



THE MAKING OF THE MODERN IRANIAN STATE

PHYSICAL MAP OF THE MIDDLE EAST





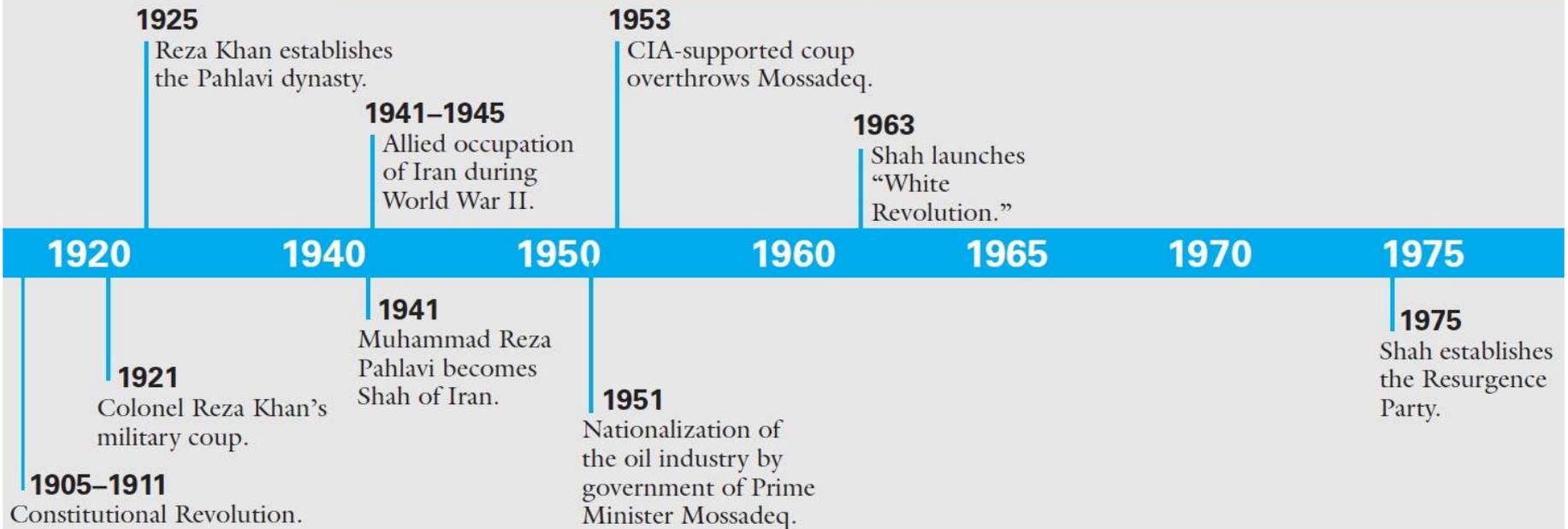
Geographic Setting

- ▶ Most of Iran is inhospitable to agriculture.
 - Bordered by Great Salt Desert and two mountain ranges
 - Rain-fed agriculture confined mostly to northwest and provinces along the Caspian Sea
 - Only pastoral nomads survive in semiarid zones and high mountain valleys.
- ▶ Iran is the second-largest oil producer in the Middle East and fourth in the world.
 - Middle-income country

- ▶ Iran lies on strategic crossroads areas, making it vulnerable to invasion.
 - ▶ Central Asia and Turkey
 - ▶ Indian subcontinent and Middle East
 - ▶ Arabian Peninsula and Caucasus Mountains
 - ▶ Considered boundary between Europe and Asia
- ▶ Population reflects invasions.
 - ▶ Majority speak **Farsi**.
 - ▶ **Farsi**—Persian word for the Persian language. Farsi is a province in Central Iran.

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CHRONOLOGY of Modern Iran's Political Development



1979

Islamic Revolution; Shah forced into exile; Iran becomes an Islamic Republic; Ayatollah Khomeini becomes Leader.

March 1980

Elections for the First Islamic *Majles* (parliament). Subsequent *Majles* elections every four years.

June 1981

President Bani-Sadr ousted by Khomeini, replaced by Muhammad Ali Rajai.

2005

Ultraconservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected president.

1979

1980

1985

1990

2000

2005

1979–1981

Hostage crisis—52 U.S. embassy employees held by radical students.

December 1979

Referendum on the Islamic constitution.

October 1981

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei elected president.

January 1980

Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr elected president.

1980–1988

War with Iraq.

1989

Khomeini dies; Khamenei appointed Leader; Rafsanjani elected president (reelected in 1993).

