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Chapter 1: Profile

Introduction

Long a melting pot for diverse cultures, Iran has a rich history. It was the center of the world's first empire. Because of its strategic location, Iran was a place where many cultures and societies interacted with one another. The mixtures are reflected in the diversity of modern Iranian culture. Officially known as Persia until 1935, Iran's constitutional monarchy was overthrown in 1979 by an Islamic revolution. Since that time, the country has been a conservative, theocratic Shi'ite state.^{1, 2}



© Terry Feuerborn
The Citadel of Rayen

Oil has been important to the modern history of the country and plays a leading role in the economy today. Iran is estimated to have 10% of the world's oil reserves. It remains critically dependent on oil for revenues as oil represents the largest sector of the economy.^{3, 4, 5} Iran purports to be building nuclear energy plants, but concerns among the world community about the Iranians' real intent have led to international sanctions. The sanctions have not only slowed Iran's nuclear program but have taken a huge toll on the economy. The sanctions play a part in Iran's high unemployment and rising rates of inflation.^{6, 7, 8}

¹ Art Arena, "Persia or Iran: A Brief History of the Pre-Twentieth Century," 1998, <http://www.art-arena.com/history.html>

² Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Introduction," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

³ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Iran," March 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>

⁴ International Business Times, "Middle East's New Oil War: Iran, Iraq Gloat over Reserve Size," 14 October 2010, <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/71909/20101014/iran-iraq-reserve-raise-output-opeq-quota-oil-gas-petroleum-natural-gas.htm>

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁶ Arms Control Now, "Examining the Impact of Iran Sanctions: Highlights from Today's ACA Event," Arms Control Association, 9 March 2011, <http://armscontrolnow.org/2011/03/09/door-to-engagement-with-iran-remains-open-senior-u-s-official-einhorn-says/>

⁷ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Iran," March 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>

⁸ PBS NewsHour, "Examining the Effects of Economic Sanctions on Iran," PBS, 21 September 2010, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec10/iran_09-21.html

Geography and Climate

Area

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in southwestern Asia. It is bordered by the countries of Afghanistan (936 km/580 mi), Armenia (35 km/22 mi), Azerbaijan proper (432 km/268 mi), the Azerbaijan Naxcivan exclave (179 km/111 mi), Iraq (1,458 km/904 mi), Pakistan (909 km/564 mi), Turkey (499 km/309 mi), and Turkmenistan (992 km/615 mi).⁹ It is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Alaska. Its coastline border is 2,440 km (1,513 mi). It also has a 740-km (459-mi) border on the Caspian Sea, the largest landlocked body of water in the world.



© Mohammad Emdadi
Caspian Sea

Climate

Iran's climate varies from subtropical to nearly sub polar. Temperatures can vary widely depending on the elevation, latitude, maritime influences, seasonal winds, and proximity to deserts or mountains. In certain regions, December and January are cold with heavy snowfall, and subfreezing temperatures are common. Spring and fall are relatively mild. Summers are dry with average daily temperatures in July exceeding 38°C (100°F), although summer heat on the Khuzestan Plain is accompanied by high humidity.¹⁰



© Jiahung Li
A range of climates

Precipitation also differs depending on region. In the southeast, average precipitation is less than 50 mm (2 in), while near the Caspian Sea in the north, 1,980 cm (78 in) is typical. Rainfall for the whole country averages about 400 mm (16 in). During the three-month winter, more than half the annual precipitation occurs. Summer is the dry season except in the semitropical northern coastal region, where temperatures may reach 38°C (100°F) with 100% humidity. There are four distinct seasons in the northern and western parts of the country. The fall and spring seasons become increasingly short toward the south and the east. These seasons merge into an area characterized by mild winters and hot summers.¹¹

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran," in *The World Factbook*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

¹⁰ About.com, "Climate of Iran," 2011, <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/persianempire/qt/ClimateIran.htm>

¹¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: Climate," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran/32204/Climate>

Mountainous Highlands

Rugged mountain chains surround several basins collectively known as the Central Plateau.¹² The main mountain system, the Zagros Mountains, cuts across the country for more than 1,600 km (1,000 mi) from northwest to southeast. Formed by the collision of the Eurasian and Arabian tectonic plates, the Zagros occupy most of western Iran and can be as wide as 340 kilometers (210 mi) in the range's center.¹³ Many of the peaks within this range are more than 4,000 m tall (12,000 ft).



The highest at 4,547 m (14,918 ft) is Zard Kuh. These mountains trap a great deal of moisture that becomes groundwater used to cultivate agricultural crops in the low-lying basins.¹⁴

The Alborz Mountains rim the coast of the Caspian Sea in the northern part of the country.¹⁵ The range is more than 600 km (400 mi) long and about 100 km (60 mi) wide. The highest peak is Mount Damavand at 5,670 m (18,602 ft). Its heavily forested northern slopes survive easily because of the high amount of rainfall. Several smaller ranges, in elevation from 2,400 to 2,700 m (8,000 to 9,000 ft), run parallel to the Alborz Mountains. The eastern border of the country, known as the eastern highlands, is lined by many of these low mountains.¹⁶

Major Water Systems

Rivers

Most of Iran's rivers are too short and shallow for suitable navigation, except for the Karun, in the southwestern part of the country, which is 829 km (515 mi) long. The rivers are a source of irrigation. A number of dams have been built on the Ab-e Dez, Karkheh, Sefid Rud, Karun, and other rivers. These dams provide a major source of electricity, and helped expand irrigation for agriculture. Some of the rivers form international borders. The Aras forms the border with Armenia and Azerbaijan,



¹² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, *Country Profile: Iran*, May 2008,

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iran.pdf>

¹³ Earth Observatory, "Salt Dome in the Zagros Mountains, Iran," NASA, n.d.,

http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/EarthObservatory/Salt_Dome_in_the_Zagros_Mountains_Iran.htm

¹⁴ Countriesquest.com, "Iran: Land and Resources, Natural Regions," n.d.,

http://www.countriesquest.com/middle_east/iran/land_and_resources/natural_regions.htm

¹⁵ The name is also commonly rendered as "Elburz."

¹⁶ Countriesquest.com, "Iran: Land and Resources, Natural Regions," n.d.,

http://www.countriesquest.com/middle_east/iran/land_and_resources/natural_regions.htm

the Atrek with Turkmenistan, and the Shatt al Arab forms part of the border with Iraq.¹⁷

Lakes

The largest landlocked body of water in the world, the Caspian Sea, borders five countries. Control of the sea is a point of contention between Iran and its neighbors.^{18, 19} Several other saltwater lakes fall completely within the borders of Iran. The largest is Lake Orumiyeh in the northwest. A few small freshwater lakes can be found in the high mountain valleys.²⁰



© Shahram Sharif
Relaxing by the Caspian Sea

Plains

The folds of the Zagros Mountains separate the lowland plains of Khuzestan, which abut Mesopotamia, from the highland plains of Fars. Successive ridges enclose fertile valleys. Many of these fertile enclaves were settled as early as the Paleolithic and appear to have a continuous history of occupation from the Neolithic to the present day.^{21, 22}



© ninera / flickr.com
Plains of Iran

¹⁷ Countriesquest.com, "Iran: Land and Resources, Rivers and Lakes," n.d.,

http://www.countriesquest.com/middle_east/iran/land_and_resources/rivers_and_lakes.htm

¹⁸ The demise of the Soviet Union threw into limbo the territorial division of the Caspian Sea and its potential billions of dollars in oil revenue. The legal status of the Caspian Sea remains unresolved. Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan appear to have agreed on the issue but Iran's position is still a problem. Iran maintains that the Caspian should be divided into five equal parts, or 20% for each littoral country.

¹⁹ Pitts Report, "War for Caspian Sea Inevitable?" 25 November 2010,

<http://www.pittsreport.com/2010/11/war-for-caspian-sea-inevitable/>

²⁰ Countriesquest.com, "Iran: Land and Resources, Rivers and Lakes," n.d.,

http://www.countriesquest.com/middle_east/iran/land_and_resources/rivers_and_lakes.htm

²¹ Iranian Society of Travel Agents (ISTA), "Population in Iran," 2007,

<http://www.irantour.org/Iran/population.html>

²² Cameron Petrie, "Exploring Routes and Plains in Southwest Iran From Space," ArchAtlas, 2005,

<http://www.archatlas.dept.shef.ac.uk/Petrie/RoutesandPlains.php>

Cities

Tehran

Tehran is in north central Iran, south of the Caspian Sea. It is the political, administrative, industrial, and commercial capital of Iran, with a population of slightly over 7 million.²³ When the greater metropolitan area is included, the population of Iran's capital exceeds 12 million. Approximately half the Tehran population is under the age of 27. The residents of the city are mainly Shi'ite Muslims with some Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian minorities.²⁴ More than one-third of the jobs in Tehran are in the service sector, about one-fifth in manufacturing, and about one-sixth in sales.²⁵ Yet unemployment is relatively high at 13.2%.²⁶



© Enise & Matthias / flickr.com
Urban sprawl of Tehran

Mashhad

Mashhad is the seat of government for Khorasan Province and is northeast of Tehran near the border of Turkmenistan. The name of this city, an Arabic word meaning “place of martyrdom,” was not chosen arbitrarily: some believe that in the ninth century, Reza, the eighth Imam of Shi'a Islam, was murdered there. Since then, Mashhad has been a holy pilgrimage site for Shi'ite Muslims in and outside of Iran. Statistics indicate a population of over 2.6 million.

Tabriz

Far in the northwest corner of Iran, near the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, lies the city of Tabriz. Famed for its traditional carpet craft and magnificent mosques, Tabriz is home to Iran's largest minority, the Azeris. The population of Tabriz is at least 1.5 million.²⁷ Ethnic issues occasionally flare up and there have been reports



© quv / flickr.com
El-Goli Park in Tabriz

²³ Iranian Society of Travel Agents (ISTA), “Population in Iran,” 2007, <http://www.irantour.org/Iran/population.html>

²⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “Iran: Tehran,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/585619/Tehran>

²⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “Iran: Tehran,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/585619/Tehran>

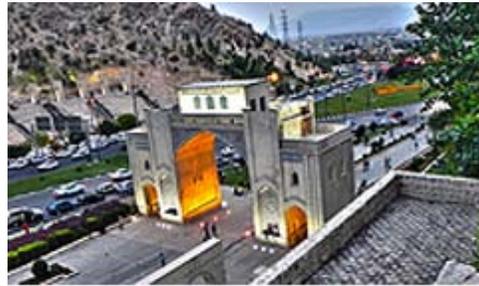
²⁶ Tehran Times, “Unemployment, Economic Growth Goals Outlined,” 16 January 2011, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=234167

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “Azerbaijan,” 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/46770/Azerbaijan>

of growing unrest in the city.²⁸ More recently, labor strikes have occurred in the city.²⁹

Shiraz

Shiraz, in the southern part of the country at the foot of the Tang Allah o Akbar mountains, is famous for its wine. The city was founded after the Arab conquest of Iran. By the 13th century it had become one of the largest and most popular Islamic cities.^{30, 31} The old part of the city showcases historic buildings. About a dozen mosques, some with bulb-shaped domes and others with pear-shaped domes and cupolas, are scattered among the old houses.³²



© Ashkan Kankash
Quran Gate in Shiraz

Esfahan

Halfway between Tehran and Shiraz, Esfahan was the capital of the Safavid Empire in the 17th century. The city's most remarkable feature is its magnificent central square, which is roughly seven times larger than Venice's Piazza San Marco.³³ Known also for two of the most magnificent mosques in the Muslim world—the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and the Imam Mosque—Esfahan is approached via beautiful bridges that span the Zayandeh Rud River.³⁴



© ninara / flickr.com
Imam Square in Esfahan

Qom

Founded in the ninth century BCE and located about 100 km (62 miles) south of Tehran, Qom is a holy city for Shi'ite Muslims. It contains the burial place of Fatima, the daughter of the seventh Imam and sister of Reza, the eighth Imam. The town is best known for its religious university, Howzeh-ye Elmieh, which attracts many Iranian



© Graeme Wood
Qom holy shrine

²⁸ Navid Ahmadi, Rooz Online, "Growing Unrest in Azerbaijan," Iran-Va-Jahan, 25 May 2006, <http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/news.pl?!=en&y=2006&m=05&d=25&a=16>

²⁹ Ardalan Sayami, "Wave of Labor Strikes in Iran," Rooz Online, Iran Gooya Media Group, 7 March 2011, <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/archive/2011/march/07/article/wave-of-labor-strikes-in-iran.html>

³⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Shiraz," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/541082/Shiraz>

³¹ Persian Iran.com, "Shiraz," 2000, <http://persepolis.free.fr/iran/tourism/shiraz/shiraz.html>

³² Iran Chamber Society, "Cities of Iran: Shiraz," 2006, <http://www.iranchamber.com/cities/shiraz/shiraz.php>

³³ AMEinfo.com, "Iran (Islamic Republic of): Top Things to See," 12 March 2011, http://www.ameinfo.com/iran_things_to_see/

³⁴ Iran Travel Service, "Isfahan," 2011, <http://www.irantravelservice.com/isfahan.html>

and international students who want to become *mullahs*.³⁵ It was revealed in 2009 that a secret uranium enrichment facility exists at Qom. Evidence suggests that the facility was intended for military use.³⁶ The facility, about 30 km (19 miles) north of the city, is expected to begin enriching uranium in 2011. Iran reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that the plant was not for weapons production.³⁷

History

Rule of the Shah

Iran is situated in the region that claims some of the oldest history in human civilization. But Iran's modern history begins in the 20th century. In 1921, Reza Khan, a former military officer, organized a successful coup against the Qajar government. He installed himself as Shah, or king, and ruled the country for nearly 16 years as Reza Shah Pahlavi. He attempted to modernize the country and secularize the political sector. His belief in a strong central government led him to reassert authority. Following the Allied occupation of western Iran in 1941, the Shah was forced to give up his rule. His son was installed as Shah and ruled until 1979.³⁸



DoD Image
Shah Pahlavi and his wife Farah

Premier Mohammed Mossadeq, a militant nationalist, forced the nationalization of the British-owned oil industry in 1951. This move was opposed by the Shah and Mossadeq was removed from power, but his ouster was short lived. Mossadeq quickly returned to power, causing the Shah to flee the country. Supporters of the Shah staged a successful coup in 1953 that prompted Mossadeq's arrest by the army.³⁹

Once again in power, the Shah began a series of economic, social, and administrative reforms that became known as the "White Revolution." Land reform was at the core of these changes. This period featured unprecedented modernization of the country and growth in the economy. Much of the economic growth was fueled by Iran's huge reserves of oil, now thought to be the third-largest in the world.⁴⁰

³⁵ Bamjam Travel Pictures, "Qom," n.d., <http://www.bamjam.net/Iran/Qom.html>

³⁶ Catherine Philp, Francis Elliot, and Giles Whittell, "How Secrecy Over Iran's Qom Nuclear Facility Was Finally Blown Away," *The Times*, 26 September 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6850325.ece

³⁷ BBC News, "Iran's Key Nuclear Sites," 6 December 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11927720>

³⁸ Shapour Ghasemi, "Pahlavi Dynasty," *Iran Chamber Society*, 2001–2011, <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/pahlavi/pahlavi.php>

³⁹ Virtual Sources, "Iran," 1999–2006, <http://www.virtualsources.com/Countries/Middle%20East%20Countries/Iran.htm>

⁴⁰ Virtual Sources, "Iran," 1999–2006, <http://www.virtualsources.com/Countries/Middle%20East%20Countries/Iran.htm>

The Shah developed close relations with the West, particularly the United States, which viewed Iran as a bulwark against communism and militant Arab nationalism. In pursuing his modernization agenda, however, the Shah ignored the historical influence exerted by the Islamic clergy. The destabilizing effects of rapid change on a traditional society coupled with the Shah's intolerance of opposition produced increasing political tension in the country. By the late 1970s, mounting discontent had found a focus in the fundamentalist preaching of Ayatollah Khomeini, the unquestioned leader of Iran's Shi'ite community. Exiled in France, he called for the overthrow of the government via cassette tapes.⁴¹

Islamic Revolution

In 1978, Reza Pahlavi traveled to the United States to undergo cancer treatment. Faced with massive opposition from Islamic fundamentalists and secular liberals, as well as uncertainty within the ranks of the previously loyal army, his position became untenable. He had no choice but to embark on a life in exile as his health declined. The Carter Administration froze Iranian assets, many of which were held in the name of the Pahlavi family, in American banks. In reaction, Iranian students occupied the American embassy in Tehran, which they denounced as a center of espionage, and took the embassy personnel hostage.⁴²



Courtesy of Wikimedia
Ayatollah Khomeini

The triumphal return of Ayatollah Khomeini effectively ensured that the Islamic clergy would prevail over secular elements in establishing a new political order. Over the next 2 years, secular opponents of the Shah were steadily displaced as the Islamic clergy asserted complete political control. The reaction in the West was almost uniformly hostile, and fixated on the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran in 1979 as a cause célèbre. The hostages were freed the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated in 1981.⁴³

This was also the period when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The new government in Tehran made a concerted effort to train and support Hazara Shi'ite groups in Afghanistan for the purpose of extending its own revolution across the border.⁴⁴ The prolonged contest for power brought into Iran over 1 million Afghan refugees from the

⁴¹ iExplore, "Iran Travel Guide: Iran History," 2010, <http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Iran/History>

⁴² *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: History," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

⁴³ "Americans fixate on the 1979 revolution and the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. But for Iranians, the events of 1953 loom much larger, when America and Britain teamed up to depose a nationalist regime, replacing it with a pliant but tyrannical monarchy." Charles A. Kupchan and Ray Takeyh, "Dealing with Tehran: The Key Lies in Iran's History," *International Herald Tribune*, 29 March 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/dealing-tehran-key-lies-irans-history/p10281>

⁴⁴ Richard S. Newell, "Chapter 4—Government and Politics—The Afghan Resistance—Neighboring Governments: Involvements and Interference—Iran," in *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, ed. Peter R. Blood, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1997, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-119.html>

warfare, and later, from Taliban rule. Developing policies to deal with the Afghanis became a major burden for the Iranian government as early as 1984; because the refugees' numbers continued to swell although Iran received no international assistance to help care for them.⁴⁵ Several camps in eastern Iran were established, but approximately one-third of the residents left and settled in big cities such as Tehran, Shiraz, and Mashhad, where they could find work.

