah Abbas also established trade relations with Great Britain and reorganized the army. Religious differences led to frequent wars with the Ottoman Turks, whose

interest in Iran was to continue well into the 20th cent.

The fall of the Safavid dynasty was brought about by the Afghans, who overthrew the weak shah, Husein, in 1722. An interval of Afghan rule followed until Nadir Shah expelled them and established (1736) the Afshar dynasty. He invaded India in 1738 and brought back fabulous wealth, including the legendary Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-noor diamond. Nadir Shah, a despotic ruler, was assassinated in 1747. The Afshar dynasty was followed by the Zand dynasty (1750–94), founded by Karim Khan, who established his capital at Shiraz and adorned that city with many fine buildings. His rule brought a period of peace and renewed prosperity. However, the country was soon again in turmoil, which lasted until the advent of Aga Muhammad Khan.

### *The Qajar Dynasty*

A detested ruler (assassinated 1797), Aga Muhammad Khan defeated the last ruler of the Zand dynasty and established the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925). This long period saw Iran steadily lose territory to neighboring countries and fall under the increasing pressure of European nations, particularly czarist Russia. Under Fath Ali Shah (1797–1834), Persian claims in the entire Caucasian area were challenged by the Russians in a long struggle that ended with the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) and the Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828), by which Iran was forced to give up the Caucasian lands. Herat, the rich city on the Hari Rud, which had been part of the ancient Persian Empire, was taken by the Afghans. A series of campaigns to reclaim it ended with the intervention of the British on behalf of Afghanistan and resulted in the recognition of Afghan independence by Iran in 1857.

The discovery of oil in the early 1900s intensified the rivalry of Great Britain and Russia for power over the nation. Internally, the early 20th cent. saw the rise of the constitutional movement and a constitution establishing a parliament was accepted by the shah in 1906. Meanwhile, the British-Russian rivalry continued and in 1907 resulted in an Anglo-Russian agreement (annulled after World War I) that divided Iran into spheres of influence. The period preceding World War I was one of political and financial difficulty. During the war, Iran was occupied by the British and Russians but remained neutral; after the war, Iran was admitted to the League of Nations as an original member.

In 1919, Iran made a trade agreement with Great Britain in which Britain formally reaffirmed Iran's independence but actually attempted to establish a complete protectorate over it. After Iranian recognition of the USSR in a treaty of 1921, the Soviet Union renounced czarist imperialistic policies toward Iran, canceled all debts and concessions, and withdrew occupation forces from Iranian territory. In 1921, Reza Khan, an army officer, effected a coup and established a military dictatorship.

### *The Pahlevi Dynasty*

Reza Khan was subsequently (1925) elected hereditary shah, thus ending the Qajar dynasty and founding the new Pahlevi dynasty. Reza Shah Pahlevi abolished the British treaty, reorganized the army, introduced many reforms, and encouraged the development of industry and education. In Aug., 1941, two months after the German invasion of the USSR, British and Soviet forces occupied Iran. On Sept. 16 the shah abdicated in favor of his son Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlevi. American troops later entered Iran to handle the delivery of war supplies to the USSR.

At the Tehran Conference in 1943 the Tehran Declaration, signed by the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR, guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of Iran. However, the USSR, dissatisfied with the refusal of the Iranian government to grant it oil concessions, fomented a revolt in

the north which led to the establishment (Dec., 1945) of the People's Republic of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish People's Republic, headed by Soviet-controlled leaders. When Soviet troops remained in Iran following the expiration (Jan., 1946) of a wartime treaty that also allowed the presence of American and British troops, Iran protested to the United Nations. The Soviets finally withdrew (May, 1946) after receiving a promise of oil concessions from Iran subject to approval by the parliament. The Soviet-established governments in the north, lacking popular support, were deposed by Iranian troops late in 1946, and the parliament subsequently rejected the oil concessions.