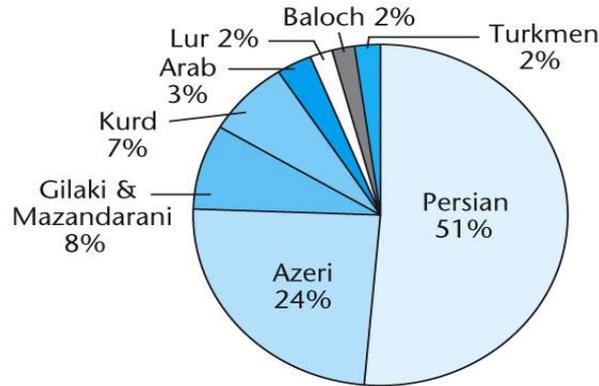
1997

Muhammad Khatami elected president on reform platform (reelected in 2001).

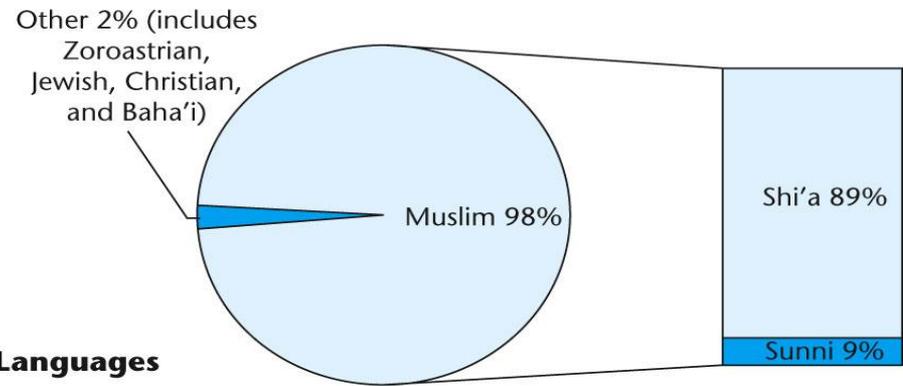
2009

Ahmadinejad re-elected; large-scale protests against alleged electoral fraud take place in Tehran and other cities.

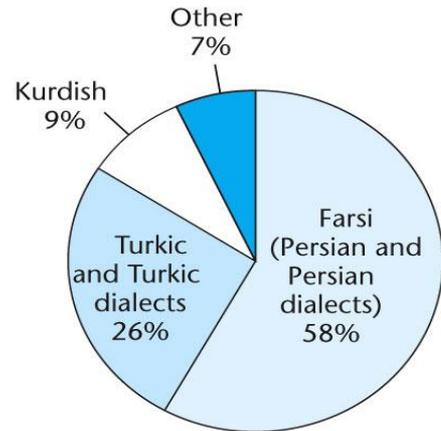
Iran: Ethnic Groups



Iran: Religions



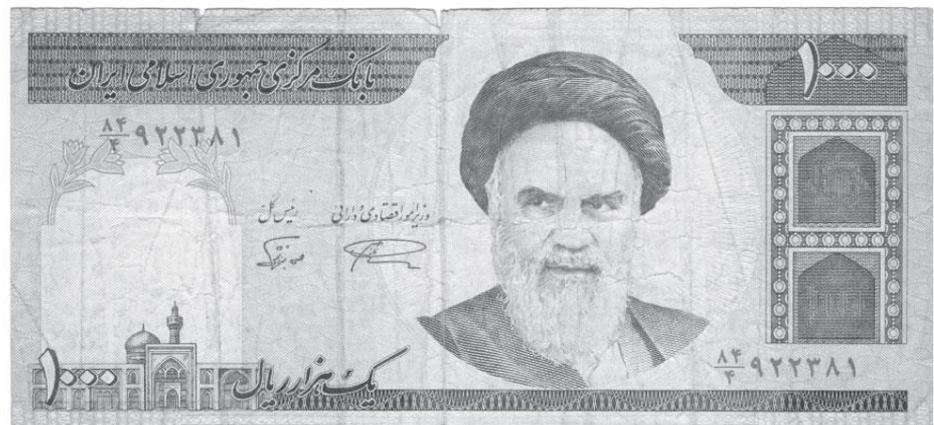
Languages



shari' a —Islamic law derived mostly from the Qur' an and the examples set by the Prophet Muhammad.

