

IRAN



QUICK FACTS

- Iran is twice the size of Turkey with a population of 65 million
- Ethnic Persians constitute 51% of the population, followed by Azeri (24%), Gilaki and Mazandaran (people living in Caspian Sea provinces – 8%), Kurdish (7%) and other (10%) ethnic groups
- It is the fourth biggest exporter of oil; however, income per capita is slightly lower than that of Turkey - \$8,700
- Iran is the 130th country in the world in terms of life expectancy at birth – Turkey is 104th out of 222

HISTORY

- Iran (Persia) has been invaded many times throughout its history:
Greeks, Arabs, Seljuk Turks, and Mongols
- Arab conquest was important since it introduced Islam to Iran
- Shia Safavid (Turkic) dynasty came into power in the 16th century and developed a distinct Iranian identity

SUNNI vs SHIA

- Nearly 20% of world's Muslims belong to a minority branch called Shia
- The reason for split between Sunni vs. Shia is the conflict about the true successor of Muhammad.
- Shias believe that Prophet's cousin Ali is true successor (both himself and his son Hussein are assassinated)
- Shia is the state religion only in Iran

CITY OF QOM

- Qom is considered to be a holy city in Shia Islam, being the site of the shrine of Fatema Masuma (the sister of Imam Ali Reza), considered to be a Muslim “saint”
- The city is also the largest center for Shia scholarship in the world and a significant destination of pilgrimage



Western Penetration

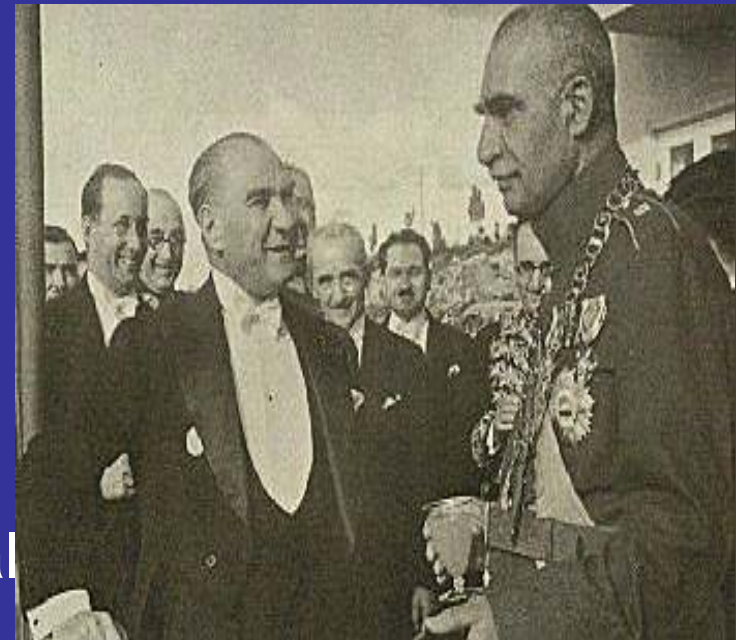
- Afghan invaders ended the Safavid dynasty in 18th century
- Following the ensued chaos, Britain and Russia became dominant powers in Persia and put it into a semicolonial status
- The Constitutional Revolution of 1906/1907 introduced Persia's first constitution and elected parliament, *Majlis*, only to be shut down one year later

Pahlavi Dynasty

- An illiterate cavalry officer, Reza Pahlavi, seized power in 1925, starting Pahlavi dynasty that lasted until 1979 Islamic Revolution
- Reza Shah was nationalistic and considered to be a *modernizing tyrant*
- He strengthened the army, replaced Islamic courts with Western-type civil courts, created European-type civil service, ordered Western dress to society
- Opponents were not tolerated

Atatürk vs. Reza Shah

- In 1920s, Atatürk and Reza Shah were trying to modernize their countries from above
- Both were secular, nationalistic military officers who had a statist view in economy and pushed education, women's rights, Western clothing
- The key difference: Atatürk created some lasting, representative political institutions, Reza Shah did not.
- As a result, Turkish reforms are relatively long-lived. In Iran the Islamic revolution scrapped them.



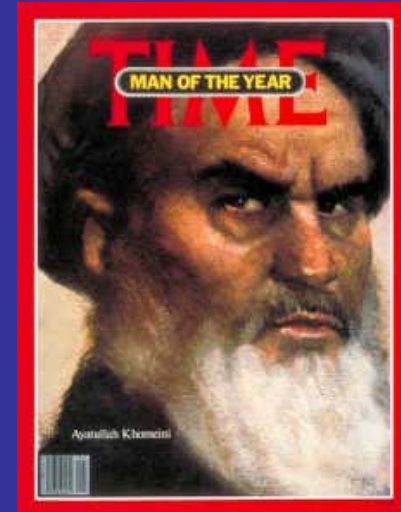
- Which factors can help to explain why Atatürk was more successful than Pahlavi?