In 1951, the National Front movement, headed by Premier Mussadegh, a militant nationalist, succeeded in nationalizing the oil industry and formed the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). Although a British blockade led to the virtual collapse of the oil industry and serious internal economic troubles, Mussadegh continued his nationalization policy. Openly opposed by the shah, Mussadegh was ousted in 1952 but quickly regained power. The shah fled Iran but returned when monarchist elements forced Mussadegh from office in Aug., 1953; covert U.S. activity was in large part responsible for Mussadegh's ousting.

In 1954, Iran allowed an international consortium of British, American, French, and Dutch oil companies to operate its oil facilities, with profits shared equally between Iran and the consortium. After 1953 a succession of premiers restored a measure of order to Iran; in 1957 martial law was ended after 16 years in force. Iran established closer relations with the West, joining the Baghdad Pact (later called the Central Treaty Organization), and receiving large amounts of military and economic aid from the United States until the late 1960s.

Starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the Iranian government, at the shah's initiative, undertook a broad program designed to improve economic and social conditions. Land reform was a major priority. In an effort to transform the feudal peasant-landlord agricultural system, the government purchased estates and sold the land to the people; it also distributed large tracts of crown land. In the Jan., 1963, referendum, the voters overwhelmingly approved the shah's extensive plan for further land redistribution, compulsory education, and a system of profit sharing in industry; the program was financed by the selling of government-owned factories to private investors. Within three years, 1.5 million former tenant farmers were plot owners.

The shah held close reins on the government as absolute monarch, but he moved toward certain democratic reforms within Iran. A new government-backed political party, the Iran Novin party, was introduced and won an overwhelming majority in the parliament in the 1963 and subsequent elections. Women received the right to vote in national elections in 1963.

### ***Reaction, Repression, and Conflict***

The shah's various reform programs and the continuing poor economic conditions alienated some of the major religious and political groups, and riots occurred in mid-1963. The general political instability was reflected by the assassination of Premier Hassan Ali Mansur and an unsuccessful attempt on the shah's life in Jan., 1965. Amir Abbas Hoveida succeeded as premier. In Oct., 1971, Iran commemorated the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Achaemenid Empire of Cyrus the Great with an elaborate celebration in the desert at Persepolis. Iran's pro-Western policies continued into the 1970s; however, opposition to such growing Westernization and secularization was strongly denounced by the Islamic clergy, headed by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had been exiled from Iran in 1964. Internal opposition within the country was regularly purged by the Shah's secret police force (SAVAK), created

in 1957.

Improved relations in the 1970s, especially in the economic sphere, were established with Communist countries, including the USSR. However, relations with Iraq were antagonistic for much of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in great part due to conflict over the Shatt al Arab waterway. A number of armed clashes took place along the entire length of the border. In Apr., 1969, Iran voided the 1937 accord with Iraq on the control of the Shatt al Arab and demanded that the treaty, which had given Iraq virtual control of the river, be renegotiated.

In 1971, Britain withdrew its military forces from the Persian Gulf. Concerned that Soviet-backed Arab nations might try to fill the power vacuum created by the British withdrawal, Iran increased its defense budget by almost 50%, and with the help of huge U.S. and British defense programs, emerged as the region's strongest military power. Although Iran renounced all claims to Bahrain in 1970, it took control (Nov., 1971) of three small, Arab-owned islands at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Iraq protested Iran's action by expelling thousands of Iranian nationals.

In Mar., 1973, short of the end of the 25-year 1954 agreement with the international oil-producing consortium, the shah established the NIOC's full control over all aspects of Iran's oil industry, and the consortium agreed (May, 1973) to act merely in an advisory capacity in return for favorable long-term oil supply contracts. In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War of Oct., 1973, Iran, reluctant to use oil as a political weapon, did not participate in the oil embargo against the United States, Europe, Japan, and Israel. However, it used the situation to become a leader in the raising of oil prices in disregard of the Tehran Agreement of 1971. Iran utilized the revenue generated by price rises to bolster its position abroad as a creditor, to initiate domestic programs of modernization and economic development, and to increase its military power.

