



Iran Fact Sheet

Background

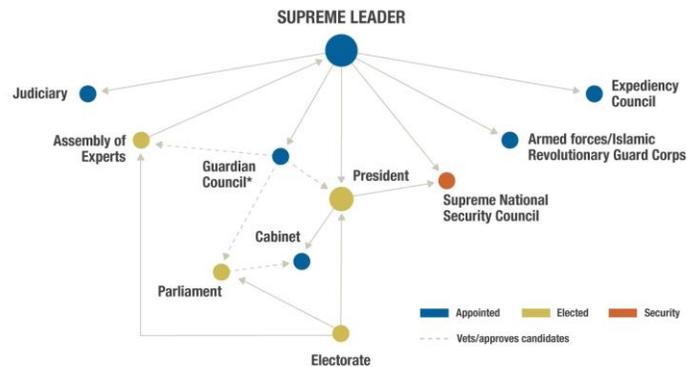
Known as Persia until 1935, Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979 after the monarchy was overthrown and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile. Shia Muslim Islamist clerical forces led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a theocratic system of government with political authority vested in a religious scholar referred to as the Supreme Leader who is accountable only to the Assembly of Experts - an elected 86-member body of clerics. Now the Supreme Leader is the Ayatollah Ali Khomeini. Iran's current President is Hassan Rouhani. The President is elected in an [undemocratic process](#) every four years.



(Map source [here](#))

Government System

IRANIAN REGIME STRUCTURE



*Half of its members appointed by Judiciary and half by Supreme Leader

Sources: Fatemeh Aman, Alex Vatanka, IFES

COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS

Iran is a Theocracy: “On the [surface](#), the U.S. and Iranian governments have much in common: a president who is popularly elected, a boisterous legislature, and a powerful judiciary. The obvious difference lies in the fact that Iran is an Islamic theocracy, and that one man, the Supreme Leader, exerts ideological and political control over a system dominated by clerics who shadow every major function of the state.”

Demographics

[The total population](#) of Iran is 82,802,633. Ethnic Persians [make up 50-60%](#) of the population. Islam is the official language with 90-95% Shiite, and 5-10% Sunni. Others include Zoroastrian, Jewish, Baha’is and Christian. “Ethnic minority groups, [including](#) Arabs, Azeris, Baluch and Kurds, face discrimination in gaining access to university studies, employment, business licenses and economic aid, getting permission to publish books and exercising their civil and political rights.”

- **Kurds in Iran:** There are an estimated 8-12 million Kurds living in the northwestern region in what Kurds call Rojhalat (East Kurdistan). The Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslim, with a sizable Shia minority. Most Kurds identify as secular. The Kurds are prohibited from speaking their language in schools, Kurdish activists are harassed, and town names are in Farsi. Ayatollah Khomeini declared a *Jihad* (Holy War) against the Kurdish people. Kurds are often imprisoned and publicly executed due to their activism. The largest Kurdish political party is the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq. Another group is the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) movement in Turkey. Both groups [fight the Iranians](#); there may be 7000 PJAK fighters and 2000 PDKI fighters.
 - **Khorasani Kurds:** There are [nearly](#) 1.5 million Kurds in the northeastern region, Khorasan, where they were moved in the 17th century. They suffer from heavy poverty, illiteracy, and destitution.
- **Baluchi:** In Iran, there are almost 2 million [Baluchis](#) living in the southeastern region, who are largely Sunni. There are another 8 million in Pakistan. They are vastly underrepresented in political positions.
- **Azeri:** There are nearly 12-20 million [Azeris](#) in Iran, where they are the second largest ethnic group. They live in the northwestern region, next to the 10 million Azeris in Azerbaijan. Iran and Azerbaijan are not friendly. Due to their Shia faith, Azeris are given greater freedoms than Sunni Muslims. But they still face cultural discrimination, as they are closer to Turks than Persians. They are prohibited from speaking their language in schools, activists are harassed, and town names are in Farsi. Prominent Azeris include Iranian Leader Ali Khamenei and Yahya Rahim Safavi, who was an IRGC commander from 1997-2007.
- **Arabs:** The less than two million Ahwazi Arabs live along the southwestern border with Iraq in the Khuzestan province; nearly 2% of Iran. Most Arabs are Shiite, while a small minority are Sunni. The province holds [85-90%](#) of Iran’s oil production. Despite that, the Arabs face poverty, unemployment, and a lack of education as well as human rights abuses by the regime. A terror group called the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz [may have attacked](#) government targets.
- **Lors:** The Lors number around 4.5 million and are largely Shia, who live in the western area adjacent to Iraq. They speak Lori, an ancient language similar to Farsi.