End of Pahlavi Dynasty

- CIA-helped coup overthrew the nationalist government of Mossadeq, who nationalised oil companies, and restored the Shah in 1953
- The Shah governed Iran by means of secret police, the SAVAK, and had the full support of the US government
- Under the Shah corruption flourished, Muslim clergy alienated, oil revenues inappropriately spent on military
- Many Iranians began to oppose the Shah

Islamic Revolution of 1979

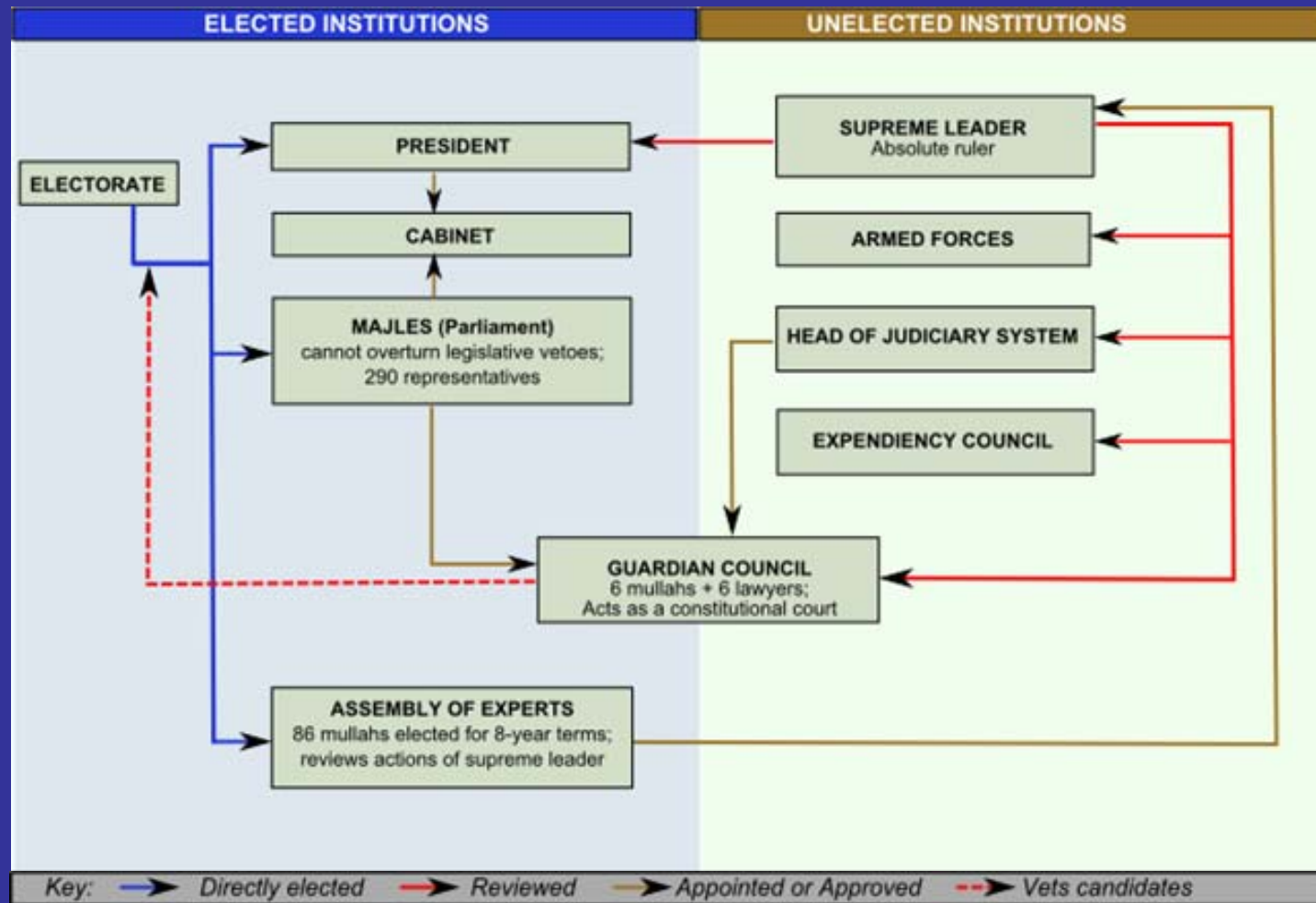
- In the late 1970s, discontent in Iran from both seculars and Islamic clerics grew tremendously
- Influenced by religious authority Ayatollah Khomeini, who was in exile, huge demonstrations were organized
- On January 16, 1979 the Shah was forced to leave the country and Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed as a result of a referendum



KEY INSTITUTIONS

- The *faqih*
 - The leading Islamic jurist, the religious chief. Khomeini was the first *faqih*, and successors are chosen by an Assembly of Experts
- Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis*)
 - A unicameral (one-house) legislature with deputies elected as a result of single-member district elections
- Council of Guardians
 - An institution combining features of an upper house, a supreme court, an electoral commission and a religious inquisition
 - Members are selected by the *faqih* and Iran's supreme court, High Council of Justice
- Expediency Council
 - Settles conflicts between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians
 - Additional powers are given in 2005 to oversee the president

KEY INSTITUTIONS



- Question: Which institutions in the diagram represent
 - Traditional-religious authority?
 - Modern-Rational authority?
 - Why?