### *The Islamic Revolution*

The rapid growth of industrialization and modernization programs within Iran, accompanied by ostentatious private wealth, became greatly resented by the bulk of the population, mainly in the overcrowded urban areas and among the rural poor. The shah's autocratic rule and his extensive use of the secret police led to widespread popular unrest throughout 1978. The religious-based protests were conservative in nature, directed against the shah's policies. Khomeini, who was expelled from Iraq in Feb., 1978, called for the abdication of the shah. Martial law was declared in September for all major cities. As governmental controls faltered, the shah fled Iran on Jan. 16, 1979. Khomeini returned and led religious revolutionaries to the final overthrow of the shah's government on Feb. 11.

The new government represented a major shift toward conservatism. It nationalized industries and banks and revived Islamic traditions. Western influence and music were banned, women were forced to return to traditional veiled dress, and Westernized elites fled the country. A new constitution was written allowing for a presidential system, but Khomeini remained at the executive helm as Supreme Leader. The Revolutionary Guard was established separately from the military as an ideologically based corps charged with defending the revolution. Clashes occurred between rival religious factions throughout 1979, as oil prices fell. Arrests and executions were rampant.

On Nov. 4, 1979, Iranian militants seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 American hostages. Khomeini refused all appeals, and agitation increased toward the West with the Carter administration's economic boycott, the breaking of diplomatic relations, and an unsuccessful rescue attempt (Apr.,

1980). The hostage crisis lasted 444 days and was finally resolved on Jan. 20, 1981, the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as U.S. president. Nearly all Iranian conditions had been met, including the unfreezing of nearly \$8 billion in Iranian assets.

### *War and its Aftermath*

On Sept. 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran, commencing an eight-year war primarily over the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway (see Iran-Iraq War). The war rapidly escalated, leading to Iraqi and Iranian attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf in 1984. Fighting crippled both nations, devastating Iran's military supply and oil industry, and led to an estimated 500,000 to one million casualties. Khomeini rejected diplomatic initiatives and called for the overthrow of Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein. In Nov., 1986, U.S. government officials secretly visited Iran to trade arms with the Iranians, in the hopes of securing the release of American hostages being held in Lebanon, because Iran had political connections with Shiite terrorists in Lebanon. On July 3, 1988, a U.S. navy warship mistakenly shot down an Iranian civilian aircraft, killing all aboard. That same month, Khomeini agreed to accept a UN cease-fire with Iraq, ending the war. Iran subsequently summarily and secretly executed some 5,000 political prisoners.

Iran immediately began rebuilding the nation's economy, especially its oil industry. Tensions also eased at that time with neighboring Afghanistan, as Soviet troops there began withdrawal (completed in 1989), after a presence of nearly 10 years. During the Soviet occupation, Iran had become host to nearly 3 million Afghan refugees. Khomeini died in 1989 and was succeeded by Iran's president, Sayid Ali Khamenei. The presidency was soon filled by Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, who sought improved relations and financial aid with Western nations while somewhat diminishing the influence of fundamentalist and revolutionary factions and embarking on a military buildup. A major earthquake hit N Iran on June 21, 1990, killing nearly 40,000 people.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in Aug., 1990, Iran adhered to international sanctions against Iraq. However, Iran condemned the use of U.S.-led coalition forces against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War (1991), and it allowed Iraqi planes fleeing coalition air attacks to land in the country. As a result of the war and its aftermath, more than one million Kurds crossed the Iraqi border into Iran as refugees.

Rafsanjani was reelected president in 1993. The United States suspended all trade with Iran in 1995, accusing Iran of supporting terrorist groups and attempting to develop nuclear weapons. In 1997, Mohammed Khatami, a moderately liberal Muslim cleric, was elected president, which was widely seen as a reaction against the country's repressive social policies and lack of economic progress. Also in 1997, Iran launched a series of air attacks on Iraq to bomb Iranian rebels operating from Iraq. Several European Union countries began renewing economic ties with Iran in the late 1990s; the United States, however, continued to block more normalized relations, arguing that the country had been implicated in international terrorism and was developing a nuclear weapons capacity.