Iranian Government is Apocalyptic

- Dr. Bernard Lewis, the leading U.S. scholar on the Middle East, has [said](#), “Iran’s leadership comprises a group of extreme fanatical Muslims who believe that their messianic times have arrived... with these people in Iran, mutually assured destruction is not a deterrent factor, but rather an inducement. They feel that they can hasten the final messianic process. This is an extremely dangerous situation of which it is important to be aware.” Leader Khamenei [believes](#) this. His likely successor [also probably](#) does.
- “Iran has an [apocalyptic regime](#) ... since 2005, no poor country in the entire troubled history of the world has seen its fertility rate plunge from 7 children per female just one generation ago to only 1.6 children per female today... As a matter of arithmetic, Iran can sustain a third of its population as elderly dependents only by acquiring the wealth of its neighbors, for example, Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, which has a Shia majority, and where Iran already is attempting to subvert the Saudi monarchy. That is why Iran is aggressive, and why no negotiation will contain it.”

The Iranian Economy

Year	GDP	Iranian Military Budget (Billion Tomans)
2012-2013	-6.61 % (Source)	
2013-2014	-1.90	
2014-2015	4.34	32,527 (Source)
2015-2016	.38	42,057
2016-2017	6.60 (IMF)	50,790
2017-2018	4.07 estimated	55,527

In 2012/13, under sanctions, the Iranian economy [contracted](#) by 6.6%. These comprehensive sanctions had “[cut](#) Iran’s oil exports in half, [drove inflation to 60 percent](#), cut growth, crashed the currency, and were beginning to generate widespread popular discontent that threatened the survival of the regime.” In 2013/14, after the JPA, it contracted by 1.9%. Then it began to increase.

The official Iranian budget is a little over \$300 billion. The official defense budget is [\\$14 to 17 billion](#). The IRGC itself [gets](#) 65% of the official defense budget; around \$10 billion. Adding in extras, Iran budgets at least [\\$31 billion](#) for both its military and its proxies. The terror funding alone may amount to \$3.5-10.5 billion. (*Ilan Berman, CSP Seminar, 09/11/15*)

- At the start of the Iran deal negotiations, Iran had [\\$20 billion](#) in accessible foreign exchange reserves.
- The Iranian government has [spent](#) between \$100–500 billion on the country’s nuclear program.

Iranian Aggression & Terrorism

Iran [supports](#) terrorists and has [bragged](#) that it controls the capitals of four Arab nations. Iran [continues](#) to be the State Department’s leading State Sponsor of Terrorism. 2016 marked its 32nd year on the list.

Human Rights Violations: Non-Muslims and non-Shia [reportedly](#) face societal discrimination.

- **Kurds:** [According to a 2017 report](#) by Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, “almost one-fifth of the executions that took place in 2016 concerned Kurdish prisoners.” She stated “[Kurdish political prisoners](#) represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in Iran.”
- **Christians:** Iran is in the [Top Ten](#) of nations for Christian persecution throughout the world.
- **Baha’i:** There are more than 300,000 Baha’i in Iran. The Iranian regime [seeks](#) to eradicate them. Since 1979, more than 200 Baha’i leaders have been killed and more than 10,000 have been let go from government and university positions. Leader Khamenei issued a fatwa, in 2013, calling for Iranians to avoid “dealings” with Baha’is and labeled the group “deviant and misleading.”
- **Freedom of Expression and Information:** Free speech is often clamped down by Iranian security forces, even by social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Long prison sentences, torture and even execution can be the result. In 2014, six Iranians [were arrested](#) for appearing in a video dancing to Pharrell Williams’ song “Happy,” sentenced to up to one year in prison, and given 91 lashes.
- **Human Rights Abuses Against Women:** Women in Iran must [wear](#) a hijab [in public](#). In court, a woman’s testimony has [half](#) the value of a man’s. The law consistently [favors](#) men in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. A married woman may not [leave](#) the country without her husband’s permission. Women [are barred](#) from public events such as soccer games at local stadiums.
- **Human Rights Abuses against Children:** In [2015](#), the UN reported that there are nearly 160 children on death row in Iran. The rate of executions against minors have only increased under the “moderate” presidency of Rouhani. Child labor is also a major issue in the country; in [2011](#) there were 68,558 working children between ages 10-14 and 696,700 between ages 15-18. Children who are not of Iranian descent (Iranian mother and father) lack basic rights such as the right to speak their [mother tongues](#), and they also lack equal opportunities in schools. Girls 13 years and older are legally allowed to be married.