Iranian Currency

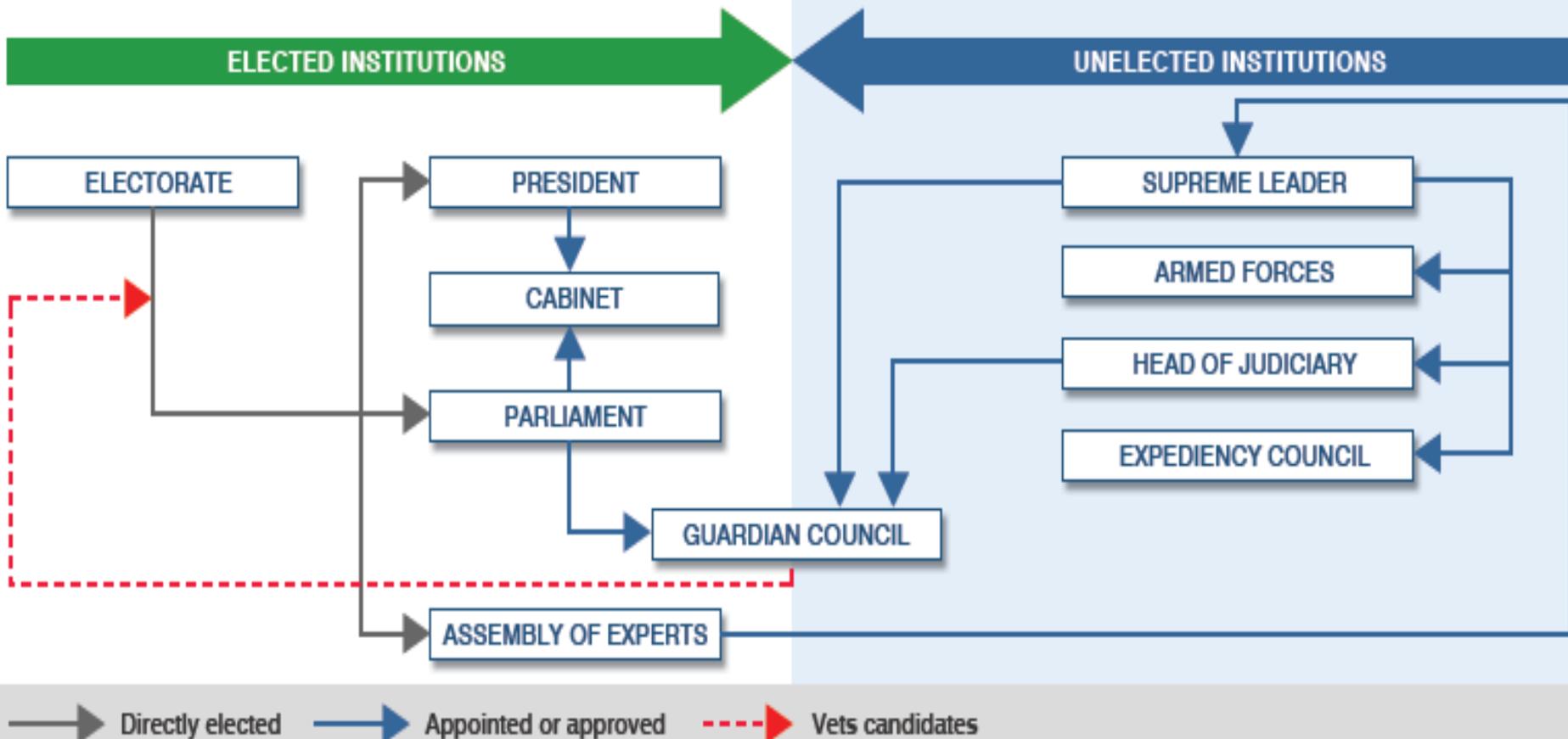
Rial (ریال)
 International Designation: IRR
 Exchange Rate (2010): US\$1 = 10,308
 1000 Rial Note Design: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), Supreme Leader (1979–1989)



Political Map of Iran



STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF IRANIAN STATE



The President

The current President of Iran is **Hassan Rouhani** who won re-election in 2017.

The President is formal head of executive branch, but can be overruled, and even dismissed, by the **Leader / Supreme Leader**.

- ▶ **Leader/Supreme Leader**—Cleric elected to be the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- ▶ Appoints the minister of justice
 - ▶ Whole judiciary is under the supervision of chief judge who is appointed by the Leader.
 - ▶ The Majles is the legislature, but bills do not become law unless the Guardian Council deems them compatible with Islam and the Islamic constitution.

The constitution describes the **president** as the second-highest ranking official in the country. He is head of the executive branch of power and is responsible for ensuring the constitution is implemented.

Presidential powers are circumscribed by the clerics and conservatives in Iran's power structure, and by the authority of the Supreme Leader.

It is the **Supreme Leader**, not the president, who controls the armed forces and makes decisions on security, defense and major foreign policy issues.

All presidential candidates are vetted by the **Guardian Council**, which banned hundreds of hopefuls from standing in the elections.

CABINET

Members of the cabinet, or Council of Ministers, are chosen by the president.

They must be approved by parliament, which can also impeach ministers.

The Supreme Leader is closely involved in defense, security and foreign policy, so his office also holds influence in decision-making.

The cabinet is chaired by the president or first vice-president, who is responsible for cabinet affairs.