In 1999, as new curbs were put on a free press, prodemocracy student demonstrations erupted at Teheran Univ. and other urban campuses. These were followed by a wave of counterdemonstrations by hard-line factions associated with Ayatollah Khamenei. Reformers won a substantial victory in the Feb., 2000, parliamentary elections, capturing about two thirds of the seats, but conservative elements in the government forced the closure of the reformist press. Attempts by parliament to repeal restrictive press laws were forbidden by Khamenei. Despite these conditions, President Khatami was overwhelming reelected in June, 2001. Tensions between reformers in parliament and conservatives in the judiciary and the Guardian Council, over both social and economic changes, increased after

Khatami's reelection. In Aug., 2002, a frustrated Khatami called for legislation to limit the powers of the Guardian Council and restore presidential powers to act as head of state and enforce the constitution, and in June, 2003, there were ongoing demonstrations by students in Tehran in favor of reform. In August, however, the Guardian Council rejected a bill aimed at curbing its ability to bar candidates from elections.

Tensions with the United States increased after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in Mar., 2003, as U.S. officials increasingly denounced Iran for pursuing the alleged development of nuclear weapons. Iranian government support for strongly conservative Shiite militias in Iraq also further soured U.S.-Iranian relations. In October, however, Iran agreed, in negotiations with several W European nations, to tougher international inspections of its nuclear installations. Concern over Iran's nuclear program nonetheless continued, and in early 2004 the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that the country had failed to disclose all aspects of its nuclear program. Meanwhile, an earthquake, centered on Bam in SE Iran, killed more than 26,000 people in Dec., 2003.

In the Feb., 2004, elections conservatives won control of parliament, securing some two thirds of the seats. The Guardian Council had barred many reformers from running, including some sitting members of parliament, and many reformers denounced the move as an attempt to fix the election and called for a electoral boycott. Many Iranians, however, were unhappy with the failure of the current parliament to achieve any significant reforms or diminish the influence of the hard-liners. A significant number of the hard-line conservative members of the new parliament had ties to the Revolutionary Guards, who increased their economic and political influence, but they also faced opposition from more traditional conservatives such as former president Rafsanjani.

In mid-2004 Iran began resuming the processing of nuclear fuel as part of its plan to achieve self-sufficiency in nuclear power production, stating the negotiations with European Union nations had failed to bring access to the advanced nuclear technology that was promised. The action was denounced by the United States as one which would give Iran the capability to develop nuclear weapons. The IAEA said that although Iran had not been fully cooperative, there was no concrete proof that Iran was seeking to develop such arms; however, the IAEA also called for Iran to abandon its plans to produce enriched uranium. In Nov., 2004, Iran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment, but also subsequently indicated that it would not be held to the suspension if the negotiations the EU nations failed. Iran signed an agreement with Russia in Feb., 2005, that called for Russia to supply it with nuclear fuel and for Iran to return the spent fuel to Russia; despite the apparent safeguards in the agreement, it was denounced by the United States. Iran's nuclear energy program remained a contentious international issue in subsequent months.

The presidential elections in June, 2005, were won by the hardline conservative mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who ran on a populist, anticorruption platform. The Guardian Council had initially rejected all reformist candidates, including one of Iran's vice presidents, but permitted him and another reformist to run after an appeal. Ahmadinejad and former president Rafsanjani were the leaders after the first round, but in the runoff Ahmadinejad's populist economic policies combined with Rafsanjani's inability to pick up sufficient reformist support assured the former's win. Ahmadinejad's victory, which was marred by some interference in the balloting from the Revolutionary Guards, gave conservatives control of all branches of Iran's government.

After Iran resumed (Aug., 2005) converting raw uranium into gas, a necessary step for enrichment, the



IAEA passed a resolution that accused Iran of failing to comply with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and called for the agency to report Iran to the UN Security Council. The timetable for the reporting, however, was left undetermined.