Iran–Iraq War

At the same time, Tehran had a far more serious border problem. Iraq, looking to exploit political instabilities in order to pursue territorial and other claims against their longtime enemy, launched a full-scale invasion in 1980. This began 8 years of fighting, often resembling the worst excesses of the trench warfare of World War I.⁴⁶ The conflict opened rifts in the entire area, with Iran being backed by Syria, North Korea, Cuba, and Yugoslavia, while Iraq found allies in Egypt,



© ninara / flickr.com
Iran-Iraq war battlefield

France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, the United States, and other Arab Persian Gulf countries. The Iran-Iraq War ended in August 1988 with next to nothing gained by either side, despite the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives on both. While Iran turned inward after the war, its former nemesis decided to invade Kuwait. Iran was largely a spectator to that conflict, although it did gain diplomatically from Iraq's subsequent defeat. It also gained another surge of refugees fleeing Saddam Hussein's postwar vengeance.⁴⁷

Post-Revolution Leadership and Recent History

The Iranian government moved to the right following the election of Ali Khamenei to the presidency in 1981 and imposed an Islamic code of social and moral behavior. The government responded to opposition elements in the country with repression. Large numbers of people were executed daily. Revulsion throughout the country for such violence caused the government to curtail its widespread repression.^{48, 49}

Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami was elected president of the country in 1997 after Khamenei was elevated to Supreme Leader following Khomeini's death. Khatami attempted political reform and tried to liberalize the country. He also tried to normalize relations with the West in an effort to reduce tensions in the region. But his attempts at democracy were undermined by the Supreme Council, which held veto power.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran," 2011,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

⁴⁶ iExplore, "Iran Travel Guide: Iran History," 2010, <http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Iran/History>

⁴⁷ MidEastWeb, "History of Modern Iran," 24 July 2009, <http://www.mideastweb.org/iranhistory.htm>

⁴⁸ MidEastWeb, "History of Modern Iran," 24 July 2009, <http://www.mideastweb.org/iranhistory.htm>

⁴⁹ George Perkovich, "Iran's Security Dilemma," Yale Global Online, 27 October 2003,

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/irans-security-dilemma>

⁵⁰ MidEastWeb, "History of Modern Iran," 24 July 2009, <http://www.mideastweb.org/iranhistory.htm>

The election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad as President of Iran in June 2005 precipitated a deterioration of Iran's relations with the West, particularly the United States. An ultra-conservative prone to undiplomatic pronouncements, he has been steadfast in his insistence that Iran's controversial nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. Sanctions from the UN have not resulted in any positive steps toward halting Iran's production of nuclear fuel.⁵¹



© Daniela Zaloman
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

In 2009, new presidential elections were held. Ahmadinejad was reelected in a disputed election. Popular challenger Mir-Hosein Musavi urged supporters to fight the results. Tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets in bloody demonstrations. Mobile phone networks were disrupted, internet access was limited, and there were mass arrests. All of this renewed Western concerns about human rights abuses in the country.⁵²

Current relations with the West remain tense. In February 2010, the Iran Parliament called for the execution of Musavi and Mehdi Karubi, another activist and reformer. More clashes occurred.⁵³ Ahmadinejad remains defiant. The United States and its allies are still concerned that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons and that the country is supplying terrorist organizations. In early 2011, Israel seized arms bound for Hamas in Azerbaijan and Iran has been openly accused of interfering in the domestic affairs of Azerbaijan.⁵⁴

Government

Iran is a theocratic republic where the state and religion are intertwined.⁵⁵ The Iranian constitution, which is based on Islamic law, was approved by a referendum in December 1979, soon after the revolution ended monarchical rule.



© www.kremlin.ru
Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

⁵¹ Neil MacFarquhar, "U.N. Approves New Sanctions to Deter Iran," *New York Times*, 9 June 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/middleeast/10sanctions.html>

⁵² Casey L. Addis, "Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections," Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2009, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/125709.pdf>

⁵³ BBC News, "Iran Unrest: MPs Call for Death of Mousavi and Karroubi," 15 February 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12462491>

⁵⁴ UPI, "Special Reports: Iran Suspected in Azerbaijan Unrest," 16 March 2011, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2011/03/16/Iran-suspected-in-Azerbaijan-unrest/UPI-38771300298502/

⁵⁵ Book Rags, "Iran Political System," 2006, <http://www.bookrags.com/research/iranpolitical-system-ema-03/>

Several layers of leadership, most of which are appointed, comprise the political system. At the top is the Supreme Leader, who is chosen by and from the Assembly of Experts, a group of “virtuous and learned” clerics elected by the public to 8-year terms. He is responsible for the delineation and supervision of “the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” which means that he sets the tone and direction for domestic and foreign policies. He is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces and controls the Islamic Republic’s intelligence and security operations; he alone can declare war or peace. The current Supreme Leader is Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.⁵⁶

The Supreme Leader’s sphere of power is extended through his representatives, an estimated 2,000 of whom are sprinkled throughout all echelons of the government, where they serve as his clerical field operatives. Because they have the authority to intervene in any matter of state on the Supreme Leader’s behalf, they are quite powerful.⁵⁷

The President is the second-highest official in Iran. While the President has a highly public profile, in reality his power is limited by the constitution, which subordinates the entire executive branch to the Supreme Leader. Iran is the only state in which the executive branch does not control the armed forces.⁵⁸ The President is responsible for setting the country’s economic policies.⁵⁹

He also appoints 6 of the 12 members of the Council of Guardians, the powerful body that oversees the activities of parliament and determines which candidates are qualified to run for public office. The Iranian Parliament, known as *Majles*, is a unicameral legislative body whose 290 members are publicly elected every 4 years. It ratifies international treaties, approves the country’s budget, and drafts legislation, which then becomes law. The council (the other half of its members are appointed by the Supreme Leader) has at times struck down up to 40% of those laws after deciding they were not compatible with shari’a, or Islamic law.⁶⁰

Media

When reformist President Mohammad Khatami came to power in May 1997, the stringent laws restricting the issuance of new publishing licenses, which had been in effect since the 1980s, were relaxed. As a result, more than 500 new licenses were issued in less than 6 months. In February



© Fellowship of Reconciliation
Iranian journalist getting an interview

⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, “The Iranian Political System,” 11 June 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/200961111422655588.html>

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, “The Iranian Political System,” 11 June 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/200961111422655588.html>

⁵⁸ Frontline, “The Structure of Power in Iran,” PBS, May 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/govt.html>

⁵⁹ Al Jazeera, “The Iranian Political System,” 11 June 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/200961111422655588.html>

⁶⁰ Al Jazeera, “The Iranian Political System,” 11 June 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/200961111422655588.html>

1998, Iran's first reformist newspaper, *Jameah* (Society), rolled off the printing presses in Tehran.⁶¹ It was an overnight success. Within a few months, more than 50 reformist newspapers and weeklies appeared around the country. For almost 2 years, the Iranian press enjoyed an unprecedented freedom to reflect the concerns of the public by tackling such previously taboo subjects as government corruption.⁶² The liberalized press became a victim of its own success, however, because conservatives (who control the judiciary) saw this trend as a threat to the Islamic system. Many pro-reform publications were subsequently shut down and their writers and editors jailed. According to the reformist Iran Press Freedom Association, more than 1,800 journalists and photographers lost their jobs during a 3-year span because of the closures and suspensions.⁶³

Although the broadcast media have seen some changes, they nevertheless remain more restricted than the press. Television is quite popular in Iran, and satellite TV is tolerated to some extent in part because illicit satellite dishes removed by authorities quickly reappear.⁶⁴ Many foreign broadcasters specifically target listeners in Iran, including the Washington-backed *Radio Farda* that is aimed at a young audience.

Economy

Iran's primary asset is its abundant energy resources: It holds 10% of the world's proven oil reserves and its supplies of natural gas are second only to Russia's.⁶⁵ An international rebound in oil prices helped lessen the impact of economic sanctions against Iran. Nevertheless, double-digit unemployment continues as does serious underemployment.⁶⁶



© brum d / flickr.com
Azeri man selling candy

Cuts in domestic subsidies and international sanctions will cause a drop in economic growth. The price of consumer goods has risen sharply since the end of 2010 due to a new domestic program that reduces subsidies. This will likely reduce consumer spending in the country, further hurting the economy.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Asharq Alawsat, "The State of the Iranian Press," 15 June 2005, <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=1&id=445>

⁶² Shahram Sokooti, "Iran's Reformist Press," World Press Review Online, 22 January 2002, <http://www.worldpress.org/mideast/0122iran.htm>

⁶³ The English Centre of International PEN, "Media in Iran," 2006, <http://www.englishpen.org/writersintranslation/magazineofliteratureintranslation/iran/mediainiran/>

⁶⁴ Thaddeus Russell, "Beyoncé Knowles, Freedom Fighter," Salon, 31 August 2006, <http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2006/08/31/beyonce/index.html>

⁶⁵ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Iran," January 2010, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=IR>

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁶⁷ Business Monitor International, "Subsidy Cuts and Sanctions to Weigh on Growth," January 2011, <http://www.meamonitor.com/file/96746/subsidy-cuts-and-sanctions-to-weigh-on-growth.html>

These problems are in turn exacerbated by Iran's extraordinarily youthful population. Nearly one-fourth of its 77.9 million people are below the age of 14, putting immense pressure on the country's labor markets. Nearly 71% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 64. Unemployment is estimated to be at 14.6%.⁶⁸ The government has promised to create 2.5 million new jobs by March 2012 and to end the unemployment crisis by 2014.⁶⁹

In 2009, Iran's main trade suppliers were the UAE (15.1%), China (13.5%), Germany (9.7%), South Korea (7.2%), Italy (5.3%), Russia (4.8%), and India (4.1%). Most of the imported goods were industrial raw materials and intermediate goods, foodstuffs, other consumer goods, and technical services. Fully 80% of Iranian exports were accounted for by petroleum. Chemical and petrochemical products, fruits and nuts, and carpets made up most of the rest. The country's main export partners were China (16.6%), Japan (12%), India (10.5%), South Korea (7.5%), and Turkey (4.4%).⁷⁰

In September 1996, Iran petitioned to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) but, to date, the WTO has not agreed to start the negotiation process to allow membership to Iran.⁷¹

Ethnic Groups

Iran has long been at a strategic location that exposed it to a variety of cultural influences and peoples. The majority of the population is ethnically Persian, but millions of Iranians descend from a range of ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Among the most significant of these are the Azeris, Turks, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, and Turkmen.^{72, 73}



© brum d / flickr.com
The youth of Iran

Azeris

Azeris are a Turkic people who live primarily in northwestern Iran and numbering nearly 16 million, or 24% of Iran's population.^{74, 75} The United Nations Human Rights Report

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁶⁹ FARS News Agency, "President Pledges More Economic, Social Progress for Iran in New Year," 21 March 2011, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9001010098>

⁷⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁷¹ Reza Aslan and Raj Bhala, "Why WTO Membership for Iran Makes Sense," *Foreign Policy*, 23 June 2010, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/06/23/iran_and_the_wto; European Commission, "Trade: Iran," 3 September 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/countries/iran/index_en.htm

⁷² Lionel Beehner, "Iran's Ethnic Groups," 29 November 2006, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-ethnic-groups/p12118>

⁷³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: Ethnic Groups," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

⁷⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: Ethnic Groups," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

on Iran notes “there may be as many as 30 million” ethnic Azeris in Iran. Although there is no evident separatist sentiment, relations between Azeris and the government are strained.⁷⁶ In May 2006, the Iranian government closed down an official newspaper after it published a cartoon depicting an ethnic Azeri as a cockroach, which led to clashes between the police and thousands of people in Tabriz.⁷⁷

Turks

The northwest of Iran is home to most of the Iranian Turks, but many reside in Zanjan Province up to Qazvin Province; in and around the cities of Hamadan, Tehran, Qom, and Saveh; and in the Khorasan provinces; also, they are scattered throughout many other parts of Iran. Some of the central and southern ethnic groups, such as the Qashqai, are Turkic-speaking.

Kurds

The Kurds reside mainly in Kurdistan Province in northwestern Iran and are of Iranian origins. They are divided into several major clans including the Mokri, the Bani-Ardalan, the Jaaf, and the Kalhor. Most Kurds follow the Sunni branch of Islam.⁷⁸

They represent about 7% of the current population of the country.^{79, 80} Tensions exist between the Kurds and the government. After the 1979

revolution, the Iranian Kurds wanted autonomous rule for their regions, but Ayatollah Khomeini

declared jihad (Holy War) against them. Sustained military, psychological, and economic campaigns have been mounted against the Kurds, leading to tens of thousands of deaths.⁸¹ Kurds continue to be arrested for alleged political crimes, and executions are rising.⁸²



© Nicolas Holzheu
Kurds praying

⁷⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “Iran: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁷⁶ BBC News, “Azeris Feel Iranian Pressure,” 16 February 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8516682.stm>

⁷⁷ BBC News, “Iranian Paper Banned over Cartoon,” 23 May 2006,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5008420.stm

⁷⁸ Iran Chamber Society, “Iranian People and Tribes,” 2001–2011,

http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Iran: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁸⁰ KurdishRights.org, “Iran Reportedly Executes Another Kurdish Political Prisoner: Authorities Refuse to Confirm,” 22 January 2011, <http://kurdishrights.org/2011/01/22/iran-reportedly-executes-another-kurdish-political-prisoner-authorities-refuse-to-confirm/>

⁸¹ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, “Iranian Kurdistan,” 25 March 2008,

<http://www.unpo.org/members/7882>

⁸² Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, “Iranian Kurdistan: Tehran Executes 10 Kurdish Political Prisoners,” 3 March 2011, <http://www.unpo.org/article/12335>

Baluchis

The Baluchis reside mainly in Baluchestan, a dry region in the southeastern part of the Iranian plateau that is divided between Iran and Pakistan. They have never had a formal ruling hierarchy but live under a tribal system. They speak Baluchi, a West Iranian language. There are a number of distinct tribes within the Baluchi group. For the most part, Iranian Baluchis follow Sunni Islam.⁸³ Like the Kurds, the Iranian Baluchis regard themselves as a people without a state. They claim sectarian persecution, and this has led the government to declare the group to be conspiring with foreigners. In 2002 the Soldiers of God organization was founded to protect the Baluchi minority.⁸⁴ In 2009, the Baluchis led a suicide bombing attack on a group of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and in 2010, 10 Baluchis were arrested after entering Iran to carry out acts of sabotage.⁸⁵ ⁸⁶ The situation remains volatile because relations do not appear to be getting better.



© Balochistan / flickr.com
Young Baluchi shepherd

Turkmen

The Turkmen are a Turkish-speaking group that has been in Iran since around 550 C.E. They live mainly in the Turkoman Sahra or in the Gorgan plains along the northeastern border with Turkmenistan. The majority of Turkmen follow the Sunni sect and some are followers of Sufi mysticism. The Turkmen have a history of opposing central governments and were put down in an important rebellion by Reza Shah.⁸⁷ Today, many of the younger generation are increasingly assimilating into Iranian society, even discarding their language in favor of Persian. The Turkmen identity is beginning to fade because of other factors: It is forbidden to give Turkmen names to babies; Iranian-style dress is mandated by law; and there is almost no Turkmen media. Although the Turkmen have felt the sting of discrimination based on



© BPeretz Partensky
Turkmen relaxing and chatting

⁸³ Iran Chamber Society, "Iranian People and Tribes," 2001–2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

⁸⁴ Roger Hardy, "Profile: Iran's Jundullah Militants," BBC News, 20 June 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8314431.stm

⁸⁵ Jonathan Foreman, "The Baluchi Attack on Iran's Revolutionary Guards," National Review Online, 19 October 2009, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/188886/baluchi-attack-irans-revolutionary-guards/jonathan-foreman>

⁸⁶ News 24, "Iran Arrests 10 Sunni Baluchis," 22 June 2010, <http://www.news24.com/World/News/Iran-arrests-10-Sunni-Baluchis-20100622>

⁸⁷ Iran Chamber Society, "Iranian People and Tribes," 2001–2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

religion, the message of Iranian nationalism seems to have gained acceptance among some of the people.⁸⁸

Arabs

Arab tribes are scattered in an area between the Arvandrud River and the Persian Gulf in the south and Shush in the north. The Arabs have retained their Arabic language and many of their customs, but have lost some ethnological characteristics. They are a mixed religious community of Sunni and Shi'ite followers, although most consider themselves Shi'ite.⁸⁹ They represent an estimated 1–3% of the Iranian population, but accurate numbers are difficult to obtain because of their extensive migrations.^{90, 91} The Arabs claim that they are persecuted and marginalized by the government. Other claims are that nearly one-third of the Arabs in urban areas live in poverty. Despite their feelings of persecution, Arab Iranians helped defend Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. They claim to be supporters of the revolution and loyal members of the country.⁹² Nevertheless, as Sunni–Shi'ite tensions mount throughout the region, this group has pressed for greater autonomy. The Arabs and the government have recently clashed.^{93, 94}



© Hamed Saber
Arab family

⁸⁸ Muhammad Tahir, “Turkmen Identity on the Wane in Iran,” 29 March 2010, http://www.muhammادتahir.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1228:turkmen-identity-on-the-wane-in-iran&catid=103:my-articles&Itemid=471

⁸⁹ Hussein D. Hassan, “Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities,” Congressional Research Service, 25 November 2008, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf>

⁹⁰ Iran Chamber Society, “Iranian People and Tribes,” 2001–2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

⁹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Iran: People,” in *The World Factbook*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁹² Al Jazeera, “Iranian Arabs Seek Equal Rights,” 10 February 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/iranaftertherevolution/2008/12/200812691745418706.html#>

⁹³ Sunniforum, “Five Killed, 22 Injured in Clashes with Security Forces in Ahvaz,” 17 May 2010, <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?58350-Five-killed-22-injured-in-clashes-with-security-forces-in-Ahvaz>

⁹⁴ Hussein D. Hassan, “Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities,” Congressional Research Service, 25 November 2008, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf>

Chapter 1: Assessment

1. Nearly all of Iran's rivers are navigable by ship.
False
Most of Iran's rivers are relatively short and shallow, and are unsuitable for navigation. The only navigable river is the Karun, in southwestern Iran.
2. The United States backed Iran during the Iran–Iraq War.
False
During the war, Iran was backed by Syria, North Korea, Cuba, and Yugoslavia, while Iraq was backed by Egypt, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, the United States, and others.
3. Iran is a theocratic republic.
True
Iran is a theocratic republic where the state and religion are intertwined. The Iranian constitution is based on Islamic law.
4. The President is the highest-ranking official in Iran.
False
The President is the second-highest official in Iran. His power is limited by the constitution, which subordinates the executive branch to the Supreme Leader.
5. Iran holds 10% of the world's proven oil reserves.
True
Iran holds 10% of the world's proven oil reserves and its supplies of natural gas are second only to Russia's.

Chapter 2: Religion

Introduction

Religion in Iran permeates society and government. Although the country has a long history reflecting different religious influences, most modern-day Iranians are Shi'ite Muslims (89% of the population). Kurdish and Turkmen ethnic groups follow the Sunni branch of Islam, accounting for 9% of the population.⁹⁵



© Simon Taylor
Iranian Mosque

Several religious minorities exist in Iran. There are small Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Baha'i religious communities throughout the country, together accounting for 2% of the country's population.^{96, 97} Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians all have a degree of religious freedom. (Zoroastrians believe in a struggle between good – typified by the creator, Ahura Mazda – and evil – typified by Ahriman. Zoroastrians must choose which side of the fight they are on and are to practice good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.)⁹⁸ The Baha'i faith, having been founded after the advent of Islam, has been actively persecuted in Iran. Baha'i organizations are not tolerated and followers are banned from access to universities and government jobs. Some have also been arrested and killed for espionage.⁹⁹

Origins and Doctrine of Shi'a Islam

All Muslims believe in one God (*Allah*), believe Muhammad to be the last Prophet, adhere to the Quran, are expected to offer five daily prayers, perform the prescribed fast in the month of Ramadan, go to Mecca for the pilgrimage (*hajj*), and to give to the poor. Muslims believe that the Quran consists of the word of God revealed in



© Fraz Ismat
The Kaaba in Mecca

⁹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁹⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. "Iran: Religion," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran/230043/Religion>

⁹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

⁹⁸ Brian Wells, "Zoroastrianism" (site developed for course in New Religious Movements, University of Virginia), 26 July 2001,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20060828130112/religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Zoro1.html>

⁹⁹ Thomas Erdbink, "Iran Accuses Seven Bahai Leaders of Espionage," *Washington Post*, 18 February 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/17/AR2009021703011.html>

Arabic by God to the Prophet Muhammad over a 22-year period starting in 610 C.E.¹⁰⁰

The division between Shi'ites and Sunnis emerged over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims believed that after the Prophet's death, the new leader should be elected from among those qualified for the position. The Prophet Muhammad's close friend and advisor, Abu Bakr, became the first Caliph, or successor, of the Islamic nation.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the Shi'a sect believed that leadership should be given to someone in the Prophet's family. This group supported Ali ibn Abu Talib, a cousin of the Prophet and husband of the Prophet's daughter.¹⁰² Shi'ites therefore revere Ali and his sons Hassan and Husayn.