- **Homosexuals:** In accordance with sharia law, homosexual intercourse between men [can be punished](#) by death, and men can be flogged for acts such as kissing. Women may be flogged. Iranians [sometimes required](#) LGBT Iranians to undergo sex-reassignment surgery to avoid what the report describes as “legal and social consequences due to their gender identity ambiguity.” *The Huffington Post* [ran an expose](#) on anti-gay discrimination in Iran, where one refugee said that “either you want to leave, or you want to die.”
- **Rape in Prison:** Dissidents and homosexuals have become the [victims of rape and torture](#) in prisons.
- **Death Penalty:** Iran has [the second highest rate of execution](#), behind China. It accounted for 66% of all recorded executions in the Middle East. The overall number of executions carried out in Iran was 567 in 2016, a drop from at least 977 in 2015. Many crimes in Iran are punishable by death, including insults to the prophet, apostasy, same-sex relations, adultery and drug related offenses.

Iran-U.S. Relations

On November 4, 1979, Iranian students occupied the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Fifty-two Americans were held hostage for 444 days. Since 1979, the Iranian regime has committed [numerous](#) acts of war against the U.S. It supported and directed terrorists that killed 241 U.S. Marines and 17 Embassy personnel in the 1983 bombings in Beirut, and killed 23 Americans in the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers. It supplied Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFP's) and other weapons to Islamists from 03-11 that killed [more than 1100](#) U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. It planned a 2011 bombing of a Washington, DC restaurant to kill the Saudi Ambassador. Commercial relations between Iran and the U.S. are restricted by U.S. sanctions and consist mainly of Iranian purchases of food and medical products and U.S. purchases of carpets and food. The U.S. has had discussions with Iranian representatives within the UN framework on the issue of Afghanistan. The U.S., through the P 5 Plus 1, also negotiated with Iran and agreed to the JCPOA.

Iran-Israel Relations

Iran does not recognize Israel's legitimacy as a state but instead [pushes for its elimination](#).

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

The IRGC promotes Iran's Islamic Revolution throughout the Middle East and South America. [Within the IRGC](#), there is the Basij (mobilization) militia and the Quds Force (IRGC-QF). The IRGC Army has 100,000 troops in 20 infantry divisions. The IRGC Navy has 20,000 sailors, including 5,000 Marines. IRGC Special Forces, called the “Quds” (“Jerusalem”) Force numbers 5,000.

- **Basij militia:** The main task of the Basij is to keep popular support by recruiting volunteers, many of whom are teenagers. Their primary focus is on giving military training to “resist foreign invasion” and to help “suppress domestic opposition to the regime through street violence and intimidation.” The volunteers number 90,000 normally but are capable of mobilizing 300,000 to 1 million fighters.
- **Quds Force:** The core task of the Quds Force is to protect Iran from foreign threats and to provide support to its interests abroad, mainly Iraqi militias, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas, and militias in Syria allied with the Assad regime. The Quds Force is led by its notorious leader Major General Qasem Soleimani. Soleimani has been responsible for many deaths and only answers to Leader Khamenei.
- **Killed Thousands of Americans:** The IRGC [has killed and wounded](#) thousands of Americans, far more than ISIS, in Iraq and Afghanistan. The IRGC has killed more U.S. allies too through their terror operations. For example, it subsidizes Hezbollah and Hamas.
- **Controls Nukes:** The IRGC controls Iran's missiles, nuclear, chemical, & biological weapons programs.
- **Funds:** The IRGC is the third-wealthiest organization in Iran. The IRGC attracts young men by paying them up to \$265 a month. The IRGC is able to buy out entire government institutions, as well as the [“black economies.”](#) Iranian expert [Ali Ansari](#) has stated that “(t)hrough holding companies, front companies, and charitable foundations the IRGC is a big player in the construction business, oil and gas, import-export, and telecommunications. Its company subcontracts work to foreign firms, and its subsidiaries bid for contracts abroad. The IRGC's control over a string of jetties along the Gulf coast, as well as terminals in Iranian airports, allows it to move commodities in and out without paying any duty.”

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