In the fall of 2005 Ayatollah Khamenei broadened the responsibilities of the Expediency Council by delegating to it some of his governmental oversight responsibilities. The move enhanced the standing and power of Rafsanjani, who had become head of the council in 1997, and was regarded as an attempt to establish a counterweight to the new president (who had been elected with the ayatollah's support) and the more radical conservative elements associated with Ahmadinejad's presidency. Ahmadinejad, meanwhile, issued strong anti-Israel, anti-Holocaust statements, and sought to set a more conservative course for Iran. The country also continued to move forward with its nuclear research program.

In Feb., 2006, the IAEA voted to report Iran to the UN Security Council. In response Iran resumed uranium enrichment and ended surprise IAEA inspections and surveillance of its nuclear facilities. The Security Council called (March) for Iran to suspend its nuclear research program in 30 days, but the statement left unclear what if any response there would be if Iran refused. For its part, Iran remained defiant, and its slow response to a European Union–led negotiating effort and the revelation of an additional, previously unknown enrichment program caused the nations involved (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and the EU) to refer the issue back to the Security Council in July, 2006. The Council set an Aug. 31 deadline for Iran to stop enrichment, but Iran insisted it would continue its program and ignored the deadline. The Council's veto-holding nations were divided over the subsequent U.S. call for sanctions, but in Dec., 2006, they agreed on sanctions that barred the sale of technology and materials that could be used in Iran's nuclear program. and the international assets of certain companies associated with program were frozen. After a new deadline for stopping enrichment also passed without Iranian action, additional sanctions were imposed in Mar., 2007, but Iran continued with its enrichment activities. A subsequent IAEA report (Aug., 2007) indicated that Iran was continuing to expand its enrichment capabilities while utilizing them at lower than expected levels.

Also in Dec., 2006, Ahmadinejad's supporters and allies suffered losses in elections for local councils and the Assembly of Experts; more moderate conservatives were the biggest winners, and reformists did sufficiently well to reemerge as a political force. The most significant winner was Rafsanjani, who was reelected to the Assembly of Experts and received the most votes of any Tehran Assembly candidate.

Fifteen British naval personnel were seized in Mar., 2007, by Revolutionary Guards forces in what Iran asserted were its waters. The British disputed the claim, and called for them to be released. After two weeks marked by behind-the-scenes negotiations and Iranian broadcasts of the British personnel saying they had violated Iranian waters (which the personnel, after their release, said were coerced), the British were released.

Tensions between Iran and the United States over Iran's nuclear program and over accusations that Iran was providing support for Shiite groups that had attacked U.S. forces in Iraq became increasingly pronounced in the second half of 2007. There were press reports of Bush administration plans to launch air strikes against Iran, and the United States pressed, unsuccessfully, for stiffer UN sanctions on Iran. In Oct., 2007, the United States imposed additional sanctions on Iran, aimed mainly at Iranian banks, which it said were supporting Iran's nuclear program, and at Iran's Revolutionary Guards, which it charged supported terror attacks against U.S. forces and others.

A November IAEA report indicated that Iran was cooperating with the IAEA (but on a more limited basis than in the past), and a December U.S. intelligence assessment said that Iran appeared to have stopped nuclear weapons design development in 2003 in response to international pressure and now seemed less determined to develop such weapons. Nonetheless, concerns remained with respect to Iran's continuing expansion of its enrichment capabilities and, after the IAEA said that Iran had not proved it did not have a nuclear weapons development program, the UN Security Council imposed a third round of sanctions in Mar., 2008. In the Mar.–Apr., 2008, parliamentary elections, conservatives won roughly 70% of the seats; many reformist candidates were again barred from running.

In May and subsequent months, the IAEA said that Iran continued to fail to provide information about its nuclear programs that would clarify whether it was developing nuclear weapons. Iran subsequently tested longer-range missiles that were capable of hitting Israel, but U.S. intelligence sources indicated that it believed at least one test was not fully successful; in Feb., 2009, Iran successfully launched a satellite for the first time. A value-added tax on shopkeepers provoked a weeklong strike by them in several cities in Oct., 2008, and the government postponed the imposition of the tax for a year.