The majority of Muslims throughout the world follow Sunni Islam. Approximately 10–15% follow the Shi'ite (or Shi'a) branch. Approximately 89% of Iranians are Shi'ite Muslims.¹⁰³ Of the several Shi'ite sects, the Twelver (*ithna-ashariya*) is dominant in Iran. Most Shi'ites in Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon also follow this sect.

Despite common core values, traditions, and practices, there are significant differences between the two Islamic sects. Sunnis have generally less powerful religious hierarchy than Shi'ites. The Sunnis allow lay persons to serve as prayer leaders and preachers. The Shi'a sect believes in a supreme imam who, similar to the Roman Catholic pope, is infallible in interpreting the law or tradition. Shi'ites believe that the supreme imam is a spiritual guide who inherited the Prophet's inspiration. The Shi'ite sect also has a strong tradition of martyrdom and suffering.¹⁰⁴

Religion and Government

Between 1925 and 1963, the government became more centralized and exercised more power over the various tribal groups. Courts and educational institutions were secularized. But the new policies were seen by Shi'ite religious leaders as contrary to Islamic values. The reforms had chipped away at the bases of clerical power.¹⁰⁵



Courtesy of Wikimedia.org
Khomeini in an airplane

In 1963, Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini, a relatively unknown cleric, spoke against the reforms.

¹⁰⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: Religion," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran/230043/Religion>

¹⁰¹ Religion Facts, "Comparison of Sunni and Shia Islam," 2011, http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/comparison_charts/islamic_sects.htm

¹⁰² Christopher M. Blanchard, "Islam: Sunnis and Shiites," Congressional Research Service, 28 January 2009, <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21745.pdf>

¹⁰³ Hussein Abdulwaheed Amin, "The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam," Islam for Today, 2001, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Hussein Abdulwaheed Amin, "The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam," Islam for Today, 2001, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm>

¹⁰⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: History," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

Forced to leave Iran, Khomeini resided for many years in exile, primarily in Iraq, but kept in touch with religious colleagues in Iran. While in exile, Khomeini developed his concept of an Islamic government. A series of lectures, published as a book entitled *Hukumat-i Islami* (Islamic Government), argued that government should realize God's will and that the clergy was the only group justified to rule. By 1978, thousands of Iranians were protesting what they saw as years of excess by the government. From his position abroad, Khomeini coordinated the opposition and the Shah was forced to leave the country. Khomeini returned to Iran in February of 1979. On April 1, Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic republic.^{106, 107}

Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, church and state were inextricably linked. Central to the Iranian system of government is the concept of *vilayat-i faqih*. Literally "the guardianship of the jurist," *vilayat-i faqih* places political authority among a few powerful clergy.¹⁰⁸ The current government system is dominated by a small group of religious clerics and revolutionary forefathers. Only insiders—those who support the supreme leader—wield any real power in the government.¹⁰⁹

Although religious rule is a seminal factor in Iranian government, it does not operate in a vacuum. Following the initial election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, political hardliners and religious conservatives seemed firmly united in control of the government.¹¹⁰ Rifts between the two, however, began to emerge in 2008 and came to a head after Ahmadinejad's hotly contested reelection in 2009.^{111, 112} Debates among influential Shi'ite clergy, political contests between conservative hardliners and reformers, the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and continued popular unrest will all continue to collectively define the role religion plays in the Iranian government.^{113, 114}

¹⁰⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Iran: History," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>

¹⁰⁷ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16-17.

¹⁰⁸ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17.

¹⁰⁹ Greg Bruno, "Religion and Politics in Iran," Council on Foreign Relations, 19 June 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/religion-politics-iran/p16599>

¹¹⁰ BBC News, "Guide: How Iran is Ruled," 9 June 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8051750.stm>

¹¹¹ Nazila Fathi, "Ahmadinejad loses favor with Khamenei, Iran's top leader," *New York Times*, 7 January 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/world/africa/07iht-tehran.4.9063096.html>

¹¹² Michael Slackman, "Hard-Line Force Extends Grip Over a Splintered Iran," *New York Times*, 20 July 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/world/middleeast/21guards.html>

¹¹³ Mohamad Bazzi, "Iran struggles to redefine its religious leaders' roles," *The National*, 29 December 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/analysis/iran-struggles-to-redefine-its-religious-leaders-roles>

¹¹⁴ Ray Takeyh, "The Struggle for a New Iran," *New York Times*, 27 December 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/28/opinion/28iht-edtakeyh28.html? r=1>

Religious War Martyrs

When Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini revived an ancient Shi'ite tradition of martyrdom: hundreds of thousands of soldiers, many of them children, heeded his call and died in futile, suicidal assaults over minefields. For 8 years, Iran battled Iraq's military in a war in which neither side ultimately gained much. Today, Iran is filled with reminders of the war. Massive billboard images of the war dead, as well as pictures of Palestinian and Lebanese suicide bombers, line the boulevards of Tehran.¹¹⁵



© Mary hodder / flickr.com
Martyrs' cemetery in Esfahan

The issue of war martyrs has taken on an important social dimension. Families of the deceased receive special privileges, ranging from quotas for highly competitive university admission to low-interest government loans. "The martyrs' privileges are Iran's version of affirmative action," observed Siamak Namazi, a Tehran-based political analyst educated in the United States.¹¹⁶

Financial Support for Religious Activities

The traditional financial support for all religious institutions including mosques, shrines, and seminaries has been the religious endowment called a *vaqf*. These endowments provided land or other income-producing property that was given in perpetuity in order to maintain the facility.



© Umar Nasir
A page of the Quran

The *vaqfs* were traditionally run by hereditary administrators in accordance with the terms of the bequest. During the Shah's reign, the government attempted to control the administration of *vaqfs*, which led to an antagonistic relationship with the clergy. As a result, many wealthy Shi'ites gave their financial contributions directly to a leading ayatollah, who used these funds for religious and charitable enterprises. This gave the clergy access to a steady source of income and was an important factor in their ability to oppose and ultimately overthrow the Shah.¹¹⁷ The scope of the mosques' activities expanded in the 1970s and played a prominent part in organizing people for the large demonstrations in 1978 and 1979. Since the Revolution, the role of the mosques has continued to expand to include important political and social roles as well as religious ones. Today, clerics are still politically active and sometimes

¹¹⁵ Kevin Tolis, "A Million Martyrs Await the Call," *Times Online*, 19 November 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1072-1878612,00.html>

¹¹⁶ Afshin Molavi, "War Memories Weigh Heavily in Iranian Reform Debate," *Washington Post*, 8 August 1999.

¹¹⁷ Windows on Asia, "Religion in Iran," Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 2011, http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/central_asia/iran/religion.htm

take positions at odds with the government. They point out that Islamic history provides ample evidence of people overthrowing venal religious leaders. Therefore, no one, not even a cleric, can claim a monopoly on godliness or truth. “Only the Quran is immutable. Our constitution is not,” said Mohammed Ali Abtahi, the grandson of a Grand Ayatollah. “We are not looking to ban religion, only to amend the constitution.”¹¹⁸

The Role of Religion in Daily Life

The mosque is the center of Shi’a life, especially in urban areas where congregational prayers, and prayers and rites associated with religious holidays, take place. Muslims observe five formal prayers each day. Technology often allows for printing of daily prayer schedules that precisely pinpoint the beginning of each prayer time. The timing of these prayers is spaced fairly evenly throughout the day, so that one is constantly reminded of God and given opportunities to seek his guidance and forgiveness.



© Ben Piven
Shrine of Fatima Masumeh

Exchange 1: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	che moqe'ee nemaaz meeKhoonee?
Local:	I pray at noon.	zoR nemaaz meeKhoonam

The more devout will have calluses on the tops of their feet and foreheads. The forehead mark comes from pressing one’s forehead to the *mohr*, the prayer stone, while bowing. Only Shi’ite Muslims use a prayer stone while praying; Sunnis consider it a form of idolatry. The calluses on the tops of the feet are from friction with the carpet, which also occurs while bowing.¹¹⁹

Religious Holidays

Iran has the most non-working days: 132, including weekends, which fall on Thursday and Friday. Many public holidays in Iran are connected to Shi’ite holy days. Islamic holidays follow the lunar-based Muslim hijra (flight of the Prophet) calendar. Because of the differences between the Gregorian solar reckoning and the



© Hamed Saber
Ramadan evening meal

¹¹⁸ Margaret Coker, “Iran’s Regime Sees Fiercest Critics Among Religious,” *Austin American-Statesman*, 3 September 2006.

¹¹⁹ Diane Tober, “Tulips From the Blood of Martyrs,” excerpt from *A Path to Isfahan: Iran with My Two Sons* (forthcoming), 27 January 2006, <http://www.iranian.com/Travelers/2006/January/Martyrs/index.html>

lunar months of the Muslim calendar, holidays occur on different dates each year. Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the moon and the dates cannot be determined far in advance. In addition, religious calendars may be subject to local variations, so the holiday can fall on different days in different places.¹²⁰

Eid al-Adha

The most holy feast on the Muslim calendar is the feast of sacrifice. It lasts anywhere from 2 to 10 days. This feast commemorates Abraham's obedience to God as demonstrated by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isma'il. Isma'il, known to Christians as Ishmael, is considered to be the forefather of the Arabs. According to the Quran, just before Abraham was to sacrifice his son, a voice from heaven stopped him and allowed him to sacrifice a ram instead. Families reenact Abraham's obedience by sacrificing an animal; they keep a third of the meal for themselves and give the rest to extended family and the poor.¹²¹

Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr

The biggest event of the year for all Iranian Muslims is Ramadan, the month of fasting and prayer. During this month preceding *Eid al-Fitr*, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. Exceptions are made for the elderly, the sick, and the very young. People rise early to have a meal before sunrise, and then gather after nightfall to break the day's fast with a special evening meal called *iftar*.¹²² Normal business patterns may be interrupted. Many restaurants will be closed during the day and there may be restrictions on smoking and drinking.

At the end of the month comes the *Eid al-Fitr* feast, a joyous occasion for attending religious services, visiting friends and family, and exchanging gifts. The festivities may last anywhere from 2 to 10 days, depending on the region.¹²³

Ashoura

Among Shi'ite Muslims, this is a day of special sorrow. It honors the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn and his followers at the battle of Karbala in Islam's first century. Commemorated through reenactments, which include self-flagellation, the Battle of Karbala is for Shi'ites what the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus is for Christians. The self-flagellation is reminiscent of the practice of self-mutilation, the



© ninera / flickr.com
Ashoura

¹²⁰ Q++ Studio, "Iran Public Holidays 2011," <http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2011/iran.htm>

¹²¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Id al-Adha," n.d., <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281649/Id-al-Adha>

¹²² The Holiday Spot, "Ramadan: The Holy Month," n.d., <http://www.theholidayspot.com/ramadan/ramadan.htm>

¹²³ The Holiday Spot, "About Eid ul Fitr," http://www.theholidayspot.com/eid_ul_fitr/about.htm

carrying of the cross, and the physical deprivation that endures in parts of the Christian world today.¹²⁴ Normally forbidden by Islam and officially discouraged by the Iranian government, self-flagellation involves beating oneself, and one's young children, with chains and a sword. This is intended to remind pious Shi'ites of the pain and the horrors the martyrs went through.

Eid-e Ghadir Khom

This is a significant holiday for Shi'ite Muslims. They believe it to mark the day the Prophet Muhammad gave his last instructions to his followers and named Imam Ali as his successor.

The Ascent of the Prophet

This holiday marks the journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem, his ascension into the heavens, and his return on the same night. Muslims believe Muhammad prayed together with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus in the Al-Aqsa mosque. The holiday affirms that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all believe in the same God.¹²⁵

Holy Sites

Most of the twelve Imams are buried in Iraq and therefore most of the holiest shrines for the Shi'ites are there.¹²⁶ In Iran, the following sites are important.

Mashhad

The name Mashhad means "place of martyrdom."

The martyr in question is Imam Reza, who purportedly was poisoned there in the ninth century. He was reputed to be a person of extraordinary scholarship and saintly qualities, and a belief developed that a pilgrimage to Imam Reza's grave would equal 70,000 trips to Mecca.¹²⁷ His shrine is a famed place of sacred healing. It draws an estimated 12 million visitors a year.¹²⁸ The best endowed



© Eliza Tashbhi
Shrine of Imam Reza

¹²⁴ Elaine Sciolino, "Martyrs Never Die," excerpt from *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (2000), Frontline, PBS, May 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/martyrs.html>

¹²⁵ Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation, "Commemorating the Night of Ascent of the Prophet Mohammed," 8 July 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/265894/commemorating-night-ascent-prophet-mohammad>

¹²⁶ Paul Sullivan, "Who are the Shia?" History News Network, 26 May 2003, <http://hnn.us/articles/1455.html>

¹²⁷ Sacred Sites: Places of Peace and Power, "Mashhad," 2010, http://www.sacredsites.com/middle_east/iran/mashhad.htm

¹²⁸ Vali Nasr, "Chapter 1—The Other Islam: Who Are the Shia?" in *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 56.

shrine in Iran, the premises include hospitals, dispensaries, a museum, and several mosques, which are situated in a series of courtyards around the tomb.¹²⁹

Qom

The city of Qom is also an important site for Shi'ite Muslims because it contains the shrine of Fatima the Pure. Fatima was a ninth-century saint who died while visiting the city. Her shrine eventually received a gold-plated dome and today is second in importance only to the shrine of her brother, Imam Reza.

There are also important secondary shrines for other relatives of the Eighth Imam in Rey (adjacent to south Tehran) and Shiraz. In virtually all towns and in many villages there are numerous lesser shrines, known as *imamzadehs*, which commemorate those descendants of the imams who are reputed to have led saintly lives. Shi'ite pilgrims visit these sites in the belief that the imams and their relatives have power to intercede with Allah on behalf of petitioners.¹³⁰

Mosque Etiquette

International visitors are welcome in many Iranian mosques as long as they adhere to the same protocol as worshippers.



© Melissa Wall
Mosque etiquette

Exchange 2: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	meetonam beeyam to masjed?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Shoes must be removed before entering. All female visitors must don a *chador*, literally “tent,” an unwieldy cape (almost always black) that they enshroud themselves in and cinch closed with their hands.¹³¹

Exchange 3: Do I need to wear a chador?

Soldier (Female):	Do I need to wear a chador?	baayad chaadoR saR konam?
Local:	Yes.	bale

¹²⁹ Windows on Asia. “Religion in Iran,” Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 2011, <http://www.asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Iran/religion.html>

¹³⁰ Helen Chapin Metz, ed., “Chapter 3—Society—Religion—Shia Islam,” in *Iran: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 1987, <http://countrystudies.us/iran/55.htm>

¹³¹ Kwintessential, “Customs in Iran,” n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/article/Iran/Customs-in-Iran/113>

Large banners printed on a black or green background are displayed inside Shi'ite mosques. They may have messages of mourning or lamentations for a recently departed person. Do not touch or remove these banners. Shi'ite places of worship may also have flags in them. These flags will probably be green and have writing on them.¹³²

Be alert to the male and female worship areas in order to enter the correct one. Take care not to walk in front of someone praying, which would invalidate their prayer, and always ask before taking photographs.

Exchange 4: May I take photographs?

Soldier:	May I take photographs inside the shrine?	meetonam daaKhele haRam 'ks begeeRam?
Local:	No.	na

Do not touch any books inside the mosque. Do not touch the walls, especially the western corner, where people direct their prayers. Some mosques have a shrine in the center or in one corner. Do not touch it. Do not speak unless you are spoken to and, even then, respond in a whisper.¹³³

¹³² Matt Bird, "Etiquette of Visiting and Praying in a Mosque," Helium, 3 February 2011, <http://www.helium.com/items/2082684-etiquette-of-visiting-and-praying-in-a-mosque>

¹³³ Matt Bird, "Etiquette of Visiting and Praying in a Mosque," Helium, 3 February 2011, <http://www.helium.com/items/2082684-etiquette-of-visiting-and-praying-in-a-mosque>

Chapter 2: Assessment

1. The majority of Muslims throughout the world follow Shi'a Islam.
False
The majority of Muslims throughout the world follow Sunni Islam. But Shi'a Islam is dominant in Iran.
2. Shi'ite Muslims use a prayer stone while praying.
True
Only Shi'ite Muslims use a prayer stone while praying; Sunnis consider it a form of idolatry.
3. The practice of self-mutilation during the Ashoura holiday is officially discouraged by the Iranian government.
True
Normally forbidden by Islam and officially discouraged by the Iranian government, Ashoura is often an occasion when devout Shi'ite Muslims mutilate themselves.
4. Most of the Imams of the Twelver branch of Shi'a Islam are buried in Iran.
False
Most of the twelve Imams are buried in Iraq, so most of the holiest shrines for the Shi'ites are there.
5. International visitors are prohibited from entering many Iranian mosques.
False
International visitors are welcome in many Iranian mosques as long as they adhere to the same protocol as worshippers.

Chapter 3: Traditions

Introduction

Iranians are a proud people with a long history. Most are Shi'ite Muslims whose faith governs nearly all aspects of their lives. Iranians are generally conservative, and traditional family values form the foundation for almost everything in society. Iranians also have been called some of the friendliest and most hospitable people in the world.¹³⁴



© Soudeh Rad
Old woman with her grandson

The country is socially conservative and male-dominated. The structures of family and society are patriarchal. Men and women are seen as equal but different. Duties and rights within the family structure are based on gender and clearly reflected in religious and family legislation.¹³⁵ Honor killings represent a way to protect and uphold the honor of the family in Iran. Both men and women may be victims of honor killings, though women are far more likely victims. The law states that the perpetrator may be held accountable for the killing, though the degree of guilt and exact punishment depend on a variety of factors. In some cases, the court may choose to invoke no punishment.¹³⁶

Iranians often see themselves as having a private and a public identity. In public, Iranians conform to accepted rules of behavior. Within their inner circle, however, individuals can feel free to be themselves. The inner circle typically includes family and friends. Members of one's inner circle can always be relied upon to help, whether through the offering of advice or assistance in finding jobs.¹³⁷

Greetings

Iranians are friendly people, and a polite greeting will always be appreciated.



© kamshots / flickr.com
A friendly smile

¹³⁴ Open Travel, "5 Friendliest Nations on Planet Earth," 22 October 2009, <http://opentravel.com/blogs/5-friendliest-nations-on-planet-earth/>

¹³⁵ Land Info, "Report: Honor Killings in Iran," 22 May 2009, http://www.landinfo.no/asset/960/1/960_1.pdf

¹³⁶ Land Info, "Report: Honor Killings in Iran," 22 May 2009, http://www.landinfo.no/asset/960/1/960_1.pdf

¹³⁷ Kwintessential, "Iran: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html>

Exchange 5: Good morning!

Soldier:	Good morning!	salaam!
Local:	Good morning!	salaam!