KEY INSTITUTIONS

- Iran is predominantly a theocracy where the religious chief, the *faqih*, has much more power than the president and serves for life
- The *faqih* names the heads of all major state and religious organizations, controls the judiciary, armed forces, security police and intelligence agencies. He may also declare war.
- But it also has republican institutions utilizing rational sources of authority for the regime's legitimacy.
- Election rigging (cheating) in recent elections severely undermined this legitimacy.

KEY INSTITUTIONS

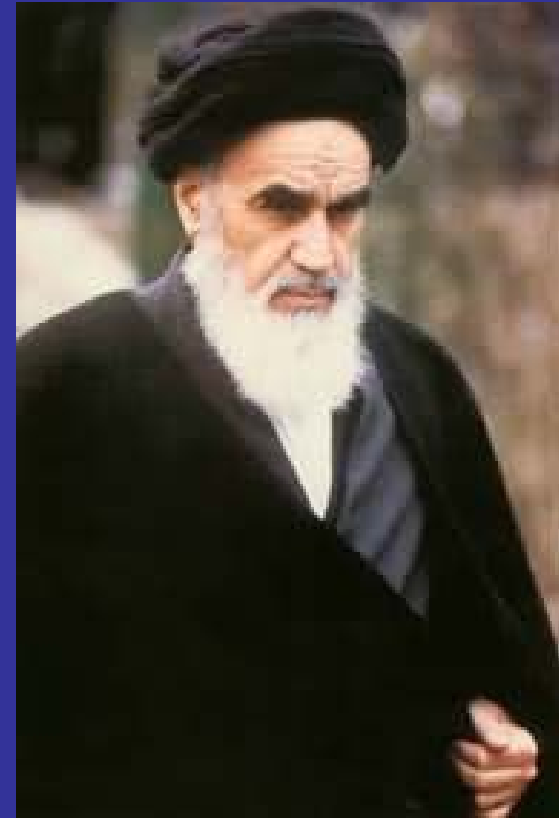
- Iran's legislature, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis*) consists of 290 deputies elected for four-year terms
- Although electoral balloting is considered to be fair and free, the Council of Guardians must approve all candidates and has the power to disqualify them without explanation
- The Council also examines *Majlis* bills to make sure their compliance with Islamic principles and can veto them to be corrected
- Thus, the Council has considerable power to block reformist candidates and bills (as it did in 2004 elections)

KEY INSTITUTIONS

- The government does not allow parties, however, observers see four main political groupings:
 - Radicals: Extreme supporters of the Islamic revolution. Socialist in economics and keen to keep out Western influences
 - Conservatives: Calmer than the radicals, yet they oppose any liberalization.
 - Reformists: Argue for less Islamic supervision of society, fewer powers for the Council of Guardians, privatization of state enterprises.
 - Liberals: Emphasize democracy and civil rights, totally free elections. A popular group among students

POLITICAL FIGURES

- **Grand Ayatullah Khomeini**
 - Shia Muslim cleric and political leader of the Revolution, Iran's founding *faqih* afterwards
 - Being a fierce critic of the Shah, he spent over 14 years in exile
 - While in exile, he set the course of the Revolution by cassette copies of his lectures
 - He returned to Iran shortly after the Shah left and assumed power



POLITICAL FIGURES

- **Ayatollah Rafsanjani**
 - Served as President of Iran from 1989 to 1997, lost elections of 2005 to Ahmadinejad
 - Now he is the Chairman of the Assembly of Experts and of the Expediency Council
 - He is considered as a pragmatic conservative having a moderate Islamist position domestically and internationally