Parliament

The 290 members of the **Majlis**, or parliament, are elected by popular vote every four years.

The parliament has the power to introduce and pass laws, as well as to summon and impeach ministers or the president. However, all Majlis bills have to be approved by the conservative Guardian Council.

The first reformist majority was elected in 2000, but this was overturned four years later in elections in 2004. Many reformist candidates were banned from standing.

Assembly of Experts

The responsibilities of the **Assembly of Experts** are to appoint the Supreme Leader, monitor his performance and remove him if he is deemed incapable of fulfilling his duties. The assembly usually holds two sessions a year.

Although the body is officially based in the holy city of Qom, sessions are also held in Tehran and Mashhad. Direct elections for the 86 members of the current assembly are held every eight years and are next due in 2014.

Members are elected for an eight year term. Only clerics can join the assembly and candidates for election are vetted by the Guardian Council. The assembly is dominated by conservatives.

GUARDIAN COUNCIL

This is the most influential body in Iran and is currently controlled by conservatives. It consists of six theologians appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurists nominated by the judiciary and approved by parliament.

Members are elected for six years on a phased basis, so that half the membership changes every three years.

The council has to approve all bills passed by parliament and has the power to veto them if it considers them inconsistent with the constitution and Islamic law.

The council can also bar candidates from standing in elections to parliament, the presidency and the Assembly of Experts.

Two more, both reformists, were permitted to stand after the Supreme Leader intervened. All the female candidates were blocked from standing.

Supreme Leader

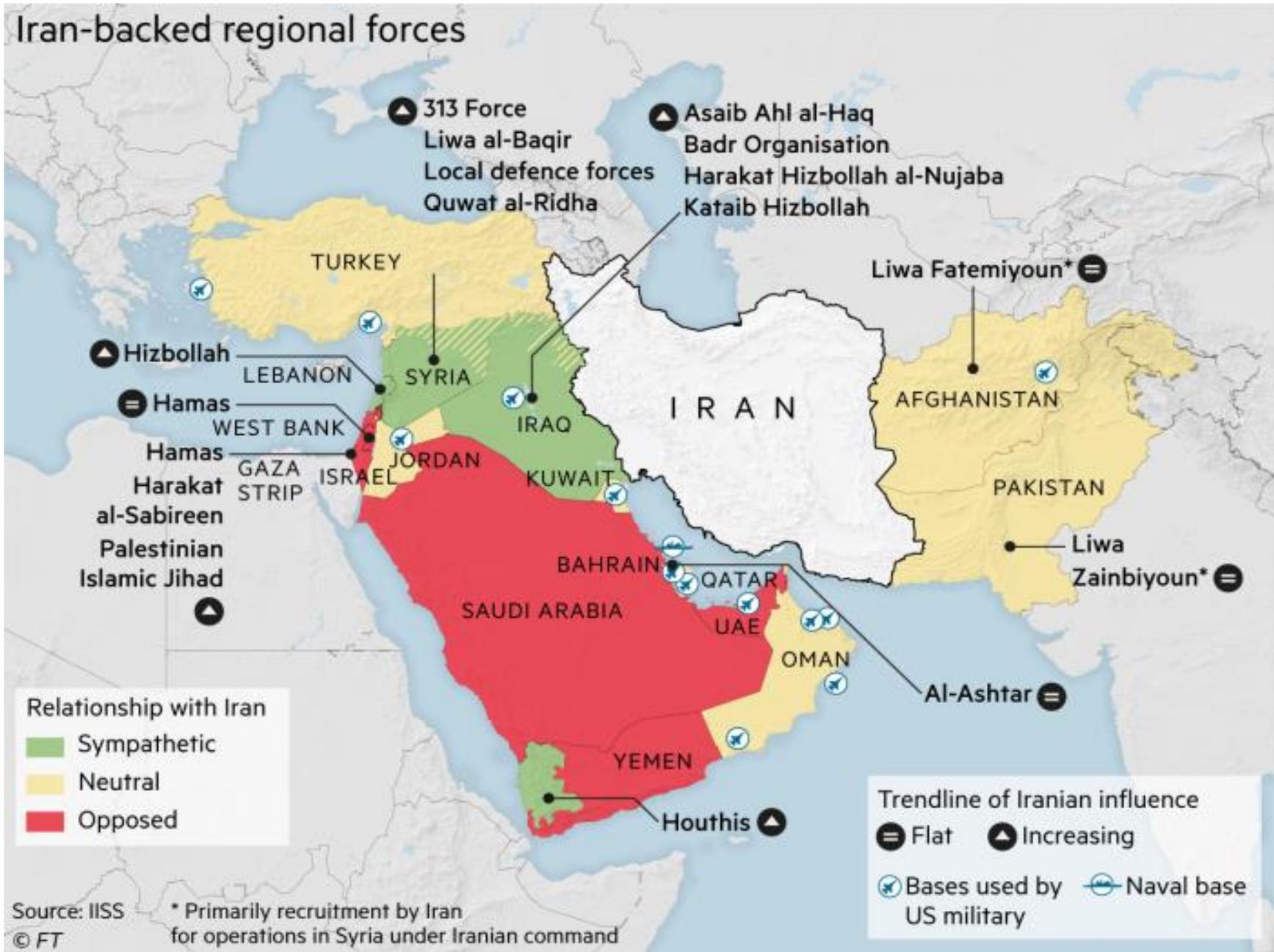
The role of Supreme Leader in the constitution is based on the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini, who positioned the leader at the top of Iran's political power structure.