The custom of shaking hands in Iran varies around the country and among different groups of people. When men are introduced, they generally shake hands. Another common form of greeting among men is the hug, usually three hugs while alternating shoulders. A kiss or two on each cheek is also common. These are normally reserved for persons that have already met.¹³⁸

Exchange 6: Good afternoon!

Soldier:	Good afternoon!	salaam!
Local:	Good afternoon!	salaam!

Among women, handshakes and hugs are common. The initial handshake should be light rather than firm. Women can also exchange a kiss on the cheek.¹³⁹

Exchange 7: Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	shab beKheyR!
Local:	Good night!	shab beKheyR!

Do not shake hands or make any physical or eye contact in public with a member of the opposite sex. A slight bow as an acknowledgement at meeting is allowed.¹⁴⁰ Kissing or holding hands in public is only acceptable between members of the same sex and indicates friendship only. It does not indicate homosexuality, something that is illegal in Iran and can be punishable by death. Hand-kissing only occurs when a male religious follower visits his religious leader.¹⁴¹



© Laura and Fulvio / flickr.com
Friends holding hands

International visitors involved in social exchanges have reported being frequently approached by Iranians, including women, who were intrigued to find out that they were

¹³⁸ Culture Crossing, "Iran: Greetings," n.d.,
http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=98

¹³⁹ Culture Crossing, "Iran: Greetings," n.d.,
http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=98

¹⁴⁰ Culture Crossing, "Iran: Greetings," n.d.,
http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=98

¹⁴¹ Mohammad Ali Salmani-Nodoushan, "The Socio-Pragmatics of Greeting Forms in English and Persian," in *Language, Society and Culture* 17 (2006),
<http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/ARTICLES/2006/17-3.htm>

Americans and eager for additional contact.¹⁴² Caution is encouraged in such situations; although many laws are not strictly enforced, they are still on the books. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the law enforcement arm of the government, can detain anyone for any slight violation at any time.

Exchange 8: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	chetoRee?
Local:	Fine, very well.	Khooba

Do not stray into conversation topics that could be deemed sensitive, such as politics or religion, with a local person in a public place.¹⁴³

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Iranian people express politeness through certain honorifics and phrases in informal conversations.¹⁴⁴ The most common methods of maintaining politeness include the choice of personal pronouns and the use of honorific titles.



© Elias Priasteh
A polite and warm smile

When addressing men, use *agha* preceding the surname. Thus, Alan Jones would be *agha-e Jones*. For women, use *Khanoom*. Mary Jones would be *Khanoom-e Jones*. When addressing professionals, use the title as the form of address. For example, when meeting Dr. Jones, you would say *Doctor-e Jones*. Religious scholars or government officials with a black turban are thought to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The title *sayyid* is used when addressing them. With military titles, the word *jae'nab* is typically used; for example, *jae'nab sar'hang hasani* for Colonel Hasani.¹⁴⁵

Exchange 9: Hi, Mr. Alizadeh! (Informal)

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Alizadeh!	salaam, aaqaa ye 'leezaade
Local:	Hello!	salaam!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	haaletoon Khoobe?
Local:	Yes.	bale

¹⁴² Peace Corps, "NPCA Sponsors Bridge-Building Trip to Iran," 11 November 2002,

<http://peacecorpsonline.org/messages/messages/2629/1010768.html>

¹⁴³ Ipersians.com, "Trip Report to Iran," 31 October 2000,

<http://boards.ipersians.com/showthread.php?t=6440>

¹⁴⁴ Mohammad Ali Salmani-Nodoushan, "The Socio-Pragmatics of Greeting Forms in English and Persian," in *Language, Society and Culture* 17 (2006),

<http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/ARTICLES/2006/17-3.htm>

¹⁴⁵ ExecutivePlanet, "Iran: First Name or Title? Addressing Others with Respect," 5 December 2006,

<http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Iran: First Name or Title%3F>

Male-Female Interaction

Certain regulations for gender relations are particularly important for non-Iranians to know. Perhaps the most well known is that no public display of affection is permitted between men and women. Even shaking hands with a woman is inappropriate. Any touching of a female by men who are not relatives is to be avoided. Women should not be alone in public with men unless they are relatives. Under no circumstance is a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim.¹⁴⁶



© Cyrus Farivar
Male-female interaction

In a conversation, a foreign woman in the company of a man may notice that most or all of the conversation is directed at the man. The woman may not even be acknowledged. Female travelers to the country may find that they are given a kind of “honorary male” status and will be allowed to mingle in places where Iranian women are clearly forbidden, including tea houses. But women should not count on this being the case. Although many Iranian men are accustomed to dealing with foreign women, it should not be assumed that the men will follow Western conventions in their interactions.¹⁴⁷

Many restaurants will have separate areas for males and females. In private homes, males and females are often segregated during meals. On public transportation, Iranian women may not sit next to men who are not relatives. Although women give their tickets to a bus driver through the front door, they do not enter through that door. Rather, women must go to their separate entrance at the middle of the bus.

Attire

There are highly specific codes of dress for Iran. Iranians are a modest people. This is particularly illustrated in their clothing. Men traditionally should not wear shorts or even short sleeves, though today T shirts are not uncommon. Women should wear a headscarf and be sure that arms and legs are completely covered. Many women wear the *chador*, which is a full-body cloak.^{148, 149}



© Amir Farshad Ebrahimi
Women in traditional clothing

¹⁴⁶ Hamed Shahidian, “Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Culture of Iran, 2006,

http://www.cultureofiran.com/gender_relations_in_iran.html

¹⁴⁷ Kerryn Burgess, “Women Travelers,” in *Iran* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2008), 397.

¹⁴⁸ 2Cinternational, “Iran: Country Briefing,” 2011, <http://www.twoci.com/2cinew/countries/iran.htm>

¹⁴⁹ Kwintessential, “Dress in Iran,” 2011, <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/article/Iran/Dress-in-Iran/114>

Exchange 10: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	chetoRee baayaad lebaas bepoosham?
Local:	Wear loose-fitting clothes which cover your body.	lebaas e goshaadee bepoosh ke hame ye jaaye badanetoo bepooshoone

Female visitors to Iran must observe the Islamic dress code for women (*hijab*) as any Iranian woman would. Many Iranian women of all ages wear a *chador*, a large piece of fabric that is held shut in the front. Except when visiting a mosque, female visitors may opt for the *rouposh*, a loose-fitting overcoat that in recent years has extended only to the knees. Bare legs or ankles should not be exposed. If wearing pants, remember to wear socks.¹⁵⁰

Exchange 11: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	een baRaa poosheedan monaasebe?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Women are not required to wear dark colors or black; all colors are perfectly acceptable. Although Islamic dress is required for all women, including foreign tourists, enforcement is selective. Still, women should take care to dress modestly.¹⁵¹ The Iranian parliament recently implemented a new public dress code for female journalists. All women reporters in the country, regardless of their nationality, must wear the mandatory Islamic dress for women.¹⁵²

Gift-Giving

Iranians tend to give gifts on special occasions or for congratulations on an event such as graduation or a promotion. It is not uncommon for businessmen to bring sweets and cakes to the office rather than bringing gifts. Always bring a small gift when you visit someone's house. The most typical gifts a visitor may bring are flowers for the host or some special sweets and pastries. Be sure to apologize for the gift being too small or too inexpensive when you give it. Gifts should be



© Erwin Bolwidt
Sweets are a good gift when visiting a home

¹⁵⁰ The Odyssey: World Trek for Service and Education, "Sweet Home Iran," 5 April 2000, <http://www.worldtrek.org/odyssey/mideast/040500/040500abejafamily.html>

¹⁵¹ Let'sGoIran, "Dress Code in Iran," 2011, <http://www.letsgoiran.com/iran-women-dress-code>

¹⁵² Agence France-Presse, "Dress Code for Iran Women Reporters," 5 February 2011, Dawn, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/06/dress-code-for-iran-women-reporters.html>

carefully wrapped and are not usually opened when they are received.¹⁵³

Gifts are given more in social rather than in business situations. Gifts given in business negotiations or situations could be construed as a bribe.¹⁵⁴

Invitations

When invited to dinner, it is customary to bring a plant, flowers, or candy.

Exchange 12: Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	salaam!
Local:	Good evening!	salaam!

Typically, people remove their shoes upon entering an Iranian home. A pair of indoor slippers may be provided for guests. Visitors should dress conservatively.¹⁵⁵

Exchange 13: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	vaaq'n az mehmoon navaazeeton mamnooneem
Local:	It is nothing.	qaabele shomaa Roo nadaaRe

The traditional Iranian dinner is set out in serving dishes placed on a large white cloth spread over many beautiful carpets. The diners assemble around the cloth on soft cushions. It is customary to eat all foods with the fingers of the right hand. Special short-handled spoons are used for soups and soft desserts, and sometimes visitors are given forks. The food is prepared and served in such a way that knives are never needed or used at the table.¹⁵⁶



© Nick Taylor
Traditional Iranian dinner

As a guest, you will be asked to start eating before the others. When asked if you want more of anything, you should always decline even if you want more. This gives the host or hostess a chance to insist that you have more. This exchange is carried out in other contexts, not just during meals. After having declined at least twice, you are then

¹⁵³ @llo' Expat, "Iran Customs and Etiquettes," 2011, http://www.iran.alloexpat.com/iran_information/customs_etiquettes_iran.php?page=0%2C1

¹⁵⁴ Culture Crossing, "Iran: Gift Giving," 2011, http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=23&CID=98

¹⁵⁵ Kwintessential, "Customs in Iran," 2011, <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/articles/article/Iran/Customs-in-Iran/113>

¹⁵⁶ Farhangsara, "Iranian Food Culture: Meal Patterns and Eating Customs," n.d., http://www.farhangsara.com/iranian_food_culture.htm#Meal%20Patterns%20and%20Eating%20Customs

expected to accept. Since this pattern is reciprocal, anything you wish to give someone should be offered several times.¹⁵⁷



© autumnnn / flickr.com
Iranian food

After you have finished, emphasize how much you enjoyed everything that was served. In return, the hosts will keep apologizing for serving mediocre fare and in such limited variety.¹⁵⁸ This is common modesty and should not be taken seriously.

Exchange 14: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	ghazaa Kheylee Khooshmazz as
Local:	Oh, no, it's quite mediocre.	na baabaa, kaamelan m'mooleeye

Exchange 15: The meal was very good.

Soldier:	The meal was very good.	ghazaa Kheylee Khoob bood
Local:	Next time the food will be better.	daf'ye deege ghazaa behtaR Khaahad bood

Food

Iranian food is diverse according to its province of origin. In general, Iranians enjoy a healthy diet centered on fresh fruits, greens, and vegetables.¹⁵⁹ It tends to be simple yet colorful.



© birdfarm / flickr.com
Typical lunch in Iran

Meat—primarily lamb, goat, or chicken—is used as a condiment rather than the centerpiece of a meal.

Exchange 16: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	een che no' gooshteeeye?
Local:	Lamb.	baRe

¹⁵⁷ Emma Salk, "Iranian Business Etiquette: Manners and Tips for Visiting Iran," Associated Content, 4 October 2005, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/9117/iranian_business_etiquette.html

¹⁵⁸ Hamid Taghavi, *The Iranian* "Iranian Hospitality Attack: A Survival Guide for the Non-Iranian Traveler," Parsi Khabar, 20 March 1998, <http://parsikhavar.net/culture/iranian-hospitality-food-and-social-customs/1649/>

¹⁵⁹ S.M. Kimiagar et al., "Food Consumption Pattern in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Its Relation to Coronary Heart Disease," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 4, Issue 3 (1998): 539–547, <http://www.emro.who.int/Publications/EMHJ/0403/4315.htm>

Rice and fresh, unleavened or semi-leavened whole-grain bread are staple starches. The primary beverage is black tea. The principal dietary taboo is the Islamic prohibition on consuming pork.

Breakfast is a light meal consisting of fresh unleavened bread, tea, and perhaps butter, white (feta-style) cheese, and jam. Fried or boiled eggs may also be eaten. Meat is not common at breakfast.

The main meal of the day is around 1 o'clock in the afternoon and is always preceded by ceremonious hand-washing and the serving of tea. In a middle-class household, dinner usually starts with a plate of fresh greens—scallions, radishes, fresh basil, mint, coriander, and other seasonal herbs and vegetables. These are served with unleavened bread and white cheese. The main dish is steamed aromatic rice (*chelow*) served with one or more stews made of meat, and a fresh vegetable or fruit.



© Cyrus Farivar
Various types of Iranian food

This stew, called *khoresht*, resembles a mild curry. Its central ingredient might be eggplant, okra, spinach, quince, celery, or a myriad of other possibilities. One particularly renowned *khoresht*, *fesenjun*, consists of lamb, chicken, duck, or pheasant, cooked in a sauce of onions, ground walnuts, and pomegranate molasses.

Exchange 17: The stew is very good.

Soldier:	The stew is very good.	een aabgoosh Kheylee Khoobe
Local:	It's <i>khoresht</i> , a famous Persian dish.	een KhooRoshe, ye ghazaaye m'Roofe eeRaanee ye

Besides being prepared as *chelow*, rice may be prepared as a pilaf (*polow*) by mixing in fresh herbs, vegetables, fruit, or meat after the rice is boiled, but before it is steamed.

The Iranian national dish, called *chelow kabab*, consists of a filet of lamb marinated in lemon juice or yogurt, onions, and saffron, then pounded with a knife on a flat skewer until fork-tender, and finally grilled.

Exchange 18: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	esme een ghazaa cheeye?
Local:	This is <i>chelow kabab</i> .	een chelokabaabe

This dish is served with grilled onions and tomatoes on a bed of *chelow* that has been topped with a lump of butter and a raw egg yolk. The butter and egg are mixed with the hot rice (which cooks the egg) and ground sumac berries are sprinkled on top.

Exchange 19: What ingredients are used to make *chelow kebab*?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make <i>chelow kebab</i> ?	che cheezaa-ee baRaa doRos kaRdane chelo kabaab bekaaR meeRe?
Local:	Filet of lamb marinated in lemon juice or yogurt, onions, and saffron.	gooshte feele ye baRe ke too aableemoo yaa mast, peeyaaaz va z'faRoon Khaaboondanesh

A common drink with a meal is *dough*, a preparation of yogurt and salted water that is similar to Turkish *ayran*, Lebanese *lebni*, and Indian *lassi*.¹⁶⁰

Soup plays an important role in Persian culinary tradition.¹⁶¹ Some soups are thin but many, such as *ash*, are thick and substantial enough to serve as a main course. In Farsi, the cook is called *ash-paz*, or the soup preparer, and the kitchen is *ash-paz khaneh*, the place where the soup is prepared.

Exchange 20: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	soop e daagh meeKhaam
Local:	Sure.	chashm

Many different kinds of soup are served to mark special occasions. When a family is making special prayers, such as for a child's health or a loved one's safe return, it will enjoin neighbors and friends to help make a soup that will serve as a pledge for the prayer. All the ingredients for the soup must be donated by those who wish for the prayer to be fulfilled. In this way, the rich are not accused of bribery nor are the poor excluded through poverty. If the prayer is granted, the soup will be made each year as pledged, usually on the nearest saint's day.¹⁶²

Weddings

For Iranians, marriage is one of life's biggest rites of passage. Accordingly, it is the most conspicuous of occasions and is celebrated in the presence of a fairly large assembly.

¹⁶⁰ Countries and Their Cultures, "Iran," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Iran.html>

¹⁶¹ Najmieh Batmanglij, *New Food of Life: Ancient Persian and Modern Iranian Cooking and Ceremonies* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1997).

¹⁶² Soupsong, "Persian (Iranian) Soup Customs," n.d., <http://www.soupsong.com/spersia.html>

Exchange 21: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	baRaa haR doo toon aaRezooye KhooshbaKhtee meekonam
Local:	We are honored.	saR afRaaz faRmoodeen

Although there are many regional variations, the wedding ceremony is based on Zoroastrian traditions. The ceremony has been largely unchanged over the years.¹⁶³

The *jashn-arusi*, or wedding, has two phases: the *aqd*, the legal ceremony, where the *aqd nameh* (contract) is agreed upon and signed; and the *arusi*, the reception, often held in the groom's home. As the *aqd* ceremony begins, women who are happily married, friends, or relatives of the bride and groom are invited by the bride's mother to gather in the ceremony room. Two of them hold a square of white silk or cotton over the bride's head while another sews a piece of tissue using seven colored threads. Another rubs two sugar loaves together to symbolize the raining of sweet joy and happiness upon the bride and groom.



© Shahram Sharif / flickr.com
Iranian bride and groom at their wedding

A holy man chosen by the couple reads the marriage contract and recites the traditional prayers. During the reading, all the unmarried women are asked to leave the room in the belief that their chances for marriage might be jinxed. The holy man then asks the bride, “Young and noble woman, do you realize you are marrying an honorable man for this *mahr*?”¹⁶⁴

But the bride remains silent and those in attendance pretend she is absent and respond with explanations such as “She is not here; she went out to gather rosebuds.” The holy man asks the question again. This time the guests might answer, “The bride has gone to the library.” He asks the question a third time and the bride finally answers in a shy, barely audible voice, “Yes.” He then pronounces the couple husband and wife. The groom kisses the bride, although he cannot join her until the *arusi*, the reception celebration. Traditionally, the *arusi* follows the *aqd* on the same night, though it may be held on a later date.¹⁶⁵

The reception entails much feasting, singing, and dancing. After the guests have gone home, it is customary to give the remaining pastries to those who were unable to come and to those who helped make the day a success.

¹⁶³ Massoume Price, Culture of Iran, “Marriage Ceremony, History and Symbolism,” Pars Times, 2001, http://www.parstimes.com/women/marriage_cermony.html

¹⁶⁴ *Mahr* is the security-money or property that the groom agrees to give the bride upon demand.

¹⁶⁵ Massoume Price, Culture of Iran, “Marriage Ceremony, History and Symbolism,” Pars Times, 2001, http://www.parstimes.com/women/marriage_cermony.html

Exchange 22: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	'Rooseet mobaaRake!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	baa oomadanetoon maa Roo saR afRaaz kaRdeen

Funerals

According to tradition, the body should be buried within 24 hours. The body will be cleansed and washed following Islamic prescriptions.

Following the ritual cleansing, the body will be covered in white cloth. The ends of the cloth are tied, never sewn, and the body is placed in the coffin. Prayers are offered, asking for forgiveness for the deceased. The washing of the body is usually done away from the home in specially designated places. Once the body has been cleaned, all body openings are blocked with cotton balls.¹⁶⁶



© Cyrus Farivar
Washing the grave in rosewater

Exchange 23: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	be shomaa va Khoonevaadatoon tasleeyat meegam
Local:	We are grateful.	mamnooneem

Traditionally, females did not participate in the funerals of male relatives because of rules regarding the segregation of the sexes. While the tradition is still practiced in some parts of the country, many modern Iranians no longer engage in this type of segregation. Close relatives of the departed will dress in black for 40 days as is customary.¹⁶⁷

The *khatm* memorial service is held on the third day. The next memorial observations are the *hafteh*, held after 1 week, the *cheleh*, held at 40 days, and *sal*, 1 year after the death. At each gathering, participants are served special meals. The wealthy provide *nazry* (free food) to the poor. Such acts are regarded as *savab* (good deeds) and offer the hope that the act will elevate the deceased's status in the eyes of God.