POLITICAL FIGURES

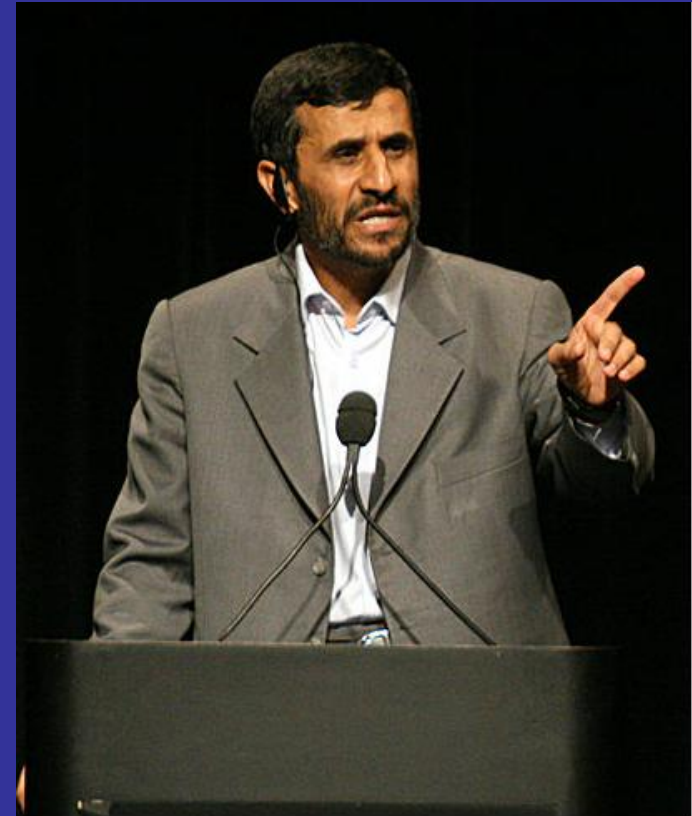
- **Mohammad Khatami**
 - President of Iran from 1997 to 2005
 - Regarded as Iran's first reformist President, having support of the women and youth
 - His policies of reform led to repeated clashes with the conservative Islamists and Khatami lost most of those clashes
 - During his Presidency, in Parliament elections of 2004, the Council of Guardians banned thousands of reformist candidates



POLITICAL FIGURES

- **MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD**

- President of Iran since 2005, after serving as the Mayor of Tehran
- Seen as an extremist seeking to restore the original Islamist and socialist goals of the Revolution during which he was a student leader
- Has the support of the poor due to his populist policies
- Known for his fierce comments about Israel, Holocaust and the U.S.



POLITICAL FIGURES

- **MIR HOSSEIN MOUSAVI**

Former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. Opposition leader and surprise presidential candidate of the reformers in the 2009 elections. He was an ally of Khomeini during the 1980s. He is an architect specializing in traditional Islamic architecture and served as the Editor-in-Chief of the Islamic Republic Party newspaper. He did not run for President in 1997 election because allegedly he was discouraged from doing so by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. He declined to run in 2005 elections as well.

POLITICAL CULTURE

- Iran's Islamic Revolution has proved that secularization does not always come with modernization
- Many secularist intellectuals seeking democracy initially supported the Revolution to oust the Shah; however, the Islamists have dumped the secular democrats after using them
- Nationalism was revived with the Iraq war and continues to be strong today

IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-1988)

- The war began when Iraq invaded Iran without warning due to border disputes and fear of a Shia insurgency.
- Both sides never advanced much, and at the end of the war borders were left unchanged
- The war has been noted for brutal fighting including the use of chemical weapons, missile bombings of cities and human wave attacks by Iran to clear fields of landmines



IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-1988)

- Iraq was supported by the U.S. and Persian Gulf countries
- It has been estimated the war claimed lives of a million Iranians and cost \$350 billion
- Iraq also have been greatly indebted to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to finance the war, one of the causes of the later invasion of Kuwait



POLITICAL CULTURE – Moderates vs. Islamists

- **Moderates want to...**
 - Shift power to *Majlis*
 - Permit many parties
 - Improve relations with West
 - Permit Western women's attire
 - Liberalize economy
- **Islamists want to...**
 - Preserve power of *faqih*
 - Ban non-Islamic parties
 - Keep distant from West
 - Keep Islamic attire
 - Continue statist economy

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

- Iran has an essentially statist economy: 60% of economy is controlled by state (mostly oil industry), 20% by *bonyads* (foundations originally set up to redistribute the wealth of Shah and his supporters), 20% in private hands.
- The Revolution, Iraq war, isolation from West and mismanagement hurt the economy: Per-capita GDP has barely reached pre-1979 levels, unemployment and poverty are worse than under the Shah
- The government is trying to alleviate economic problems by giving subsidized food and gasoline to all Iranians
- Moderates advocate abandoning statist economy in favor of a free-market capitalism; conservatives oppose this idea arguing that a statist, collectivist economy is the logical extension of Islam

FOREIGN POLICY

- Iran is thought to have strong influence on the Shia population especially in Iraq (concentrated in the South constituting 60% of population), Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.
- Troubled relations with the West: Isolation from the U.S. since the Revolution and from Western Europe since the initiation of nuclear program and explicit hostility towards Israel
- U.S. State Department has put Iran into the list of countries sponsoring terrorism along with Iraq, Syria and Libya.
- Iran is trying to overcome isolation by developing relations with Russia, India and China