The Supreme Leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, appoints the head of the judiciary, six of the members of the powerful Guardian Council, the commanders of all the armed forces, Friday prayer leaders and the head of radio and TV. He also confirms the president's election.

The Leader is chosen by the clerics who make up the Assembly of Experts.

Periodic tension between the office of the Leader and the office of the president has often been the source of political instability, a reflection of the deeper tensions between religious rule and the democratic aspirations of many Iranians.

Iran-backed regional forces



Source: IISS
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* Primarily recruitment by Iran for operations in Syria under Iranian command

Contradictory political forces at work

Written constitution tries to synthesize:

Theocracy and democracy; Spiritual authority and popular sovereignty

- ▶ **Theocracy**—state dominated by the clergy, who rule on the grounds that they are the only interpreters of God’s will and law.

Divine rights and human rights

Although they have regular elections for the presidency and **Majles** (Parliament), the clerically dominated **Guardian Council** determines who can run.

- ▶ **Majles**—Iranian parliament, from the Arabic term for “assembly”.
- ▶ **Guardian Council**—a committee created in the Iranian constitution to oversee the Majles (the parliament)

Table 13.1**Political Organization**

Political System	A mixture of democracy and theocracy (rule of the clergy) headed by a cleric with the title of the Leader.
Regime History	Islamic Republic since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.
Administrative Structure	Centralized administration with 30 provinces. The interior minister appoints the provincial governor-generals.
Executive	President and his cabinet. The president is chosen by the general electorate every four years. The president chooses his cabinet ministers, but they need to obtain the approval of the Majles (parliament).
Legislature	Unicameral. The Majles, formed of 290 seats, is elected every four years. It has multiple-member districts with the top runners in the elections taking the seats. Bills passed by the Majles do not become law unless they have the approval of the clerically dominated Council of Guardians.
Judiciary	A Chief Judge and a Supreme Court independent of the executive and legislature but appointed by the Leader.
Party System	The ruling clergy restricts most party and organizational activities.

The Islamic Revolution (1979)

Anti-shah cleric Khomeini formulated new version of Shi'ism, labelled Islamic **fundamentalism** (or **political Islam**; Shi'i populism.)

- ▶ **Fundamentalism**—term used to describe radical religious movements through the world.
- ▶ **Political Islam**—intermingling of religion with politics ; often used as a substitute for fundamentalism.

Gave new meaning to **Shi'i** term for **jurist's guardianship**

- **Jurist's guardianship**—Khomeini's concept that **the Iranian clergy should rule on the grounds that they are the divinely appointed guardians of both the law and the people.**
- Gave senior clergy all-encompassing authority over whole community and competence to understand *shari'a*.
- Clergy were people's true representatives.

- ▶ Minor economic difficulties and international pressure concerning human rights violations 1977
 - ▶ Shah cut construction projects, declared war against profiteers.
 - ▶ Human rights pressure gave opposition opening.
- ▶ Bloody Friday September 8, 1978
 - ▶ Troops killed unarmed demonstrators.
 - ▶ General strike brought economy to halt by late 1978.

○ The Islamic Revolution (1979)

Local communities met social needs in urban centers.

- ▶ Food was distributed to the needy by communities attached to mosques and funded by bazaars.
- ▶ Supplanted police with militias known as ***pasdaran***
 - ▶ **Pasdaran**—Persian term for guards, used to refer to army of Revolutionary Guards formed during Iran's Islamic Revolution.
- ▶ Replaced judicial system with *shari'a* courts
- ▶ Participation at demonstrations increased.
 - ▶ Led by pro-Khomeini clerics, but broad support

The Islamic Republic

○ The Islamic Republic (1979–present)

- ▶ Nationwide referendum replaced monarchy with Islamic Republic.
 - ▶ Khomeini overruled option of democratic Islamic Republic, arguing that Islam was democratic.
- ▶ New constitution was crafted by **Assembly of Experts**.
 - ▶ **Assembly of Experts** —Nominates the Supreme Leader and can replace him. The assembly is elected by the general electorate, but almost all its members are clerics.
 - ▶ Elected under boycott by secular organizations and anti-Khomeini clerics, media control, voter intimidation by **Hezbollahis** (“Partisans of God”)
 - ▶ **Hezbollahis**—In Iran, religious vigilantes.