Exchange 24: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	lotfan qaveedel baasheen
Local:	We will try.	s'ee meekoneem

¹⁶⁶ Massoume Price, "A History of Moharram and Other Rituals of Death in Iran," Iran Chamber Society, December 2001, http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/rituals_of_death.php

¹⁶⁷ Massoume Price, "A History of Moharram and Other Rituals of Death in Iran," Iran Chamber Society, December 2001, http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/rituals_of_death.php

Non-Religious Celebrations

Shab-e yalda

The winter feast is celebrated on the longest night of the year, either 21 or 22 December. This is the eve of the birth of Mithra, the ancient pagan sun god, and symbolizes the rebirth of the sun. Bonfires are lit in the evening and family and friends meet for an all-night vigil around a low square table called a *korsi*.¹⁶⁸

The oldest member of the family recites prayers thanking God for the previous year's crops and asking for a good harvest in the coming year. The elder then cuts yogurt and melons and passes them to everyone. The cutting symbolizes the removal of sickness and pain from the family. Throughout the night the family and friends eat nuts and dried fruits. According to legend, eating nuts will lead to prosperity in days to come.¹⁶⁹

The evening feast includes eggplant stew with saffron-flavored rice, rice with chicken, thick yogurt, and saffron and carrot brownies. The family keeps the fires burning and the lights on to aid the sun in its battle with darkness. They eat, recite poetry, play music, and tell jokes and stories until the sun triumphantly reappears in the morning.¹⁷⁰

Nowruz

Nowruz is the Iranian New Year festival that has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years. In harmony with the rebirth of nature, the 13-day Persian New Year celebration always begins on the first day of spring (the first day of the month of *farvardin*, which refers to "the spirits") marked by the vernal equinox, or *tahvil*. On that day, which can fall on March 20, 21, or 22, the sun crosses the celestial equator.



© Mahmoudreza Shirinsokhan
The items of Nowruz

During this holiday season, people are expected to visit each others' houses for a short time. It is customary for the family to gather around a table on the first day of *Nowruz* and wait for the exact moment when spring arrives. Gifts are then exchanged. Later on this first day of spring, there are visits to the most senior family members' homes.

Visits are short, lasting only about half an hour. Pastry, cookies, fruits, and special nuts are served to the visitors. On the 13th day, called *Sizdah Bedar*, people go outdoors and have picnics and parties. This is thought to ward off bad luck normally associated with the number 13.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Farsinet, "Shab-e Yalda: Yalda History and Traditions in Iran," 2011, <http://www.farsinet.com/norooz/yalda.html>

¹⁶⁹ Farsinet, "Shab-e Yalda: Yalda History and Traditions in Iran," 2011, <http://www.farsinet.com/norooz/yalda.html>

¹⁷⁰ Farsinet, "Shab-e Yalda: Yalda History and Traditions in Iran," 2011, <http://www.farsinet.com/norooz/yalda.html>

¹⁷¹ Crystallinks, "Nowruz," n.d., <http://www.crystallinks.com/noruz.html>

Exchange 25: Happy Nowruz!

Soldier:	Happy Nowruz!	'ydetoon moobaaRak!
Local:	You too!	'yde shomaa ham moobaaRak!

In every Persian household a special cover is spread on a carpet or a table. This ceremonial setting is called *sofreh-ye haft-sinn* (literally “seven dishes’ setting,” each one beginning with the Persian letter “S”).¹⁷²

Dos and Don'ts

Do remove your shoes when visiting a mosque or other Islamic religious building.

Do smile when you greet people.

Do signal a person by putting your hand out, palm side down, and curling your fingers.

Don't walk in front of anyone praying.

Don't point the sole of your shoe or foot at anyone.

Don't sit next to a member of the opposite sex in public who is not your spouse or a close relative.

Don't ask an Iranian about his wife or any female relative.

Don't hold hands in public or engage in other public displays of affection.

Don't give the “thumbs up” gesture.^{173, 174}

¹⁷² Zoroastrians today do not have the seven S's but they have a ritual of growing seven seeds as a reminder that this is the seventh feast of creation, while the seeds sprouting into new growth symbolizes resurrection and eternal life to come.

¹⁷³ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “Tips for Business Travelers,” n.d., <http://www.infoexport.gc.ca/ie-en/DisplayDocument.jsp?did=11984>

¹⁷⁴ Charlene Wu, “Cultural Gestures,” http://soc302.tripod.com/soc_302rocks/id6.html

Chapter 3: Assessment

1. Men and women commonly greet each other by shaking hands.
False
Men and women must follow strict social rules. Shaking hands and embracing in public is only done by those of the same gender.
2. Female visitors to Iran must observe the Islamic dress code for women.
True
Female visitors to Iran must observe the Islamic dress code for women (*hejab*) as any Iranian woman would.
3. In Iran, it is customary to eat all foods with the fingers of the right hand.
True
It is customary to eat all foods with the fingers of the right hand. Special short-handled spoons are used for soups and soft desserts.
4. The principal dietary taboo is the Islamic prohibition on consuming beef.
False
The principal dietary taboo is the Islamic prohibition on consuming pork.
5. The Persian New Year celebration always begins on the first day of spring.
True
The Persian New Year, Nowruz, is celebrated in harmony with the rebirth of nature. This 13-day celebration always begins on the first day of spring.

Chapter 4: Urban Life

Introduction

Today, just over 70% of Iran's population lives in urban areas. Iran has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world, and estimates are that by 2030 nearly 8 in 10 Iranians could be city dwellers.¹⁷⁵ Large-scale migration from villages to urban areas has increased the size of the cities.¹⁷⁶ Municipal services have not kept pace with this population transfer, so the consequence has been the spread of slum areas. Tehran has the most extensive urban slum in Iran, but other large cities have notable slum sections where marginally employed and unskilled workers are concentrated. The urban population in Iran has more than doubled in 80 years, from 28% in 1921 to 71% in 2011.¹⁷⁷



© Enise & Matthias / flickr.com
Tehran's urban sprawl

In the process, the demographic configuration of the country was drastically altered from village and tribal to urban population. In 2009, five major cities in Iran had more than 1 million inhabitants. Tehran is by far the largest of all Iranian cities with nearly one in five of the country's urban inhabitants. The major metropolitan areas are within the most developed provinces of Tehran, Esfahan, Khorasan, Fars, and East Azerbaijan.¹⁷⁸ The increased size of the cities has strained the infrastructure, particularly transportation and related sectors.¹⁷⁹ Additional problems in desperate need of attention include pollution, housing shortages, and overcrowding.^{180, 181}

Employment and the Economy

The economy of Iran is in disarray. It is struggling largely because of an overreliance on oil as the major source of revenue. The private business sector is limited to small-scale workshops or the service industry, in addition to some small farms. As a result, the

¹⁷⁵ British Council, "Iran Market Introduction," December 2006, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-information-background-iran.htm>

¹⁷⁶ Helen Chapin Metz, ed., "Chapter 3—Society—Structure of Society—Urban Migration," in *Iran: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 1987, <http://countrystudies.us/iran/49.htm>

¹⁷⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

¹⁷⁸ Kazemipour Shala and Mohammad Mirzaie, "Uneven Growth of Urbanization in Iran," International Population Conference, 18–23 July 2005, <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=51663>

¹⁷⁹ Morteza Aminmansour, "Urban Transportation in Iran (Part 1)," *Pars Times*, n.d., http://www.parstimes.com/transportation/urban_transportation.html

¹⁸⁰ NPR, "Iran's Pollution Worries Come by Air and Water," 31 January 2007, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7102236>

¹⁸¹ Meir Javedanfar, "The Worsening Housing Crisis in Iran," *Iran-Pulse* 8 (2007): 1–3, http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/iranian_studies/files/pulse8.eng.pdf

country has a high rate of unemployment—nearly 15%—which is particularly acute among the young and well educated.¹⁸² International sanctions also have had a negative effect on the economy. Sanctions have made it difficult for Iran to build its oil industry and create jobs, and have led to a “brain drain” because many educated Iranians leave to seek jobs overseas.¹⁸³

Most urban dwellers are employed in the service sector or industry. The service sector is the largest growing sector of the economy and is second only to the oil industry in job opportunities. Unemployment among the educated women of the country is acute. Between 60 and 70% of all women in the labor force are in the service sector, particularly in education, healthcare, and social services.¹⁸⁴ The government intends to build additional railways, which will give the construction industry a much-needed boost. Growth in the energy sector is at a virtual halt, largely because of the pressures of sanctions.¹⁸⁵

Banking and Credit

All Iranian banks were nationalized in 1979. The banking regulations were changed to approve new, interest-free, Islamic banking regulations. Banks now play a stronger role in client services: for example, by collecting deposits and funding credit to clients.^{186, 187}



© Ben Piven
Bank Melli in Iran

The Iranian *rial* is the official currency of the country. There is a special form on which all foreign currencies must be declared upon arrival in the country. Foreign currencies can be exchanged, but only through Special Branches of all banks in the capital and in other large cities, including Esfahn, Shiraz, and Mashhad. Hard currency, particularly U.S. dollars or euros, should be brought for exchange purposes. MasterCard and Visa credit cards can be used in a limited number of shops provided that they are not American-issued cards. Travelers checks cannot be cashed. Wire transfers into Iran are not possible under the rules of the banking system.^{188, 189}

¹⁸² Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Iran,” 17 February 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>

¹⁸³ PBS NewsHour, “Examining the Effects of Economic Sanctions on Iran,” PBS, 21 October 2010, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec10/iran_09-21.html

¹⁸⁴ Rokhsana Bahramitash and Hadi Salehi Esfahani, “Nimble Fingers no Longer! Women’s Employment in Iran,” June 2008, <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/esfahani/www/IndexFiles/Nimble%20Fingers%20No%20Longer.pdf>

¹⁸⁵ Business Monitor International, “Iran Infrastructure Report Q2 2011,” Market Research, 24 February 2011, <http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productid=6169073>

¹⁸⁶ *Tejerat [Trade]: The Internal Publication of Bank Tejarat* 8 (1998), “History of Banking in Iran,” Pars Times, http://www.parstimes.com/history/banking_history.html

¹⁸⁷ Irpedia, “Iran: Banking Hours and Currency,” 2011, <http://www.irpedia.com/iran-trip-planner/iran-travel-facts/938/>

¹⁸⁸ SmartTraveller, “Iran,” Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, 4 March 2011, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/iran>

Education

Since the revolution in 1979, the Iranian school system has undergone many changes. The current structure of education is divided into four cycles. The pre-school cycle is a 1-year program for 5-year-old children. The curriculum is designed to prepare students for entry into the primary schools. Students are not required to take an exam, but pass automatically to primary schools.¹⁹⁰



© Asasch / flickr.com
Children leaving school

Primary education in Iran is compulsory and free under the constitution. Attendance begins at 6 years of age. Elementary education covers the first 5 years of schooling, followed by 3 years of “the guidance cycle,” which is the equivalent of junior high school, and “the secondary cycle,” 4 years of high school. Students take an exam at the end of the guidance cycle to determine eligibility for the secondary cycle. Secondary schools follow either an academic or a vocational track. Exams are administered at the end of each year.¹⁹¹

Beginning in September 2011, all high-school students must take courses such as political training and living skills. These courses are designed to rid Iran of Western influence and to warn students against the dangers of “perverted” political movements. Also intended is a push to get girls to marry at an earlier age.¹⁹²

According to government figures, over 95% of Iranian children currently receive primary and secondary education.¹⁹³ In urban areas, most schools are single-sex and female students are required to veil.¹⁹⁴ Universities in Iran are segregated, however, with separate classes, study areas, and facilities for men and women.¹⁹⁵

More than 50% of the population is under the age of 25, placing critical strain on the education system. College admission is highly competitive and places are secured through the *konkur*, or National Entrance Examination.¹⁹⁶ In 2008, 3.5 million students

¹⁸⁹ Irpedia, “Iran: Banking Hours and Currency,” 2011, <http://www.irpedia.com/iran-trip-planner/iran-travel-facts/938/>; Lonely Planet, “Money and Costs,” n.d., <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/iran/practical-information/money-costs#1>

¹⁹⁰ The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Norway, “Education System in Iran,” <http://www.iran-embassy-oslo.no/embassy/educat.htm>

¹⁹¹ The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Norway, “Education System in Iran,” <http://www.iran-embassy-oslo.no/embassy/educat.htm>

¹⁹² Thomas Erdbrink, “Iran Revamps Education System,” *Washington Post*, 3 January 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/01/AR2011010101345.html>

¹⁹³ Iran Chamber Society, “The Iranian Education System: A Brief Review of Iranian Educational System,” 2001–2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/education/articles/educational_system.php

¹⁹⁴ Mongabay, “Iran: Society,” 2006, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/new_profiles/195.html

¹⁹⁵ Reuters, “Iranian Minister Urges Sex Segregation in Colleges,” 10 February 2011, <http://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/-/world/8808264/iranian-minister-urges-sex-segregation-in-colleges/>

¹⁹⁶ Frances Harrison, “Women Graduates Challenge Iran,” *BBC News*, 19 September 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5359672.stm

(5% of the population) enrolled in universities. That number is expected to continue increasing in the coming years.¹⁹⁷

Healthcare

Although the constitution emphasizes the right of every Iranian to the best healthcare available, Iran ranks 93rd on the World Health Organization’s List of Health Systems.¹⁹⁸ Healthcare is generally good in the urban areas but insufficient in rural areas. Estimates are that 5% of Iranians do not have access to health services.¹⁹⁹ With only about one doctor for every 3,100 people, access to medical services can be limited. Efforts by the government to improve these conditions have been largely successful.²⁰⁰



© Hamed Saber
Healthcare in Iran

Nearly 90% of the population is covered by some sort of insurance.²⁰¹ Medical costs in Iran are reported to be the lowest in the world.²⁰² Many free benefits are provided through the primary healthcare network, including immunizations for children and pregnant women; pre- and post-natal care; growth monitoring of children younger than 5; nutrition promotions; and control of diseases such as malaria.²⁰³ Efforts are continuing to improve access and treatment.

Exchange 26: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	daR een nazdeekeeyaa beemaaRestaan has?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	bale, daR maRkaze shahR

Prior to the Islamic Revolution, Iran had a shortage of medical personnel. Many physicians also emigrated after the Shah fell from power. But the new government expanded the healthcare system by constructing facilities and encouraging students to

¹⁹⁷ Frances Harrison, “Women Graduates Challenge Iran,” BBC News, 19 September 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5359672.stm

¹⁹⁸ WHO, “World Health Organization’s Ranking of the World’s Health Systems,” 2007, <http://www.photius.com/rankings/healthranks.html>

¹⁹⁹ S.A. Marandi, “The Integration of Medical Education and Health Care Services in the I.R. of Iran and its Health Impacts,” *Iranian Journal of Public Health* 38, no. 1 (2009): 4–12, http://www.sid.ir/en/VEWSSID/J_pdf/86320090102.pdf

²⁰⁰ Ramin Mehrdad, “Health System in Iran,” *Japan Medical Association Journal* 53, no. 1 (2009): 69–73, http://www.med.or.jp/english/journal/pdf/2009_01/069_073.pdf

²⁰¹ Ramin Mehrdad, “Health System in Iran,” *Japan Medical Association Journal* 53, no. 1 (2009): 69–73, http://www.med.or.jp/english/journal/pdf/2009_01/069_073.pdf

²⁰² Tehran Times, “Medical Care Costs in Iran Lowest in the World,” 19 February 2009, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=189657

²⁰³ Regional Health Systems Observatory, “Health Systems Profile: Islamic Republic of Iran,” 2009, <http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Iran/Health%20service%20delivery.pdf>

attend medical school. Now the number of healthcare professionals is significantly greater and Iran has become a regional center for certain medical procedures.²⁰⁴

Exchange 27: Is Dr. Mehraby in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Mehraby in, sir?	aaqaa, doctoR mehRaabee hasan?
Local:	No.	naKheeyeR

In Iran, because of gender segregation, women can only be seen and treated by female doctors. It has been reported that husbands would rather see their wives die in childbirth than be attended by a male doctor.²⁰⁵ Increasing numbers of female physicians in the country mean women will have greater access to care.²⁰⁶



© diocal / flickr.com
Iranian nurse

Exchange 28: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	meedooneen che eshkaalee has?
Local:	No.	na

Because of Islamic cultural traditions, international medical teams engaged in humanitarian work in Iran have to change their standard setup. They must separate treatment facilities for men and women rather than use the usual acute and non-acute designations.²⁰⁷

Exchange 29: Can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, doctor, can you help me?	dasam shekaste doctoR, meetooneen komakam koneen?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	bale, meetonam komaket konam

²⁰⁴ Marcia Inhorn, “A More Open Mind Toward Iran,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 June 2006, http://www.sph.umich.edu/news_events/pdf/inhorn%20iran.pdf

²⁰⁵ Associated Content, “The Women of Iran Wait Anxiously for Election Day, June 12, 2009,” 4 June 2009, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1816316/the_women_of_iran_wait_anxiously_for.html

²⁰⁶ George Zaharias and Leon Piterman, “Doctors and Patients: Gender Interaction in the Consultation.” *Academic Medicine* 79, no. 2 (2004): 148–155.

²⁰⁷ Focus, “Medical Team Aids Earthquake Relief in Iran,” *Harvard Medical, Dental, & Public Health Schools*, 6 February 2004, http://archives.focus.hms.harvard.edu/2004/Feb6_2004/outreach.html

Transportation

Iran has an extensive transportation network. It is possible by road, rail, and air to connect all points in the country to the border and to international travel. The primary means of transportation is by road.²⁰⁸ Road conditions are good in cities, and taxis are easy to flag down.



© A. Davey / flickr.com
A highway in Kerman

Exchange 30: Can I share this cab with two female passengers?

Soldier (male):	Can I share this cab with two female passengers?	meetonam baa do mosaafeR e zan savaaR e een taaksee besham?
Local:	No, wait for another.	na, montazeR e yekee deege baash

Keep in mind that Iran has one of the highest road-accident rates in the world, averaging five deaths every 2 hours.²⁰⁹ Visitors who rent a car are advised to hire a driver.

Exchange 31: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	een nazdeekeeyaa t'meeRgaah e maasheen e Khoobee has?
Local:	Yes.	Bale

Motorists, including taxi drivers, routinely ignore traffic lights, traffic signs, and lane markers, and almost never yield to pedestrians at crosswalks.²¹⁰

Exchange 32: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	meetonee mano oonjaa bebaRee?
Local:	Yes, I can.	bale, meetonam

Driving at night is dangerous on poorly lit city streets because some motorists drive without their headlights on. The use of four-wheel drive vehicles is not recommended because of the high risk of theft. In the event of an accident, drivers should remain at the scene until authorities have made an official report.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Thetis Travel Agency, "Tourism Transportation," 2007,

<http://www.thetistravel.com/en/transportation.php>

²⁰⁹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Iran: Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1142.html#safety

²¹⁰ British Council, "Visiting Iran," n.d., <http://www.britishcouncil.org/iran-discover-visiting-iran-farsi.htm>

²¹¹ Bogus plainclothes police officers may approach international visitors and ask to see foreign currency or passports. One should politely decline to cooperate, but offer to go to the nearest police station.

Exchange 33: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	een nazdeekeeyaa pompe benzene has?
Local:	Yes.	Bale

Although there are sidewalks on the main roads in urban areas, they are usually obstructed by parked vehicles.²¹² Sidewalks are rare in residential areas.