In the June, 2009, presidential election Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former prime minister, and two other candidates challenged Ahmadinejad, who was seen as favored by Khamenei. Mousavi appeared to gain broad support as the campaign progressed, but when the tally was announced Ahmadinejad was declared the winner with 63% of the vote. The rapidity of the vote count and other anomalies, including overvoting in 50 of 170 districts and dramatic shifts in voting patterns since 2005, strongly suggested vote rigging, and Mousavi and others denounced the result as fraudulent. There were large demonstrations in support of Mousavi, but the Guardian Council affirmed the result, and after two weeks security forces had forcibly suppressed most public protests.

Mousavi, former president Khatami, and others nonetheless continued to denounce the election, and Rafsanjani criticized the government response to the protests. Opposition members were tried in group trials that antigovernment groups decried as show trials, though Mousavi, Khatami, and other opposition leaders were not arrested. In Dec., 2009, the funeral and memorials for Grand Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri, who was Khomeini's chosen successor until he criticized (1989) the Iranian government on human rights, turned into large antigovernment demonstrations and led to clashes with security forces, but the government soon regained control in the streets.

In Sept., 2009, Iran acknowledged constructing a second nuclear enrichment facility, leading to international calls for IAEA inspections of the site. Although Iran agreed that inspectors could enter the site in October, other discussions concerning its nuclear enrichment were less successful. Western nations asserted that Iran had agreed in principle to shipping enriched uranium outside the country for further enrichment, but Iranian sources and officials insisted that Iran was interested in purchasing enriched uranium and that Iran did not accept an enrichment agreement proposal made by IAEA. The IAEA found nothing of concern at the second enrichment site, but said that Iran's secrecy raised issues about whether other secret sites existed, and later (Mar., 2010) said that Iran was not fully cooperative and as a result the IAEA could not verify that Iran's nuclear program was only for peaceful purposes. The IAEA voted to censure Iran over the site.

In Nov., 2009, Iran announced plans for 10 more sites, and indicated that it did not intend to notify the IAEA about them until six months before they were operational, in contravention of Iran's 2003 agreement. In subsequent months no progress was made concerning the shipment of fuel outside Iran

for enrichment, but in Feb., 2010, Iran announced that it was beginning to enrich its uranium to higher levels for use as medical isotopes. In May, 2010, Brazil and Turkey negotiated a deal that called for Iran ship most of its enriched fuel to Turkey in a swap but did not call for Iran to end its enrichment program, and in the face of a new UN sanctions resolution and Iran's continuing with enrichment, it failed to resolve the situation.

The IAEA subsequently (May and Nov., 2011) reported it had evidence that Iran had undertaken work involved in the development of a nuclear weapon, including experiments involving nuclear triggers, and in Jan., 2012, Iran began the process of enriching nuclear fuel to a higher level (20%, used in medicine and a precursor to weapons-grade uranium) than before. The United States and other Western nations imposed additional sanctions in 2011–12 following those revelations; those imposed on many Iranian banks complicated Iran's ability to conduct international trade, leading to a drop in petroleum revenues and financial liquidity problems in Iran. The sanctions also contributed to high inflation and increased unemployment in Iran. In addition to sanctions, since 2010 a number of assassinations of scientists linked to Iran's nuclear program and at least one cyberattack at a nuclear facility have taken place in Iran. In retaliation for the sanctions and other measures, Iran apparently engaged in cyberattacks in the West and Middle East. The IAEA continued its calls for Iran to cooperate, but talks did not produce any resolution until after Hassan Rowhani's election (Aug., 2013) as Iran's president (see below).

In Dec., 2010, the government began reducing subsidies on food and energy; the reductions were forced in part by the high cost of maintaining them in the face of international sanctions against the country. An opposition demonstration in Tehran in Feb., 2011, in support of Egyptian antigovernment protesters was suppressed by the government, which also placed Mousavi and former presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi under house arrest after they called for the protest. Mousavi and Karroubi were later reported to have been transferred to a prison. The moves were part of a broader government crackdown in early 2011 that was believed to be in reaction to the antigovernment demonstrations in many Arab nations. In subsequent months a split developed between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad, and the ayatollah and hardline clerics moved to limit the president's power. The Mar.–May, 2012, parliamentary elections were largely boycotted by reformists and were mainly a contest between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad supporters, with the former winning a sizable majority of the seats. Tensions between Ahmadinejad and his opponents, particularly the parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, continued into 2013.