○ The Islamic Republic (1979–present)

New constitution was crafted by **Assembly of Experts**.

Majority elected, including **hojjat al-Islams (“the proof of Islam”)**, were pro-Khomeini clergymen.

- ▶ **Hojjat al-Islams**—medium ranking cleric.
- ▶ Highly theocratic with Khomeini having majority of authority
- ▶ Bazargan wanted French-style presidential republic Islamic in name, but democratic in structure.
 - ▶ Undermined when threatened to submit alternate constitution
- ▶ Khomeini instigated anti-American sentiment leading to hostage crisis.
 - ▶ Thought to be orchestrated to ratify constitution
 - ▶ Khomeini submitted constitution to public.
- ▶ Declared citizens had divine duty to vote
- ▶ Constitution passed, but support eroded

The Islamic Republic (1979 to Present)

Factors that helped clerics consolidate power in first decade

- ▶ Khomeini's overwhelming charisma and popularity
- ▶ Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980
- ▶ Increased oil prices
- ▶ Second decade held challenges.
 - ▶ Khomeini's death June 1989
 - ▶ Successor lacked charisma and credentials.
 - ▶ 1988 United Nations brokered cease-fire, ended Iran-Iraq War.
 - ▶ Fall in oil prices
 - ▶ Ideological crisis by late 1990s
 - ▶ Democracy over theocracy

Iran After 9/11

- ▶ Terrorist attacks, invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq has profound effect on Iran.
 - ▶ At first brought Iran and United States closer
 - ▶ Iran saw Taliban and Hussein as enemy.
 - ▶ Iran helped in both Iraq and Afghanistan.
 - ▶ United States antagonized Iran by including it in the Axis of Evil.
 - ▶ Tried to pressure Iran to stop nuclear research
 - ▶ Tensions played major role in Ahmadinejad election.
 - ▶ Reformers could not be associated with potential coup.
 - ▶ Conservatives wanted to stand up to United States.
- ▶ United States and Iran: stalemate
 - ▶ United States would like to see “behavioral” or regime change, but needs Iran’s cooperation in keeping Iraq in control.
 - ▶ Iran has oil, regional position.

Historical Junctures and Political Themes

- ▶ Khomeinism has divided into two divergent branches:
 - ▶ Political liberalism
 - ▶ Clerical conservatism
 - Iran inadvertently prompted Saddam Hussein to launch the Iraq-Iran War in 1980.
 - Denounced United States as “arrogant imperialist
 - Held United States diplomats as hostages

- Acts that isolated Iran from United States, European Community, human rights organizations, and the United Nations:
 - Denounced Saudi Arabia as “corrupt puppets of American imperialism”
 - Bought nuclear subs from Russia
 - Denounced proposals for Arab-Israeli negotiations over Palestine
 - Sent money and arms to Muslim dissidents
 - Permitted intelligence services to assassinate some one hundred exiled opposition leaders living in Western Europe
- Iran unlikely to be able to develop nuclear weapons in the near future.
 - Successful joint U.S.-Israeli cyber-sabotage program

- In 1980s Islamic Republic dealt with many issues, such as:
 - Lack of both agricultural land and irrigation
 - Industry suffered lack of investment capital
 - High inflation and unemployment
 - Some leaders favored state-interventionist strategies.
 - Others favored **laissez-faire** market-based strategies.
 - **Laissez-faire** —term taken from the French, which means “to let be,” in other words, to allow to act freely.

State and Economy

- ▶ Oil financed over 90 percent of imports in Iran during the '70s.
 - ▶ Oil revenues made Iran into a **rentier state**: a country that obtains much of its revenue from the export of oil or other natural resources.

Product	1953	1977
Coal (tons)	200,000	900,000
Iron ore (tons)	5,000	930,000
Steel (tons)	—	275,000
Cement (tons)	53,000	4,300,000
Sugar (tons)	70,000	527,000
Tractors (no.)	—	7,700
Motor vehicles (no.)	—	109,000

Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic

- ▶ Iran's main economic problem has been instability in the world oil market. Oil revenues provide 80 percent of hard currency.
 - Economic difficulties resulting in twenty-two year economic crisis lasting into 1990s:
 - Population explosion
 - Iran-Iraqi War
 - Emigration of some three million Iranians
 - Technicians and professional fled to West after revolution.

Some successes

- Reconstruction of Ministry—roads, schools, libraries
- Agricultural Ministry—redistribution of lands to poor
- Government—allowing privatization

Society and Economy

During Shah's reign, huge state investment into social welfare.