City officials in Tehran have tried to ease congestion by imposing alternate driving day restrictions in Tehran. In addition, “smog” days have been initiated to help curb pollution in the city. None of the initiatives appears to have been particularly effective in curbing either congestion or pollution.²¹³

**Exchange 34: Is there a train station nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	een nazdeekeeyaa qataaR has?
Local:	No.	Na

Tehran has five subway lines. Most of the routes are underground to help ease congestion and maintain pedestrian space. There are approximately 126 km of track.²¹⁴ No travel advisories have been issued for riders.²¹⁵

Exchange 35: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	kodoom jade meeRe be fooRoodgaah?
Local:	The road heading east.	jaade eey ke meeRe be taRaf e shaRq

Car rental services are available in Iran, but transactions with American credit cards cannot be processed in the country, so alternative payment arrangements must be made.²¹⁶

²¹² Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Iran: Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions,” 2011, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1142.html#safety

²¹³ Maryam Sinaiee, “Political Tussles Delay Solutions to Tehran’s Smog,” The National, 5 December 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/political-tussles-delay-solutions-to-tehrans-smogs>

²¹⁴ Tehran Metro Information Site, “About Tehran Metro,” 2011, <http://tehran-metro.com/about-tehran-metro>

²¹⁵ Hospital for Tropical Diseases, “Iran,” <http://www.thehtd.org/travel/destination.asp?DocID=88>

²¹⁶ Irpedia, “Car Hire in Iran,” 2011, <http://www.irpedia.com/iran-travel/car-rentals/>

Exchange 36: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	kojaa meetonam ye maasheen keRaaye konam?
Local:	Downtown.	maRkaz e shahR

Telecommunications

As a result of heavy investment in the national telephone system since 1994, the number of long-distance channels in Iran has grown substantially. In 2008 Iran ranked first in the Middle East in terms of growth in development and was given the UNESCO award for expanding telecommunications to the poor rural regions of the country.²¹⁷



© Ben Piven
Cell phones charging

Exchange 37: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	telefonet chande?
Local:	My phone number is 1325477.	telefonam sado see yo do, panjaa o chaaR, haftaad o haft e

Modernization of the telecommunications industry is aimed at improving the efficiency and increasing the volume of urban service. The government also plans to provide service to thousands of unconnected villages throughout the rural areas. There are currently 26 million fixed telephone lines in the country, making access (at least in urban areas) relatively easy.²¹⁸

Exchange 38: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	meetonam aaz telefonetoon estefaade konam?
Local:	Sure.	albate

The mobile phone industry has grown rapidly in the past several years, with the number of mobile phone subscribers at about 50 million.²¹⁹

There are an estimated 33 million internet users in Iran or just over 43% of the population.²²⁰ The government controls bandwidth in an attempt to discourage internet

²¹⁷ Atieh Bahar Consulting, "Iran Telecom Brief," 20 October 2008, <http://www.atiehbahar.com/Resource.aspx?n=1000014>

²¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Communications," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Communications," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²²⁰ "Iran: Internet Usage and Marketing Report," Internet World Stats, 9 July 2010, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ir.htm>

use.²²¹ The group Reporters Without Borders reports that the government has filtered the internet and is suspected of intercepting internet messages and email communications.²²²

This move at censorship and control of the internet appears ongoing. In 2011 the government intensified online crackdowns after the demonstrations in the Middle East. In January of 2011 the government formed the Iranian cyber police to strengthen internet control. Thousands of sites are continually blocked. Filtering software is in place to block unapproved sites. The Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Websites issued a list of internet offenses in January 2010.²²³ All of this makes it difficult to access foreign sites, including those for music, movies, and news.

Restaurants and Cafes

The consensus of travelers is that the best food is found in Iranian homes.²²⁴ But there are a large number of restaurants.



© mohammadaali / flickr.com
Dinner at a restaurant in Tehran

Exchange 39: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	momkene ye leevaan aab be man bedeen?
Local:	Yes, sir!	chasm qoRbaan!

A wide range of cuisines is available throughout the country. Traditional specialties are the most common. In addition to Persian dishes you can find Indian, Chinese, and even Korean dishes. Western food is also quite common; pizzas and hamburgers are widely available on Tehran menus.²²⁵

²²¹ Christopher Rhoads, Geoffrey A. Fowler, and Chip Cummins, *Wall Street Journal*, "Iran Cracks Down on Internet Use, Foreign Media," YaleGlobal Online, 17 June 2009, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/iran-cracks-down-internet-use-foreign-media>

²²² Voice of America News, "In Iran, Internet is Lifeline and a Noose," 09 June 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/In-Iran-Internet-is-Lifeline-and-a-Noose-95977139.html>

²²³ Reporters Without Borders, "Internet Enemies 2011: Iran," 11 March 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,IRN,,4d82268f2,0.html>

²²⁴ Genevieve Poucel, "Forget Martha's Vineyard: I'm Going to Iran," *The Iranian*, 30 August 2000, <http://www.iranian.com/Travelers/2000/August/Contrast/index.html>

²²⁵ DirectGlasgow, "Iran Tours: Iran Cuisines and Food," October 2004, <http://www.directglasgow.co.uk/glasgow-iran/iran-food-cuisine.asp>

Exchange 40: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	momkene lotfan jamm'e soRathesaabamoo be man bedeen?
Local:	Yes, sir!	chashm qoRbaan!

Exchange 41: Do you have dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have dessert?	deseR daaReen?
Local:	Yes, we have <i>faloodeh</i> and <i>shirini</i> .	bale faloodeh va shiRini daaReem

Coffee and tea are standard restaurant beverages.

Exchange 42: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	man chaa-ee yaa qahve meeKhaam
Local:	Sure.	chashm

The familiar icon on the restroom door indicating whether it is for men or women is rare in Iran, so take care to enter the correct one. Men are depicted with an image similar to the familiar Western icon; however, women are pictured in skirts and hijab.²²⁶ Remember that proper etiquette for Muslims requires that only the left hand is used in restrooms.



© Cordelia Persen
Bathroom sign in Persepolis

Exchange 43: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	das sho-eetoon kojaas?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	oon jaas, daRe dase chapetoon

Restaurants in Iran are typically divided into two sections. The family section is where women and families eat while the other section is men only. It is common to leave a tip of between 10 and 15% in hotel restaurants.²²⁷ Single checks are customary in Tehran and the person who issued the invitation pays.

Exchange 44: Put this all on one bill, okay?

Soldier:	Put this all on one bill, okay?	hame eena Roo Roo ye sooRatehesaab bazaaR?
Local:	Okay.	baashe

²²⁶ Lisa Wade, "Go Where? Sex, Gender, and Toilets," The Society Pages, 2 September 2010, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/09/02/guest-post-go-where-sex-gender-and-toilets/>

²²⁷ Etiquettescholar, "International Dining Etiquette: Iran," 2010, http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/mideast_dinner_etiquette/iranian.html

Iran began a no-smoking policy in December 2007. Smoking is prohibited in all public places, such as restaurants, coffee shops, and hotels. But in February 2008, the government allowed the smoking of unflavored tobacco through water pipes or hookahs in tea houses.²²⁸

Hotels

Iran has a range of accommodations. Although four- and five-star hotels generally do not measure up to international standards, the more modest, middle-of-the-range hotels offer value for the money.



© Babak Farrokhi
Hyatt Hotel in Iran

Exchange 45: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	daR een nazdeekeeyaa mosaafeR Khoone has?
Local:	Yes.	bale

There is a wide choice of cheap accommodations. There are no rules about whether breakfast is included in the room rate.

Exchange 46: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	hanoozam soboone meedeen?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Marketplace

Bazaars are ancient structures that initially comprised a set of shops bordering water streams or rivers in settled areas.²²⁹ Bazaars in Iran are more than simply places to shop. They have played a central role in the economic and political history of the country. Political news and gossip are also traded.²³⁰



© Ben Snooks
Bazaar in Kashan

Exchange 47: Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	Is the bazaar nearby?	bazaaR daR een nazdeekeeyaaas?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	bale, oonjaa das e Raase

²²⁸ Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, "Iran," 1 June 2009, <http://www.no-smoke.org/goingsmokefree.php?id=630>

²²⁹ Destination Iran, "Bazaars in Iran (Persian Bazaars)," <http://www.destinationiran.com/Bazaars.htm>

²³⁰ Kevin Harris, "The Bazaar," in *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/bazaar>

In nearly all Persian towns, the *bazaar* evolved into a covered street or series of streets and alleyways lined with small shops grouped by service or product. For example, the shops of cloth and apparel dealers are together in one part of the *bazaar*. Another part will house the carpet makers and merchants; still another, the workshops of artisans making copper, brass, leather, cotton, or wool goods.²³¹

Exchange 48: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	meetonam aaz nazdeek eenoo bebeenamoo emtehaan konam?
Local:	Sure.	aalbate

In small towns, the *bazaar* might be the equivalent of a narrow, block-long street. In the largest cities, such as Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Shiraz, it is a warren of streets that encompasses warehouses, restaurants, baths, mosques, schools, and gardens in addition to hundreds and hundreds of shops.²³² Traditionally, the biggest square of a city was situated at the entrance or exit of a *bazaar*.

The establishment of modern factories displaced the numerous artisan workshops. Parts of old *bazaars* were destroyed as part of “urban renewal” to widen streets. Merchants were encouraged to locate retail shops along these new streets rather than in the *bazaars*. Many stores that opened to meet the increased demand for commerce and services from the rapidly expanding urban population were in the new streets. The political elite in the last years of the Pahlavi dynasty spoke of the *bazaars* as symbols of backwardness and planned to replace some of them with modern shopping malls, which were later discarded by the incoming Islamists.



© smoughadam / flickr.com
Bazaar in Tehran

Exchange 49: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	aaz eenaa beeshtaR daaRee?
Local:	No.	na

New networks of commerce in Iran have reduced the importance of the bazaar to economic life. The middle class have given in to the congestion of the big cities, and

²³¹ Rahman Mehraby, “Bazaars in Iran (Persian Bazaars),” 22 March 2010, <http://www.destinationiran.com/bazaars-in-iran-persian-bazaars.htm>

²³² Eric Hooglund, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment—Structure of Society—Urban Society,” in *Iran: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, December 1987,

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ir0058\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ir0058))

those that live farther from the downtown areas are less willing to travel to the bazaar to make most major purchases. Instead, they are frequenting the new superstores and shopping malls that have emerged.²³³

Exchange 50: Do you sell Persian carpets?

Soldier:	Do you sell Persian carpets?	qaalee eeRoonee meefRoosheen?
Local:	Yes.	bale

If you are a serious shopper, ask a local to help with price negotiation, since bargaining is a way of life in Iranian commercial transactions.

Exchange 51: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	baa een qade pool meetonam ye qaalee beKhaRam?
Local:	No.	na

Be aware that credit cards issued in the U.S. are not generally accepted. There are no ATMs at bazaars so be sure to bring cash. Hard currency is advisable because it is possible to exchange them for Iranian rials.²³⁴

Street Vendors

Along with the permanent *bazaars* in towns and cities, there are occasional weekly markets that set up in a special district. They are typically named for the day when they are open, such as the Friday *bazaar* or Saturday *bazaar*.²³⁵



© Parvin / flickr.com
Street vendors

Exchange 52: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	chan vaqt e deege eenjaa haseen?
Local:	Three more hours.	se saa't e deege

Rural salesmen and vendors are represented at weekly flea markets that offer a variety of merchandise, including foodstuffs, at modest prices. This food may not have been prepared under the most sanitary conditions, so caution is advised.

²³³ Kevin Harris, "The Bazaar," in *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/bazaar>

²³⁴ iExplore, "Iran Travel Guide: Iran Shopping and Exchange Rate," 2 May 2010, <http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Iran/Shopping>

²³⁵ Pars Tourist Agency, "Iran Highlights: Bazaar," n.d., http://www.key2persia.com/highlights_bazaar.htm

Exchange 53: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	eenoo baRaam KhoRd meekonee?
Local:	No.	na

Hawkers and peddlers also spread their wares alongside the pavement and around the squares, calling on passersby to come closer and touch the quality of the merchandise.

Exchange 54: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	lotfan, az man cheezee beKhaR
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	mot-sfam, poolee baRaam namoonde

The *rial* is the Iranian currency, but the *toman*, 10 of which equal 1 *rial*, is an unofficial monetary unit commonly used by the Iranian people. Prices are usually quoted in *tomans*.²³⁶

Exchange 55: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	pool e aamReekaa-ee Roo qabool meekonee?
Local:	No, we only accept tomans.	na maa faqat tomanoo qabool meekoneem

Social Issues

Like any developing nation, Iran faces a series of social problems to be addressed. Iran has not escaped problems associated with poverty, illegal drugs, prostitution, and AIDS. Tehran and other Iranian cities have problems with homeless people, including child beggars. The government periodically initiates programs to try to get beggars to give up the practice. These initiatives have been largely unsuccessful.²³⁷ Estimates are that beggars make as much as USD 1,500 a month, far more than the typical Iranian salary.²³⁸



© gollisnow / flickr.com
Evidence of the drug problem

²³⁶ Kwintessential, "Currency in Iran," n.d., <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/country/iran/currency-money-iran.html>

²³⁷ Robert Tait, "Iranian Beggar Was a Real-Life Slumdog Millionaire," *Guardian*, 27 March 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/27/beggar-talat-habibian-slumdog-millionaire>

²³⁸ *Financial Express*, "'Tehran Beggars Make \$1,500 a Month,'" 4 May 2010,

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/tehran-beggars-make-1-500-a-month/614979/>

Exchange 56: Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	poolam behem bede
Soldier:	I don't have any.	nadaaRam

Women and children wander the streets of Tehran and other large cities asking for handouts. Homeless children and adults frequently try to sell products such as flowers and gum.²³⁹

Exchange 57: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	een aafRaad too Roo tahdeed kaRdan?
Local:	No.	na

Internal trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is also evident. Such a phenomenon stems from the increasing number of Iranians who become vulnerable, including runaway women and children from abusive households.²⁴⁰ As of November 2006, only one shelter in Tehran was dedicated to taking in homeless women, most of them with mental health problems.²⁴¹ The selling of babies to wealthy families has also become a problem in Iran. Babies are sold as a way to escape the penalties for illegal sexual activity in the Islamic republic.²⁴²



© kamshots / flickr.com
Woman begging in Tehran

Exchange 58: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	eenaa faameeletan?
Local:	No.	na

Drug addiction is a significant problem in Iran because heroin can be cheaply imported from Afghanistan. Iran is a primary transshipment route for heroin bound for Europe.

²³⁹ *Financial Express*, “‘Tehran Beggars Make \$1,500 a Month,’” 4 May 2010, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/tehran-beggars-make-1-500-a-month/614979/>

²⁴⁰ Martin Patt, “Street Children—Iran,” 2000–2010, <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/Iran.htm>

²⁴¹ Mojgan Tousi, “Tehran Homeless Women Find Refuge,” BBC News, 17 November 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6156142.stm

²⁴² The Lambeth Walk, “Social Problems in Iran,” 4 April 2009, <http://thelambethwalk.blogspot.com/2009/04/social-problems-in-iran.html>

Iran has one of the highest rates of opiate addiction in the world. There is a growing problem with synthetic drug addiction in the country.²⁴³

For two decades, the Islamic Republic largely avoided the global AIDS crisis. But today, officials are alarmed by a 25% HIV infection rate that one survey found among hardcore heroin users, and worried that addicts may spread the virus into the general population.²⁴⁴ Most of the HIV-positive people are drug addicts. Officials fear that the epidemic may erupt into a large problem if something isn't done soon.²⁴⁵

Poverty and unemployment are also major problems for the country. The unemployment rate hovers around 15%.²⁴⁶ Estimates are that 44 to 55% percent of the urban population lives below the poverty line.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Transnational Issues 2011," in *The World Factbook*, 13 January 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²⁴⁴ Karl Vick, "AIDS Crisis Brings Radical Change in Iran's Response to Heroin Use," *Washington Post*, 5 July 2005 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/04/AR2005070401182_pf.html

²⁴⁵ *Tehran Times*, "80,000 Affected with AIDS in Iran: Health Minister," 13 October 2010, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=228402

²⁴⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: Economy," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²⁴⁷ Homylafayette, "Iran's Cities a Sea of Poverty," PBS Frontline, 4 March 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/03/irans-cities-a-sea-of-poverty.html>

Chapter 4: Assessment

1. Roughly 40% of the country lives in urban areas.
False
Iran has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world. Today over 70% of the population lives in urban areas.
2. Iran has one of the lowest road-accident rates in the world.
False
Iran has one of the highest road-accident rates in the world, averaging five deaths every 2 hours. Visitors who rent a car are advised to hire a driver.
3. Iranian cities such as Tehran are highly polluted.
True
Iranian cities such as Tehran are highly polluted, mainly from transportation. The impact of these pollutants on human health is substantial.
4. Approximately 43% of Iran's population uses the internet.
True
There are an estimated 33 million internet users in Iran. The government closely monitors internet activity.
5. It is common practice to pay the price that is first quoted for goods at markets.
False
Bargaining is a way of life in Iranian commercial transactions. If you are a serious shopper, ask a local to help with price negotiation since you are expected to haggle.

Chapter 5: Rural Life

Introduction

Approximately 29% of the population in Iran can be considered rural and are spread among some 70,000 villages.^{248, 249} These villages vary in size from just a few families to 5,000 people. Before the Islamic Revolution, about half of all agricultural land was owned by absentee landlords who lived in the cities. Most of the residents on the land were landless peasants who worked for a share of the crops they produced or a wage.²⁵⁰



© dynamosquito / flickr.com
Mountain village in Hamedan

Around 1966, a large rural to urban migration began. Today, rural areas continue to lose population as the people flock to the cities in search of greater opportunities.²⁵¹

Some nomadic tribes are present in Iran. There has never been a complete census of these groups but estimates of their size run between 1.8 and nearly 4 million people. These groups migrate each spring and fall with their sheep and goats. The nomadic peoples are concentrated in the Zagros Mountains but can also be found in smaller numbers in the northeastern and southeastern sections of the country. These groups do not represent a significant political or economic force in the affairs of Iran.²⁵²

After the Islamic revolution, government officials became particularly concerned with the state of development in rural areas. At that time, just over half the population of Iran was rural. The government tried to create or improve the infrastructure in the countryside. The main development projects fell into three categories: rural infrastructure, social facilities, and agricultural technical assistance.²⁵³

Most efforts revolved around building roads and bringing electricity to homes. During a 20-year period, thousands of miles of roads were built to connect the thousands of residents of widely spread villages and to connect villages to urban centers. Before the

²⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: People," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²⁴⁹ Eric Hooglund, "Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran," *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁵⁰ Mongabay, "Iran: Rural Society," 2003, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/iran/GEOGRAPHY.html

²⁵¹ Mongabay, "Iran: Rural Society," 2003, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/iran/GEOGRAPHY.html

²⁵² Mongabay, "Iran: Rural Society," 2003, http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/iran/GEOGRAPHY.html

²⁵³ Eric Hooglund, "Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran," *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

Islamic Revolution, only about 6% of rural villages had access to electricity. By 2001, access had increased to 99% of rural homes.²⁵⁴

Rural Life

The current government continues to see rural development as critical. The greatest concerns are to bring increased education, greater and more diversified economic opportunities, and an end to poverty to the rural inhabitants. Expanded access to healthcare has also been identified as a priority.²⁵⁵ One goal is to have at least one boys' and one girls' primary school in each village with more than 100 inhabitants. In larger villages, secondary schools are also being constructed.



