

PSCI 2400 Iran



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Brief History

- Persian Empire—traced back to the 2nd millennium BCE
- 1905-6—Constitutional Revolution—seeks to limit the power of the monarchy and it creates the Majlis
- 1925—Reza Khan is appointed the new Shah of Persia => Reza Shah Pahlavi
- 1941—Iran is invaded by the U.K and Russia
- 1963—the White Revolution
- 1979—the Iranian Revolution—beginning of the Islamic State
- 1980-88—Iran and Iraq war

Demographic data

- Population: about 70 mil.
- Ethnic groups:
 - » 51% Persian
 - » 24% Azeri
 - » 25% Kurds, Arabs, Balochs, Gilaki, and others
- Religious groups:
 - » 89% Shia Muslim
 - » 9% Sunni Muslim
 - » 2% Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i
- Official language: Farsi (NOT Arabic)
- Population median age < 25
- 4th largest producer of oil and 2nd largest reserve of natural gas in the world

Political Institutions

1. The Constitution

- Adopted in 1979
- It establishes Iran as an Islamic Republic which is designed solely to guide people towards Allah
- The God's law is the reigning law of the state
- All political institutions are seen as an expression of God's will

Cont'd.

2. The Executive

a) The Supreme Leader

- The most powerful office in Iran
- He is chosen for life by the **Assembly of Experts**
- Powers:
 - Decides who may run for presidency
 - Is commander in chief
 - Appoints the chief justice, the directors of radio and TV broadcasting
 - Supervises policy and calls referenda
- Ruhollah Khomeini—1st Supreme Leader
- Since 1989, Ali Khamenei

Cont'd.

b) The President

- His role resembles more that of a head of government
- He is directly elected for a 4-year term, renewable once
- His main roles include:
 - » initiating and executing laws
 - » carrying out policies
 - » managing the budget and
 - » foreign policy
- His powers are significantly limited by those of the Supreme Leader
- Current president: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

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3. The Legislature—Majlis

- Unicameral
- **290** members directly elected for 4-year terms
- Limited powers:
 - » initiating and passing legislation
 - » overseeing the budget
 - » approving the members of the president's cabinet
- **The Council of Guardians**:
 - 12 members appointed for 6-year terms
 - Significant powers: it reviews all legislation
- **The Expediency Council**:
 - all members are appointed by the Supreme Leader
 - It mediates b/w Majlis and the Council of Guardians

Cont'd.

4. The Judicial System

- The legal system derives from Sharia
- The **Chief Justice**—the apex of the judicial system
 - He is appointed by the Supreme Leader for a five-year term
 - He is always a cleric
- The **Supreme Court**—the highest court of appeal
 - The Chief Justice appoints the head of the Supreme Court
- Courts: public courts and 'revolutionary courts'

Cont'd.

5. The Electoral System

- SMD majority system (for the Majlis, the Assembly of Experts, and the presidency)
- If no candidate wins a majority of votes=> runoff b/w the two top vote getters
- The Council of Guardians has the constitutional power to decide who can or cannot run for office
- The legal voting age is 15

Political Economy

- 1920s-1979—mercantilism
- Since 1979: state controlled economy
- **Bonyads**: parastatal foundations—control significant assets and industries independent of government oversight
- Autarky—economic independence
- Major Problems:
 - high unemployment rates (15-20%)
 - poverty (>half of the population lives below poverty line)

Civil Society

- More active during the periods when the state was weak
- After the 1979 Revolution, civil society organizations were absorbed into the state or banned—**bonyads**
- The Internet
- Women's rights—limited again after 1979
- Women hold second-class citizenship

Other Institutions

- ❖ **The Revolutionary Guard**
 - A paramilitary force created in 1979
 - It is the Supreme Leaders' "corps of faithful"
 - It continues to be an important force
- ❖ **The Basij or Peoples' Militia**
 - A large people's volunteer militia
 - After 1988, declined in importance
 - Today: public-morals police force