- ▶ Shah's approach to development decreased his popularity.
 - ▶ Believed if economic growth benefited wealthy, it would trickle down—it did not.
 - ▶ High inequality by mid-1970s; resulted in dual society
 - ▶ **Dual society**—A society and economy that are sharply divided into a traditional, usually poorer, and modern, usually richer, sectors.
 - ▶ Each sector stratified into unequal classes
 - ▶ Increased fueled resentment, expressed more in cultural and religious terms than in economic and class terms

Society and Economy

Life has improved for most Iranians.

- ▶ Extension of social services narrowed gap between town and country.
- ▶ Literacy rate for ages six to twenty-nine hit 97 percent.
- ▶ Infant mortality rate fell.
- ▶ Life expectancy climbed from fifty-five to sixty-eight.
- ▶ 94 percent of population had access to health services.
- ▶ Major strides toward population control



Iran in the Global Economy

- ❑ Iran began integrating into world system in latter half of nineteenth century.
 - ▶ Opening of Suez Canal, Batum-Baku railway, telegraph lines, European capital outflow, Industrial Revolution
- ▶ Contact with West had repercussions.
 - ▶ Economy dependent on world market fluctuations
 - ▶ Exports reduced acreage available for domestic food; landowners stopped growing food and turned to commercial export crops.
 - ▶ Led to disastrous famines in 1860, 1869–1872, 1880, and 1918–1920
 - ▶ Increased class awareness

- Iran became second most important member (after Saudi Arabia) of the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**.
 - **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** —Founded in 1960 by Iran, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia, it now includes most oil-exporting states, with the notable exceptions of Mexico and former members of the Soviet Union. It tries to regulate prices by regulating production.
 - ▶ Nixon encouraged allies to increase role in policing their regions.
 - ▶ Kissinger argued for financing of oil imports with weapon exports.
 - ▶ Allowed shah to expand reach to protect Iran's interests and assist rebels

- ▶ Military expenditures and oil exports tied Iran to industrial countries of West and Japan.
 - ▶ Consequences of oil revenues paved way for Islamic Revolution.
 - ▶ Programs widened class and regional divisions within dual society.
 - ▶ Raised public expectations that were not met
 - ▶ Made rentier state independent of society
 - Iran needs new deep-drilling technology that can be found only in the West.
 - This explains why regime is now eager to attract foreign investment and rejoin world economy.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

□ Iran in the Global Economy (Cont' d)

- Oil is the main engine driving state development and social modernization; thus Iran has been able to avoid resource curse.
- **Resource curse**—the concept that revenue derived from abundant natural resources, such as oil, often bring unforeseen ailments to countries.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY MAKING

❑ Organization of the State

- ▶ Iran's political system is unique.
 - ▶ Mixes theocracy and democracy
 - ▶ Theocracy because religious clergy fill powerful political positions
 - ▶ Democratic because high officials are directly elected
- ▶ Islamic constitution drawn up by Assembly of Religious Experts after 1979 revolution
 - ▶ Amended 1989 by Council for the Revision of the Constitution
 - ▶ Mixture of theocracy and democracy
 - ▶ Preamble affirms belief in God, Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad, Twelve Imams, return of Hidden Imam, and doctrine of jurist's guardianship.
 - ▶ Declares that laws, institutions, state organizations must conform to "divine principles"

□ The Executive

○ The Leader and Major Organizations of Clerical Power

- ▶ Constitution named Khomeini to be Leader for life.
 - Further described him as Leader of the Revolution, Founder of the Islamic Republic ,and Imam of Muslim community
 - If no single leader named after his death, then authority would pass to council of senior clerics.
 - Senior clerics were not trusted, so middle-ranking cleric, Ali Khamenei, was elected.
- ▶ Islamic Republic described as regime of ayatollahs
 - Really regime of middle-ranking *hojar al-Islams*

▶ **Assembly of Experts**

- ▶ Elected to eight-year terms by the general public
- ▶ Members must have advanced seminary degrees
- ▶ Have power to dismiss Leader if he is found “mentally incapable”
- ▶ Has to meet once a year; deliberations are closed
- ▶ Second chamber to *Majles*.