© Hamed Saber
Women in rural Abyaneh

Plans to transport children between the smaller and larger villages are also underway.²⁵⁶

The revolutionary government's rural development program also centered on the important issue of land redistribution, but only about 5% of the total land was actually redistributed to the peasants. Prior to the 1979 revolution, lands were rented for 99 years to local peasants. Under the new government, all *vaqf* or rented lands had to be returned to the government. Farmers now pay rent to the government for land use.²⁵⁷

Simple aspects of rural lives are also changing. With the ability to have refrigerators, many people buy perishable goods, leading to a new economic opportunity for vendors. Appliance sales and repair shops have opened, providing more economic alternatives in rural areas. The reach of TV programs into households has caused a sort of amalgamation, including the loss of distinctive traditional clothing in favor of the urban style.²⁵⁸

Many traditional social values of the rural way of life have given way. Even such things as traditional wedding and birth ceremonies are losing favor among the young. Average ages for first marriages have risen among both men and women, and fertility rates have dropped remarkably. Family sizes are decreasing throughout the country—nowhere more dramatically than in the countryside.^{259, 260, 261}

²⁵⁴ Eric Hooglund, "Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran," *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁵⁵ Ahmad Rajabi, "Rural Development" 24 February 2009, http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/csd-17-ipm/24february/PM/Iran.pdf

²⁵⁶ Eric Hooglund, "Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran," *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁵⁷ Ali Hashemi, "Family Planning Program Effects in Rural Iran," November 2009, <http://ase.tufts.edu/econ/events/neudcDocs/SaturdaySession/Session012/AHashemiFamilyPlanningProgramEffects.pdf>

²⁵⁸ Eric Hooglund, "Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran," *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁵⁹ Ali Hashemi, "Family Planning Program Effects in Rural Iran," November 2009, <http://ase.tufts.edu/econ/events/neudcDocs/SaturdaySession/Session012/AHashemiFamilyPlanningProgramEffects.pdf>

Exchange 59: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	aaqaa, shoma kojaa zendegee meekonee?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	aaqaa, man ye keshavaRzam

Village Life

The mosque is the center of village life in Iran. In villages, no one is agitating for women to be allowed to abandon Islamic dress. Such an idea would be seen as an affront.²⁶² The little money people earn is spent on pilgrimages to Shi’a holy shrines, particularly in Iraq but in Syria as well.



© Nick Taylor
Mosque in Massouleh

Exchange 60: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	eenjaa bozoRg shodee?
Local:	Yes.	bale

In addition to caring for their children and the household, rural women are active in economic activities such as agriculture and handicrafts. This enables them to play an important role in reducing production costs and increasing family income.²⁶³

The climate and diverse building materials have led to great variations in housing. In the north, the traditional village house has a roof thatched with reeds, a type that has been increasingly replaced with the less picturesque but more practical tin roof. On the plateau, where rainfall is far less frequent, village houses are usually constructed of mud and sun-baked bricks, with wooden beams supporting flat roofs used for sleeping on in the summer. In even hotter areas, ingenious wind towers (*bad-gir*) that convey a slight breeze to a cool underground chamber (*zir-zamin*) alleviate the summer heat.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Eric Hooglund, “Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran,” *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁶¹ Mostafa Azkia, “Rural Society and Revolution in Iran,” in *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran since 1979*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 96–122.

²⁶² Lindsey Hilsum, “This Is a Village and We Don’t Bother with Such Things as Human Rights Here,” *Weekly Telegraph*, 5 March 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/03/05/wiran105.xml>

²⁶³ Iran Yellow Pages, “Economic Activities and Traditions of Rural Women,” n.d., http://www.iranyellowpages.net/En/About_iran/Economy/rural_weman/rural_weman.shtm

²⁶⁴ N. Mohajeri, “Environmental Impacts and Compatible Urban Design: Case Study of Bam Citadel” (paper presented at Passive and Low Energy Cooling for the Built Environment conference, Santorini, Greece, May 2005), http://www.inive.org/members_area/medias/pdf/Inive%5Cpalenc%5C2005%5CMohajeri.pdf

Healthcare and Family Planning

Since 1979 the national government aggressively attempted to meet the health needs of rural communities. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education has established more than 17,000 “health houses” in rural areas. These are staffed by community health workers including nurse-aides. This system has been recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the best in the world and has drawn attention even from poor states in the United States that need to improve rural healthcare delivery systems.²⁶⁵



© Soudeh Rad
A village family

In addition to these “health houses,” rural health centers were built. Each center is staffed by a doctor, a health technician, and an administrator. These centers are designed to deal with more serious and complex problems than can be handled in the “health houses.” There is an average of one center for every 7,000 residents.²⁶⁶

Mobile units provide care and pharmaceuticals. Basic care such as vaccinations, monitoring of childhood growth, and other medical services are provided free of charge.²⁶⁷ Over 85% of rural residents now have access to primary healthcare services.²⁶⁸

Exchange 61: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	daR een nazdeekeeya daRmoongaa has?
Local:	Yes, over there.	bale, oonjaas

Engaged couples are required by law to take family planning classes before receiving marriage licenses, and university students (regardless of their major) take courses on population and family planning.²⁶⁹ The family planning initiatives have been effective, with as many as 76% of Iranian women now using contraception.²⁷⁰ The family planning

²⁶⁵ Victoria Forlini, “Iran Provides Model to Remedy Rural Health Problems in the U.S.,” *Fierce Healthcare*, 26 January 2010, <http://www.fiercehealthcare.com/story/iran-provides-model-remedy-rural-health-problems-u-s/2010-01-26>

²⁶⁶ Seyed Enayatollah Asaei, “Iran’s Excellent Primary Health Care System,” UNICEF Iran, n.d., http://www.unicef.org/iran/media_4427.html

²⁶⁷ Alvin Powell, “Iranian Primary Care Produces Big Results: Revamped Health System Sees Life Expectancy Up, Fertility Down,” *Harvard University Gazette*, 23 January 2003, http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/01_23/07-iran.html

²⁶⁸ Mohammad Movahedi et al., “Trends and Geographical Inequalities of the Main Health Indicators for Rural Iran,” *Health Policy and Planning* 24 no. 3 (2009): 229–237.

²⁶⁹ Harvard Public Health Now, “Tehran University Official Describes Iran Health Care System to HSPH,” 24 January 2003, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/now-archive/jan24/iran.html>

²⁷⁰ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Iran: Focus on Family Planning,” 24 April 2003, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=19627>

efforts were effective in reducing the fertility rates of rural women, with some estimates of the rate of fertility decline as high as 20%.²⁷¹

In an apparent reversal of program to reduce family size and fertility, President Ahmadinejad has instituted a policy to encourage population growth. The government will pay each family about USD 1,000 for each new child. An additional USD 100 will be put into a special account for the child until age 18. This program is expected to be particularly popular among the poor and rural populations.²⁷²

In a similar departure from earlier attempts at family planning, the President is urging girls to marry at the age of 16. Ahmadinejad is also trying to lower the age of marriage for men to about 20. The President disavows his country's internally acclaimed family planning program as an "ungodly and Western import."²⁷³

Education

Iran has free and compulsory primary education for grades 1 to 5. Middle school, also known as the Guidance Cycle, is for grades 6 to 8, and the secondary education cycle includes grades 9 to 12. The country has made many efforts to improve access to and attendance at rural schools. As a result of its educational efforts, there have been tremendous improvements in literacy.²⁷⁴ The literacy rate has reached 84% and female literacy stands at nearly 71%.²⁷⁵ These gains can be attributed in part to massive government investment in public education (an average 45% of the government's social affairs budget since 1989).



© brum d / flickr.com
Small school in Garmeh

Exchange 62: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	daR een nazdeekeeyaa madRese has?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Despite these gains, national averages hide disparities related to gender and region. Although the overall enrollment rate for boys is 98%, it varies significantly between

²⁷¹ Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, M. Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, and Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, "Family Planning and Fertility Decline in Rural Iran: The Impact of Rural Health Clinics," *Health Economics* 19, no. 1 (September 2010): 159–180, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hec.1613/abstract>

²⁷² CBC News, "Iran Offers Cash Incentive for New Babies," 28 July 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2010/07/28/iran-population-boost-initiative.html>

²⁷³ Associated Press, "Iranian President Urges Girls to Marry at 16," *Al Arabiya News*, 21 November 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/11/21/126829.html>

²⁷⁴ The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Norway, "Education System in Iran," <http://www.iran-embassy-oslo.no/embassy/educat.htm>

²⁷⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Iran: People," in *The World Factbook*, 22 March 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

provinces. For girls, the range is 99% in Tehran to 84% in Sistan va Baluchestan province.²⁷⁶ In remote rural areas, where distances are vast, special provisions have been made by education officials to allow primary schools to be coeducational and multi-grade.

Exchange 63: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	bachaat madRese meeRan?
Local:	Yes.	bale

There is clear evidence that the educational and literacy levels in rural areas are increasing. Women have made great strides in education with their literacy rate rising by nearly 90%.²⁷⁷ The government’s goal of having at least one primary school in every village and at least one secondary school in villages with a population over 1,000 has clearly facilitated this rise.²⁷⁸ Girls still drop out of school at higher rates, however, because many families who allow their daughters to enroll in a community primary school are reluctant to let them travel long distances to a secondary school.²⁷⁹

Transportation

Iran’s large urban areas are widely scattered, and transportation is made difficult by mountainous and desert terrain. Motor vehicles—buses and trucks in particular—are the most important means of transportation for passengers and goods.



© Laura e Fulvio / flickr.com
Mercedes bus in Iran

Exchange 64: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	otoboos zood meeyaad?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Since the early 1990s, the government has allocated considerable resources to road construction and repair, and about half the roads are now paved.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ UNICEF, “At a Glance: Iran (Islamic Republic of),” 2003, <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran.html>

²⁷⁷ Ansia Khaz Ali, “Iranian Women after the Islamic Revolution.” July 2010. <http://conflictsforum.org/briefings/IranianWomenAfterIslamicRev.pdf>

²⁷⁸ Eric Hooglund, “Thirty Years of the Islamic Revolution in Rural Iran,” in *Middle East Report* 39, no. 250 (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/thirty-years-islamic-revolution-rural-iran>

²⁷⁹ UNICEF, “At a Glance: Iran (Islamic Republic of),” 2003, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran_30050.html

²⁸⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Iran: Transportation and Telecommunications,” 2006, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-32218/Iran>

Land Mines

The protracted border war with Iraq cost both sides billions of dollars, left several hundred thousand people dead, and wreaked untold destruction in the 1980s. In the end, the border didn't shift a centimeter. Nonetheless, both sides effectively lost vast tracts of land that remain perilous fields of unexploded land mines.²⁸¹ A significant number are also in the Persian Gulf area.²⁸²



© lachicaphoto / flickr.com
Landmines marked by black flags

Exchange 65: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	een mantaqe meen gozaaRee shode?
Local:	Yes.	bale

The Iranian government estimates that 16 million landmines were laid in Iran during the border war. Its southern provinces in particular are severely affected.²⁸³

Different Ways of Life

Nomads are people who migrate from one place to another with their tribe, family, and belongings. Herding livestock is their livelihood. This lifestyle persists mainly in semi-dry and marginal areas that are not suitable for farming. In Iran, these nomadic groups originate from the Turks, Turkmans, Persians, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, and Baluchis. These ethnic differences mean that the nomadic tribes speak a variety of languages. Although the nomadic tribes are located predominately in Zagros, only the provinces of Kurdistan and Yazd have no nomadic tribes.²⁸⁴



© ninara / flickr.com
Nomad camp and sheep

Exchange 66: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	faRmaandat eenjaa zendegee meekone?
Local:	Yes.	bale

²⁸¹ Galal Nassar, "Stranded!" Al-Ahram Weekly Online, 26 June–2 July 2003,

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/644/re1.htm>

²⁸² Journal of Mine Action, "Iran," 24 July 2010, <http://maic.jmu.edu/Journal/5.3/profiles/iran.htm>

²⁸³ Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Iran," International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 1998–2009, <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2006/iran.html>

²⁸⁴ Iran Chamber Society, "Iranian People and Tribes: Iranian Ethnic Groups," 2011,

http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

These nomadic peoples opposed the Pahlavi regime of the 1920s and 1930s. Because of this opposition, the government attempted to settle the tribal groups. These efforts were unsuccessful; however, changes in the ownership of grazing lands, changes in the political and social arrangements in the country, and increasing costs of consumer goods have managed to accomplish what the government did not. Nomads have begun to become more settled and are scattered among the many rural villages in Iran.^{285, 286}



© ninara / flickr.com
Nomad woman and her tent

Exchange 67: Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	meetonee manoo peeshe faRmandat bebaRee?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Exchange 68: Respected leader, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.	jenaabe faRmande, maa be komak / naseehat / nazaR e shomaa neeyaaz daaRam
Local:	Yes.	beseeyaaR Khoob

Following the revolution, several former tribal leaders attempted to revitalize their tribes as significant political and economic forces. Many factors prevented this from happening. Among the most important were the hostile attitude of the central government, the decline in nomadic populations as a result of the settlement of large numbers of tribal people in the 1960s and 1970s, and the consequent change in attitudes, especially of youth raised in villages and towns.²⁸⁷

Qashqais

The Qashqais are one of the largest nomadic tribal groups in Iran. They speak a language related to the Southern Azeri/Ersari languages. The primary unit is called an *Oba* and can represent a group of as few as five families. These Obas then join to form larger groups. In 1980, the CIA encourages the Qashqai to revolt against the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Israelis supplied the



© ninara / flickr.com
Qashqai people at their camp

²⁸⁵ Iran Chamber Society, “Iranian People and Tribes: Iranian Ethnic Groups,” 2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/people/articles/iranian_ethnic_groups.php

²⁸⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Qashqai Nomadic Pastoralism: Iran,” 2007, ftp://ftp.fao.org/sd/SDA/GIAHS/iran_nomadic_submission.pdf

²⁸⁷ It’s unclear if a census of nomads in Iran has ever been conducted. Population numbers range from 1.5 million to 4 million.

arms for fighting. The CIA ceased its involvement and withdrew its support for the action when the Iran–Iraq war began 30 days later. The Qashqai continued their opposition for 2 years before being badly beaten by the Revolutionary Guard.²⁸⁸

Bakhtiari

The Bakhtiari represent a group of nomadic pastoralists who speak the Luri language. They were divided into the Chahar Lang tribal group and the Haft Lang tribal groups. Until the mid-19th century, the leadership of all the Bakhtiari was performed by the Chahar Lang sub-tribe. Although many Bakhtiari have assimilated into contemporary urban society or settled as agriculturalists, an estimated 250,000 tribal people still practice nomadic pastoralism.²⁸⁹



© ninera / flickr.com
A Bakhtiari nomad family

Baluchis

The Baluchis are a traditionally nomadic group who live predominantly in Pakistan. Approximately 20% of their population resides in one of the least-developed areas of Iran. Their traditional migratory routes take them back and forth across the borders of the two nations. Their language is a distant cousin of Persian but more closely related to modern Pashtu. Most Baluchis follow the Sunni rather than the Shi'a sect of Islam. Although traditionally nomadic, it is increasingly common for the Baluchis to settle in agricultural communities. The chief of each group, whether nomadic or not, lives in fixed residences. Camels, cattle, sheep, and goats are the mainstay. They are also well known for their carpets, which have become a source of income for the tribe. Many tribespeople have become settled.^{290, 291}



© Balochistan / flickr.com
Baluchi children

Exchange 69: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	een mantaqe Roo Khoob meeshnaasee?
Local:	Yes.	bale

²⁸⁸ IntelliBriefs, "Iran: Qashqai Tribe," 22 January 2008, <http://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2008/01/iran-qashqai-tribe.html>

²⁸⁹ Helen Chapin Metz, ed., "Society: Lurs and Bakhtiari," in *Iran: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1987, <http://countrystudies.us/iran/38.htm>

²⁹⁰ GlobalSecurity, "Baluchis," 7 October 2008, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/baluchis.htm>

²⁹¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, "Baloch," 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/50816/Baloch>

Checkpoints

Iran borders seven countries by land. Over a dozen international border crossings allow overland crossing from Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The most popular crossings are Bazargan (between Iran and Turkey), Nour-dooz (Iran and Armenia), Bajgiran and Sarakhas (Iran and Turkmenistan), Mirjaveh (Iran and Pakistan), and Marivan (Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, an autonomous region). There are two recognized border crossings between Iran and Azerbaijan. These are between Astara, Azerbaijan and Astara, Iran; and between Culfa, Azerbaijan and Jolfa, Iran.²⁹²



© Gilad Rom
Iran-Turkmenistan border

Exchange 70: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	nazdeektaReen eestgaa baazRasee kojaas?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	daR do keelometRee ye eenjaas

In 2004, Tehran announced the launch of 10 new military checkpoints along the Afghan–Iranian border in Afghanistan’s western Herat Province as part of Iran’s drive against drug trafficking. The move is part of a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) bilateral initiative called Strengthening Afghanistan–Iran Drug Control Border Cooperation (SAID) that aims to establish 25 checkpoints along the border in Afghan provinces—15 in Herat, 3 in Farah, and 7 in Nimroz. The Islamic Republic of Iran has earmarked USD 2 million for the program.²⁹³

Exchange 71: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	hame ye ooRaaq e shenaasaa-yet eenaas?
Local:	Yes.	bale

The key checkpoints along the Iran–Afghanistan border include Eslam Qal-e, Zabol, and Zaranj.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Iran Budget Tours, “Iran Open Borders Crossing, Overland Travel to Iran: Getting There and Away through the Land Boundaries,” 2011, <http://www.iranbudgettour.com/iran-border-crossing>

²⁹³ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Government Moves to Tighten Afghan Border Against Drugs,” 22 March 2004, http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40177&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=IRAN

²⁹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: Border Management Cooperation in Drug Control,” April 2008, http://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/green_paper_no%20maps_v%20April%2008.pdf

Exchange 72: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	lotfan aaz maasheen peeyaade sho
Local:	Okay.	baashe

The Iraqi government has closed six border crossings to Iran. They are at Kella, Saranban-Golle, Taiwella, Parweez Khan, Muntheria, and al Sheeb. There are reports that a number of border posts were closed on the Iranian side.²⁹⁵



© theonlymikey / flickr.com
Iran-Afghanistan border post

Exchange 73: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	daftaRche e maalekeeyat e maasheeno be maa neshoon bede
Local:	Okay.	baashe

Regular and violent clashes between security forces and drug traffickers occur on the eastern borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran built a concrete wall to seal off the border with Baluchestan. There are some gaps for locals to cross at the Easement Gate. The wall is less than 100 km from Pakistan's border with Afghanistan.²⁹⁶

Exchange 74: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	aaslehe hamRaate?
Local:	Yes.	bale

The United States and Iraq have set up a joint security station at Wahab. This base is part of the military's attempts to track and counter influence from Iran. The station hopes to ease the burden of the al Sheeb border station, which is open to thousands of Iranian tourists.²⁹⁷

The two main checkpoints for entry at the Turkey–Iran border in eastern Turkey are Curbulak and Kapikoy. All vehicles attempting to enter or leave Turkey have to pass through radiation scanners.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Iran," 4 March 2011, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/iran>

²⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, "Iran to Wall off Baluchistan Border," 11 June 2007, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2007/06/200852514754178412.html>

²⁹⁷ Hannah Allam, McClatchey Newspapers, "Iraq–Iran Border Post: From 'Checkpoint Charlie' to Tourist Gate?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 April 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0427/Iraq-Iran-border-post-From-Checkpoint-Charlie-to-tourist-gate>

²⁹⁸ *Telegraph*, "Turkey-Iran Border: A Tale of Two Customs Posts," 1 February 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/nuclear-wikileaks/8297090/TURKEY-IRAN-BORDER-A-TALE-OF-TWO-CUSTOMS-POSTS.html>

Chapter 5: Assessment

1. The Islamic government shows no interest in rural development.
False
The Islamic government demonstrated considerable interest in rural development.
2. Rural women play an important role in reducing production costs and increasing family income.
True
Rural women are active in economic activities such as agriculture and handicrafts. This enables them to increase family income while taking care of the household.
3. The average age at marriage has dropped for men and women.
False
Iranians are waiting longer to get married. In addition, the sizes of families are decreasing. This trend is disturbing to the government, which is encouraging marriages at younger ages.
4. The rural areas of Iran are not affected by land mines.
False
The Iranian government estimates that 16 million land mines were laid in Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. Iran’s southern provinces in particular are severely affected.
5. The majority of Baluchis are Sunni Muslims.
True
Unlike the majority of Persians, the majority of Baluchis are Sunni rather than Shi’ite Muslims. This religious difference has been a source of tension in the past.