Six candidates were permitted to run in the 2013 presidential election; former president Rafsanjani was among the many who were disqualified. Hassan Rowhani, a pragmatic cleric and former diplomat who was regarded as the moderate candidate, won the first round with not quite 51% of the vote; the four most conservative candidates combined for some 30% of the vote. The vote was widely regarded as a rejection of both Ahmadinejad's allies and his hardline opponents. Iranian support for Syria became increasingly important beginning in 2013 as the Assad government struggled against various rebel groups. Subsequent negotiations concerning Iran's nuclear program led (Nov., 2013) to an interim agreement that called for Iran to stop enriching uranium above 5% and for it to impose other restrictions on its nuclear programs. In return, Western nations agreed to a limited, but reversible, easing of sanctions. Iran began implementing the restrictions in Jan., 2014.

Negotiations continued, and an accord placing limitations on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for lifting nuclear-related economic sanctions was agreed to in July, 2015. Meanwhile, following the Islamic

State's successes against Iraqi forces in mid-2014, Iran provided military aid and advisers, including combat troops and air strikes, to Iraqi forces, especially Iraqi Shiite militia forces. In Jan., 2016, after confirmation of the implementation of the nuclear program terms, international economic sanctions on Iran were lifted; subsequently the International Atomic Energy Agency has continued to certify Iran's compliance with the terms of the agreement.

Other sanctions and embargoes remained in place, and the United States imposed new sanctions aimed at Iran's missile program as a result of an Oct., 2015, Iranian ballistic missile test that the United States, Britain, France, and Germany said violated Security Council resolutions because it was capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. Missile tests in subsequent years also drew Western criticism and new sanctions from the United States, but Iran denied that its missiles were designed to carry warheads.

Saudi Arabia's execution in Jan., 2016, of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Saudi Shiite cleric, was bitterly denounced by Iran, and Saudi Arabia subsequently broke off diplomatic relations. The 2016 parliamentary elections produced gains for moderates and reformers aligned with the president, but their failure to secure a majority gave independents the balance of power in the legislature. Rowhani won reelection in May, 2017, with 57% of the vote, easily defeating his main hardline challenger, Ebrahim Raisi. Widespread antigovernment demonstrations, in areas historically supportive of Iran's regime, erupted in late Dec., 2017. The protests against poor economic conditions and corruption were sparked by revelations of proposed increases in support for religious and military organizations in a national budget that included reductions in or elimination of subsidies for citizens.

## **Bibliography**

- See Lenczowski, G. C. , ed., *Iran under the Pahlavis* (1978);  
Kapuscinski, B. , *Shah of Shahs* (1982);  
Keddie, N. R. , *Religion and Politics in Iran* (1983);  
Abdulghani, J. , *Iraq and Iran* (1984);  
Barthold, W. , *Historical Geography of Iran* (1984);  
Bakhash, S. , *Reign of the Ayatollahs* (1986);  
Sciolino, E. , *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (2000);  
Kinzer, S. , *All the Shah's Men* (2003);  
de Bellaigue, C. , *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs* (2005);  
Pollack, K. , *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (2005);  
Abrahamian, E. , *A History of Modern Iran* (2008);  
Afary, J. , *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2009);  
Polk, W. R. , *Understanding Iran* (2009);  
Takeyh, R. , *Guardians of the Revolution* (2009);  
Crist, D. , *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (2012);  
Yarshater, E. , *Encyclopædia Iranica* (15 vol., 1983-).

### **APA**

### Chicago

### Harvard

MLA

---

Iran. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran>

---



*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, © Columbia University Press 2018



*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, © Columbia University Press 2018

## APA

Iran. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran>

## Chicago

"Iran." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran>

## Harvard

Iran. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran> [Accessed 17 November 2019].

## MLA

"Iran." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran>. Accessed 17 Nov. 2019.