The Government Executive

Presidential office

- ▶ Highest official after Leader
- ▶ Elected every four years with two-term limit
 - ▶ If no majority in first round, then run-off between two candidates with most votes
 - Qualifications
- ▶ Must be pious Shi'i,
- ▶ Must be faithful to principles of Islamic Republic,
- ▶ Must be Iranian origin,
- ▶ Between 25 and 75
- ▶ Demonstrate administrative capabilities

Presidential Powers:

- ▶ Conduct countries internal and external policies
 - ▶ Includes signing all international treaties, laws, and agreements
- ▶ Chair the National Security Council
- ▶ Draw up the annual budget, supervise economic matters, chair the state planning and budget organization
- ▶ Propose legislation to the Majles
- ▶ Appoint cabinet ministers
 - ▶ Parliamentary stipulation that minister of intelligence (state security agency) must be from the ranks of the clergy
- ▶ Other senior officials
 - ▶ Iran has no single vice president; president selects “presidential deputies”

The Bureaucracy

President heads bureaucracy.

- ▶ Ministries of Culture and Islamic Guidance
 - ▶ Controls media and enforces public conduct
 - ▶ Intelligence (replaced SAVAK)
- ▶ Heavy Industries
 - ▶ Manages nationalized factories
- ▶ Reconstruction
 - ▶ Mission is to build bridges, roads, schools, libraries and mosques
- ▶ Clergy dominate bureaucracy, as well.
 - ▶ Monopolize most sensitive ministries and allocate others to relatives and protégés who appear to be highly trained technocrats, but are powerless

Other State Institutions

The Judiciary

- ▶ All laws must conform to *shari'a*.
 - ▶ Enacted penal code, Retribution Law, based on narrow reading of *shari'a*
 - ▶ Modern educated lawyers resigned charging contradiction of United Nations Charter on Human Rights
 - ▶ Division and unequal treatment of male/female and Muslim/non-Muslim
 - ▶ Practical experience led regime to broaden interpretation of *shari'a*.
 - Permitted banks the giving and taking of interest

The Military

- ▶ Clergy control Iran's armed forces.
 - ▶ Includes regular army, Revolutionary Guard, and Mobilization of the Oppressed (*Basej-e Mostazafin*) volunteer militia
- ▶ Leader is commander-in-chief and makes all key military appointments.
 - ▶ Also places chaplains in military units to watch over officers
- ▶ Top ranks of military purged immediately after revolution.
 - ▶ Built Revolutionary Guards as parallel force to regular armed forces

REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Elections

- ▶ Free elections promised by constitution
 - ▶ In practice, elections range from relatively free to controlled.
 - ▶ Currently free of voter intimidation but choice highly constrained
 - ▶ Main obstacle in Guardian Council, with its power to approve candidates
 - ▶ In 2004 reformers withdrew from active politics in deference to “national danger.”
- ▶ Resulted in crisis of legitimacy
 - ▶ 2009 election results unclear due to interference of government in tallying the vote

ELECTORATE

Of a total population of about 65 million, more than 46 million people over 18 are eligible to vote. Young people constitute a large part of the electorate with about 50% of voters being under 30.



Voter turnout hit a record high at 80% in the 1997 elections which delivered a landslide victory for reformist President Mohammad Khatami. Women and young people were key to the vote.

But with disillusionment growing, only about 60% of the electorate voted in the final round of the 2005 election which brought hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power.

IRANIAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION

□ Iranian Politics in Comparative Perspective

- ▶ Iran unlike most developing countries
 - ▶ Old state with many institutions dating back to ancient times
 - ▶ Religion that links elite with the masses, cities with villages, government with citizenry
 - ▶ Shi'ism and Iranian identity provides strong national identity.
- ▶ Democratic idea constrained by theocracy
 - ▶ Islam can be interpreted to support or oppose democracy
 - ▶ Theocracy originates from concept of jurist's guardianship
 - ▶ Failure of democracy more a product of group of clerics
- ▶ Islamic Republic politics divided over how to govern economy
 - ▶ Rising economic demands, fluctuating petroleum revenues, oil wells may run dry

Questions on the Making of Modern Iran

1. Discuss the role of the Supreme Leader. Does this institution remain the dominant political player in the country? Why/Why not?
2. Some scholars posit that democracy and Islam are incompatible. Does Iran prove or disprove this argument? In your response, note the authoritarian features of the theocratic regime as well as the concessions it has made to democracy. Moreover, address whether the nondemocratic elements of the regime are a result of features unique to Iran.
3. The Shah of Iran undertook many changes in Iranian society. **Research and find those changes in the net.** First, briefly describe these changes. Second, assess both the negative and positive impacts that these changes had on the country. Finally, evaluate which of these changes led to his downfall.
4. The 1979 Islamic Revolution has been variously described as a religious one and a nationalistic one. First, describe both the religious and nationalistic elements of the revolution. Next, frame an argument as to whether the revolution was predominately religious or nationalistic or a mixture of both.
5. Compare and contrast Iran's reformers and conservatives. How do the beliefs of these two groups compare to one another? What has been their impact upon Iranian politics?
6. Discuss the negative and positive impact of oil upon Iran. Note both the economic and political impacts as well as the domestic and international effects in your discussion.