Chapter 6: Family Life

The Role of the Family

In Iran, the family comes before the individual. Family ties are more important than all other social relationships. Iranian families typically comprise grandparents, uncles, and aunts as well as children. The constitution of the country references the family's seminal role in society.



© Giorgio Montersino
The importance of family

Exchange 75: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	daR een Khoone chan nafaR zendegee meekonan?
Local:	Ten.	da nafaR

Extended families are common. It is not unusual for several generations to live together. Although they may not live under the same roof, they enjoy close relationships because of the amount of time members of extended families typically spend together.²⁹⁹

Exchange 76: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	een hameye faameelete?
Local:	Yes.	bale

In Iranian families, children are often the focal point. Relationships between a parent and a child are sometimes regarded as more important than relationships between parents. Families are expected to stay together. Roles within family are well defined and often follow patriarchal lines. Taking care of the home and the children are seen as duties for the women while making a living is regarded as the obligation of the men. These roles and the view of marriage are changing, especially in urban areas, but the family remains the paramount social unit in society.³⁰⁰

Exchange 77: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	baRaadaR daaRee?
Local:	Yes.	bale

²⁹⁹ Massoume Price, "Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran," Culture of Iran, October 2009, <http://www.cultureofiran.com/patriarchy.html>

³⁰⁰ Massoume Price, "Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran," Culture of Iran, October 2009, <http://www.cultureofiran.com/patriarchy.html>

Status of Women in the Family

In Islamic tradition, marriage signifies a binding contract that specifies obligations for the husband and the wife. Men have a legal responsibility to provide for the financial needs of the wife and family. Women are obligated to be loving companions and to provide for the care of the home and the children. Article 1104 of the Civil Code of Iran states that husbands and wives should establish friendly relations in order to promote the welfare of the family and the



© Kee Hinckley
Grandmother and child

education of the children. The male is the exclusive head of household and women must obey the commands of the husband. This includes being “sexually available” to a husband.³⁰¹ These regulations do not preclude women from working outside the home provided that the husband agrees, that the occupation is considered proper to the woman, and that work obligations do not threaten family obligations.³⁰²

Other changes in family and family structure have taken place in recent years. The preferred average number of children is now two in most parts of the country.³⁰³ A drop in the fertility rates of women has allowed many more women to participate in the labor market.³⁰⁴ Fully 21% of all women work outside the home.³⁰⁵ These changes have prompted some challenges to the traditional roles assumed in patriarchies. Still, women are far from equal when it comes to power and relationships within the family and society.³⁰⁶

Exchange 78: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	aayaa shoma tanhaa faRed e ye Khoonevaadat hasee ke kaaR meekoone?
Local:	No.	na

³⁰¹ Sen McGlenn, “Family Law in Iran” (essay for the paper “Islamic Family Law,” Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³⁰² Hamed Shahidian, “Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Culture of Iran, 2006, http://www.cultureofiran.com/gender_relations_in_iran_02.html

³⁰³ Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Peter McDonald, and Meimanat Hossein Chavoshi, “Changes in Family Fertility Behavior, and Attitudes in Iran,” Australian National University, August 2003, <http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41501/2/88.pdf>

³⁰⁴ Hadi Salehi Esfahani, and Parastoo Shajari, “Gender, Education, Family Structure, and the Allocation of Labor in Iran” (paper presented at Conference on Iran’s Economy, University of Chicago, 15–17 October 2010), <http://iranecconomy.csames.illinois.edu/full%20papers/Esfahani%20-%20Gender%20and%20Labor%20Market%20Outcomes%20in%20Iran.pdf>

³⁰⁵ Iran Labor Report, “Iranian Women Labor Woes,” 12 June 2010, <http://iranlaborreport.com/?p=895>

³⁰⁶ Massoume Price, “Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran,” Culture of Iran, October 2009, <http://www.cultureofiran.com/patriarchy.html>

Engagement and Marriage

According to Islamic law and tradition, marriage is a religious obligation regarded as a way to preserve the morality of a society. Marriage in Iran is more than just a contract between two people; it is also a concern of the government.³⁰⁷ The legal age for marriage is 15 for boys and 13 for girls.³⁰⁸



© moostive / flickr.com
A groom and his bride

Weddings in Iran can be highly elaborate affairs. They are meant to be public celebrations with as many people attending as possible. Typically, such weddings consist of two parts: the *aghad*, or legal ceremony, and the *aroosi*, the reception and party following the wedding. During the *aghad* the marriage contract is signed and the bride price guaranteed. (The bride price, or *mahr*, is agreed upon before the actual signing ceremony.) The *aroosi* is often an elaborate feast and celebration that can last from 3 to 7 days.³⁰⁹ The cost of the wedding, including the reception, is usually the responsibility of the bride's family.³¹⁰

Traditionally, marriages were often arranged, but that custom has largely faded in contemporary Iran. Of course, it is still important for the families to approve of the marriage, but these days Iranians are selecting their own mates.³¹¹

Exchange 79: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	een zanete?
Local:	Yes.	bale

The expense of weddings in Iran led more than 47,000 students to register for group weddings in 2009. Concerns that economic issues were delaying marriages for many prompted the government to offer mass weddings as an alternative to the high costs of more traditional ceremonies. These wedding dates often correspond to important dates on the Islamic calendar. One of the main sources of funding for these events comes from the Office of the Supreme Leader's representative for universities.³¹²

³⁰⁷ Sen McGlinn, "Family Law in Iran" (essay for the paper "Islamic Family Law," Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³⁰⁸ Charles Recknagel and Azam Gorgin, "Human-Rights Activists Win Partial Victory in Battle Against Child Marriage," Pars Times, 28 June 2002, http://www.parstimes.com/women/child_marriage.html

³⁰⁹ Massoume Price, "Iranian Marriage Ceremony, Its History & Symbolism," Iran Chamber Society, December 2001, http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_marriage_ceremony.php

³¹⁰ HilalPlaza, "Muslim Weddings Traditions in Iran," n.d., <http://www.hilalplaza.com/iran-wedding-customs.html>

³¹¹ Persian Mirror, "Introduction to a Persian Wedding," 2004, <http://www.persianmirror.com/celebrations/persianweddings/intro/intro.cfm>

³¹² Institute for War & Peace Reporting, "Iran Promotes Mass Marriage," Middle East Online, 10 October 2010, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=41894>

Temporary Marriage

The practice of temporary marriage, or *sigheh*, is also practiced in Iran. This tradition was common until it was banned in the seventh century. *Sigheh* was reintroduced some time later and was intended to allow the widows of soldiers to have a man take care of them without obligating them to the relationship for life. Although polygamy is allowed by Sunni Muslims, it is rarely practiced among Shi'ites. Such temporary marriages offered a way around that problem.³¹³

Today *sigheh* is a legally sanctioned union of a fixed duration, which can last anywhere from 1 hour to 99 years. The contracts are renewable, but the woman must wait 3 months and 10 days before entering into a contract with a different man to ensure she is not pregnant. Children born of such unions are considered legitimate and entitled to a share of their father's property.³¹⁴



© Soudeh Rad
A bride waits for her groom

Exchange 80: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	eena bachehaatan?
Local:	Yes.	bale

Many Iranians regard *sigheh* as little more than legalized prostitution, especially since it is an acknowledgment that a woman is not a virgin. But an unusual mix of feminists, clerics, and high-ranking government officials view it as a religiously acceptable solution to the problems of singles in their 20s.³¹⁵ Their extraordinarily large numbers, combined with high unemployment, mean that more couples are putting off traditional marriage because they cannot afford it.

Exchange 81: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	ezdevaaj kaRdee?
Local:	No.	na

Divorce

Divorce is difficult for women in Iran because they are usually economically dependent on their husbands and face giving up their children.³¹⁶ The few women with minor

³¹³ John Moody, "Marriage in Iran: 'Til Death, or Contract Expiration, Do Us Part," Fox News, 18 June 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,282012,00.html>

³¹⁴ John Moody, "Marriage in Iran: 'Til Death, or Contract Expiration, Do Us Part," Fox News, 18 June 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,282012,00.html>

³¹⁵ Nadya Labi, "Married for a Minute," Mother Jones, March/April 2010, <http://motherjones.com/politics/2010/03/temporary-marriage-iran-islam>

³¹⁶ Paula Drew, "Iran: Demographics and a Historical Perspective," in *The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*, vols. I–IV, ed. Robert T. Francoeur (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1997–2001), <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/iran.html>

children who initiate divorce proceedings are likely well educated and have the means and an overwhelming need to be free from a situation where there is physical abuse.³¹⁷

A man may divorce his wife by announcing that he is divorced in front of two male witnesses. It is not necessary to tell the wife that she is divorced nor is it necessary for her to consent to the divorce.³¹⁸ After this repudiation, known as *talag*, a man cannot have sex with his wife for 3 months. During this waiting period the divorce is revocable. A husband can decide to take his wife back at any time during the waiting period.³¹⁹

A *kuhl* is a divorce in which the wife pays her husband to divorce her. It is estimated that as many as half the divorces in Tehran are *kuhls*. A *mubarat* is a divorce where both the husband and wife dislike each other and wish to divorce. This type of divorce is uncommon because a man must agree to it and he will receive only a limited payment from his wife.³²⁰

Still another kind of divorce is known as the *tatliq* and is a judicial divorce. This procedure usually occurs when a woman wants to get a divorce but the husband refuses. In this case, a judge orders the husband to pronounce divorce. If the husband refuses, the judge may pronounce divorce for the husband.³²¹

Iranian officials are worried about failing marriages. In the last 10 years, the rate of divorce in the country has nearly tripled. Marriage Day was recently renamed No Divorce Day. The requests for divorces far outstrip the requests for marriages in some parts of the country. Reasons cited for the high rates of divorce include urbanization, the increased cost of living coupled with high rates of unemployment, high dowries, and a failure to adhere to traditional Islamic values.

Some experts say that the reasons are rooted in changing attitudes toward marriage and careers among young women, and reflect a clash of traditional and modern values.³²²



© Hamed Saber
A proud mother and her baby

³¹⁷ Nina Kristiansen, "Spouse Killings in Iran," Kilden: Information Centre for Gender Research in Norway, 18 August 2003, <http://eng.kilden.forskningsradet.no/c52778/nyhet/vis.html?tid=53512>

³¹⁸ Sen McGlenn, "Family Law in Iran," (essay for the paper "Islamic Family Law," Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³¹⁹ Sen McGlenn, "Family Law in Iran," (essay for the paper "Islamic Family Law," Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³²⁰ Sen McGlenn, "Family Law in Iran," (essay for the paper "Islamic Family Law," Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³²¹ Sen McGlenn, "Family Law in Iran," (essay for the paper "Islamic Family Law," Leiden University, 2001), <http://www.sonjavank.com/sen/pdfs/iranlaw.pdf>

³²² William Yong, "Iran's Divorce Rate Stirs Fears of Society in Crisis," *New York Times*, 6 December 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/07/world/middleeast/07divorce.html>

Children

The birth of a child entails a series of prescribed rituals. When a woman becomes pregnant, her parents begin buying clothes, nursery items, and toys. These are sent to the family in daylight hours so that all of the neighbors become aware of the pending birth. The expectant parents start a fire and burn sweet smelling herbs to ward off the “evil eye.” Sweets are served to guests.



© Paul Keller
Children playing

If the child is born at home, the baby is bathed and brought to the mother who then feeds the child in the presence of the grandmother, the father, and other selected family members. Relatives pay short visits to the mother and newborn child. The guests often bring flowers, clothes, or toys.

On the seventh day a special ceremony is held. The parents give water to the child in combination with the mother’s milk. Upon arrival at home, a family member meets mother and child at the door and the herbs are burned.

If the child is born in a hospital, mother and child remain confined for 3 to 7 days. On the seventh day, mother and child take a ritualistic bath. The ears of a female child are pierced and she is given a pair of gold earrings. After the earrings are received, the whole family is invited for a lunch in which the main dish is sheep. Each member of the family brings gifts for mother or child. The ceremony continues until evening.

The child is named on the sixth day. The senior members of the family gather to choose the child’s name. These days, the name is often selected by the parents. Traditionally the grandfather or the father chose the child’s name. The grandfather or father holds the newborn, recites verses from the Quran, and whispers in the baby’s right ear. He then calls out the child’s name three times. At the end of this ritual, the father wishes the baby a long life and the audience says “*amin*.”³²³

Naming Conventions

Choosing a name for a child is regarded as a serious duty by parents. The name must be a righteous one that will bring blessings to the child.³²⁴ Names for boys often indicate service to God. It is common to name children after the prophets. Girls are often named after women in the Quran or members of the Prophet Muhammad’s family.³²⁵

³²³ Ahmad Shahvary, “Iran’s Birth Customs: Welcoming the Newborn with Joy and Color,” *SangSaeng* Spring 15 (2006): 44–45, http://apceiu.org/bbs/files/pdf/2006/sangsaeng/060529_ss_vol15_p44-45.pdf

³²⁴ Huda, “Muslim Baby Name Books,” About.com, 2011, <http://islam.about.com/library/products/aatpbabynames.htm>

³²⁵ Huda, “Muslim Baby Names,” About.com, 2011, <http://islam.about.com/od/babynames/tp/babynames.htm>

Children are given a first and a last name. The first name is a personal name while the last name is the same as the father's. Commonly, first sons will be given the name of the father or the grandfather. Successive children's names will be chosen so that the names sound good together, for example, by ending in the same sound or having the same combination of sounds. It is not uncommon for children to be given a third name that is a religious one. Female first names are often related to beautiful things including flowers or plants. Sometimes a name is chosen simply because it sounds pretty. Women in Iran keep their father's last name and do not change last names when they marry.³²⁶



© H.R. Sabbaghi / flickr.com
A young village girl

The Iranian government maintains a list of sanctioned names to be used by parents in the naming of the child. The practice of banning names began shortly after the Islamic revolution in 1980. The idea was to get rid of the vestiges or influences of Western Culture and to reinforce Islamic traditions. Arabic names are generally included on the list but Persian names, which may have pre-Islamic influences, must be checked against the list.³²⁷

The Elderly in Iran

The extended family is quite common in Iran. Traditionally, elderly relatives were kept at home rather than being placed in facilities such as nursing homes. The elderly were treated with respect and held a privileged place in the family. According to the Quran, Muslims are to respect and value the older members of family and society. These practices are still relatively commonplace among the rural population and in poorer families.³²⁸



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Old men relaxing

But in the last two decades, the situation for the elderly has been changing. The elderly are shown less deference and may feel less comfortable in their children's homes. The government has built a number of homes for the aged and additional private facilities

³²⁶ The John Cooke Fraud Report, "It's All in a Name," Alikim Media, 1996,
<http://www.johncooke.com/name/iranian.htm>

³²⁷ Azadeh Moaveni, "You've Come Only a Little Way, Baby," *Time*, 28 September 2006,
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1540450,00.html>

³²⁸ Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, "Iranian Community," Mobilizing for Action Report, 2008,
121-132,
http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Issues/Mobilizing_Action_Report/IRANIAN%20COMMUNITY%20.pdf

have opened. In middle and upper class families, it is becoming more common to place older relatives in elder care facilities.³²⁹

³²⁹ Mary Elaine Hegland "Iran and Afghanistan," in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Family, Body, Sexuality and Health*, Vol. 3, ed. Suad Joseph (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006): 7–9.

Chapter 6: Assessment

1. If the husband or father is absent, women may act under their own authority to make family decisions.

False

Patriarchy is a major institution in the Muslim world. In the absence of a husband or father, women are under the authority of other male relatives.

2. Approximately 1 in 5 women choose to work outside the home.

True

Economic difficulties and changes in family structure now mean that 21% of all women work outside the home. This has created some pressure on traditional patriarchal roles. Despite their income contributions, women still have less power in the home than men.

3. The government sponsors mass weddings to eliminate some of the financial hardship of marriage.

True

Government-sponsored mass weddings are one way to eliminate some of the financial hardship of traditional Iranian wedding customs.

4. Temporary marriage is a legally sanctioned union.

True

Temporary marriage is a legally sanctioned union of a fixed duration, which can last anywhere from 1 hour to 99 years.

5. Parents are free to name their children with any Persian names they wish.

False

Names must be checked against the official list. Some Persian names are not considered appropriate. Most Arabic names, except for some Sunni villains, are also fine.

Final Assessment

1. Although Tehran is the cultural heart of Iran, Mashhad is the capital.
True or False
2. Ayatollah Khomeini was hand-picked by Shah Reza Pahlavi to rule Iran.
True or False
3. All women in Iran, including foreign women, must wear a *chador* to enter a mosque.
True or False
4. All Muslims believe in one God but only Shi'ites believe in the Prophet Muhammad.
True or False
5. The concept of *vilayat-i faqih* places government authority in the hands of clergy.
True or False
6. The constitution of Iran is based on the religious rules and principles of Islam.
True or False
7. A black turban often signifies a religious scholar claiming descent from Muhammad.
True or False
8. All devout Muslims, without exception, must fast for a month during Ramadan.
True or False
9. The hug is a common form of greeting among men in Iran.
True or False
10. Despite segregation in other sectors of society, restaurants always seat males and females together.
True or False
11. Men in Iran do not wear short-sleeved shirts in public.
True or False
12. According to tradition, Muslims must be buried within 48 hours of their death.
True or False
13. The Iranian New Year is known as *Eid-ul-Fitr*.
True or False

14. Tehran is the only major city in Iran with a population over 1 million.
True or False
15. Primary and secondary education is free and compulsory in Iran.
True or False
16. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, formerly all Iranian banks were nationalized.
True or False
17. The Internet in Iran is strictly monitored and controlled.
True or False
18. There are no vegetarian restaurants in the cities.
True or False
19. Because of strong Islamic social values, illegal drugs are impossible to find in Iran
True or False
20. Most homes in rural areas have access to electricity.
True or False
21. The average size of rural families is getting smaller.
True or False
22. The Iranian government discourages family planning.
True or False
23. Healthcare in rural Iran has been recognized as one of the best in the world.
True or False
24. The largest nomadic group in Iran is the *Bakhtiaris*.
True or False
25. The legal age for girls to marry is 13.
True or False
26. Arranged marriages are common in Iran today.
True or False
27. Temporary marriage is not only legal, but universally accepted in Iran.
True or False

28. The rate of divorce is rising quickly in Iran.

True or False

29. Only men may petition for divorce.

True or False

30. In light of the Islamic revolution, the elderly in Iran are more highly regarded than they were decades ago.

True or False