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Country Fact Sheet IRAN December 2007

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Official name

Islamic Republic of Iran (*Jomhori-e Islami-e Irân*).

Geography

Iran is in western Asia, in the Middle East. It is bordered by Turkey and Iraq to the west and Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east; it is bordered by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south and Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan to the north. The country's total area is 1.65 million km². Iran's climate is mostly arid and semi-arid, with a humid rainforest zone along the Caspian coast. Iran has rugged mountain chains surrounding the Central Plateau. There are two large desert regions to the east of the Central Plateau. There are lowland areas along the Caspian, Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman coasts.

Population and density

Population: 65,397,521 people (mid-2007 estimate).

Density: 41.8 people per km² (mid-2005 estimate).

Principal cities and populations (mid-2005 estimates including suburbs)

Tehran (also spelled Teheran) (capital) 7,314,000; Mashad (also spelled Meshad) 2,134,000; Esfahan 1,535,000; Tabriz 1,387,000; Karaj 1,223,000; Shiraz 1,222,000; Qom 1,035,000.

Languages

Persian (Farsi) is the official language. It is spoken as a mother tongue by 60% of the population and as a second language by an additional 15%. Other languages spoken include Azeri Turkish and Turkic dialects (24%), Kurdish (7%), Luri (3%), Arabic (2%), and Balochi (2%).

Religions

Shia Islam (state religion) 89%, Sunni Islam 9 %, other religions including Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i 2%.

Ethnic groups

Persian 60%, Azeri 20%, Kurdish 7%, Lur 3%, Arab 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, Turkish tribal groups 2%, and non-Persian, non-Turkic groups such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Georgians 2%.

Demographics (2007 estimate unless otherwise indicated)

Population growth rate: 0.663%.

Infant mortality rate: 38.12 deaths/1,000 live births.

Life expectancy at birth: 70.56 years.

Fertility rate: 1.71 children born/woman.

Literacy: 83.5% of men and 70.4% of women over the age of 15 can read and write (2004 estimate).

Currency

Iranian Rial (IRR).

9,578.44 Iranian Rials = 1 Canadian dollar¹.

10 Rials = 1 Tomanⁱ.

National holidaysⁱⁱ

The Iranian calendar is a solar calendar which begins each year on the vernal equinox as determined by astronomical observations from Tehran. The Iranian year 1386 runs from 21 March 2007 to 19 March 2008 of the Gregorian calendar. The year 1387 runs from 20 March 2008 to 20 March 2009.

2007: 8 January (Eid-e Ghadir Khom), 29 January (Tassoua), 30 January (Ashoura), 11 February (Victory of the Islamic Revolution), 10 March (Arbaeen, also Arbain), 18 March (Demise of Prophet Mohammad), 20 March (Martyrdom of Imam Reza and Day of Oil Industry Nationalization), 21-24 March (Noruz, also Norouz – Iranian New Year), 1 April (Islamic Republic Day), 2 April (Thirteenth Day of New Year, Sizdah-bedar), 4 June (Death of Imam Khomeini), 5 June (1963 Uprising), 18 June (Martyrdom of Hazrat Fatemeh), 28 July (Birth of Imam Ali), 11 August (Prophet Mohammad receives his calling), 29 August (Birth of Imam Mahdi), 3 October (Martyrdom of Imam Ali), 13 October (Eid-e Fitr, end of Ramadan), 6 November (Martyrdom of Imam Jafar Sadeqh, also Sadeq), 20 December (Eid-e Ghorban, also Qorban, Feast of the Sacrifice), 29 December (Eid-e Ghadir Khom).

2008: 19 January (Ashoura), 11 February (Victory of the Islamic Revolution), 28 February (Arbaeen also Arbain), 8 March (Martyrdom of Imam Reza), 18 March (Demise of Prophet Mohammad), 19 March (Day of Oil Industry Nationalization), 20 to 23 March (Noruz also Norouz – Iranian New Year), 1 April (Islamic Republic Day), 2 April (Thirteenth Day of New Year, Sizdah-bedar), 4 June (Death of Imam Khomeini), 5 June (1963 Uprising), 8 June (Martyrdom of Hazrat Fatemeh), 18 July (Birth of Imam Ali), 30 July (Prophet Mohammad receives his calling), 19 August (Birth of Imam Mahdi), 23 September (Martyrdom of Imam Ali), 1 October (Eid-e Fitr, end of Ramadan), 27 October (Martyrdom Imam Jafar Sadeqh also Sadeq), 8 December (Eid-e Ghorban, also Qorban, Feast of the Sacrifice).

Head of state and government

The Supreme Leader (*Velayat-e Faqih* also written *Wali Faqih*), Ali Hoseini-Khamenei (since 4 June 1989) is head of state, Iran's religious leader and military leader. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad (also written Ahmadi-Nejad) is the head of government (since 3 August 2005). The first vice president is Parviz Davudi (since 11 September 2005).

Form of government

Iran is a theocratic republic guided by Islamic principles. The supreme leader holds most executive functions and is appointed for life by the Assembly of Experts (*Majli-e Khobregan*), an elected body of 86 religious scholars.

Legislative structure

Legislative powers are shared between the 290-member elected Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis-e Shura-e Islami*, generally known as the "Majlis" or "Majles") and the 12-member Council of Guardians (also called Council for the Protection of the Constitution). The supreme leader appoints six clerics to the Council of Guardians and the Majlis appoints six non-clerical lawyers from a list of nominees selected by the High Council of the Judiciary. The Council of Guardians vets candidates for the presidency, Majlis, and Assembly of Experts and also supervises national elections.

The Majlis (or National Assembly) is composed of 290 deputies elected by popular vote. Five seats are reserved for special representatives of officially recognized religious minorities: two for Armenian Christians and one each for Assyrian Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. All legislation passed by the Majlis is sent to the 12-member Council of Guardians to ensure that it

is in accordance with the constitution and Islamic law.

The Expediency Council (*Shura-ye Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam* also referred to as Council to Determine the Expediency of the Islamic Order) resolves legislative impasses between the Council of Guardians and the Majlis and acts as advisory body on national policy and constitutional issues for the supreme leader.

Administrative divisions

Iran's provinces are administered by governors appointed by the minister of the Interior. Provinces are divided into counties (*shahrestan*), districts and villages. City and village councils have been directly elected since 1999. Iran has 30 provinces (*ostan* – singular; *ostanha* – plural): Ardabil, Azarbayjan-e Gharbi, Azarbayjan-e Sharqi, Bushehr, Chahar Mahall va Bakhtiari, Esfahan, Fars, Gilan, Golestan, Hamadan, Hormozgan, Ilam, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khorasan-e Janubi, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khorasan-e Shemali, Khuzestan, Kohgiluyeh va Buyer Ahmad, Kordestan, Lorestan, Markazi, Mazandaran, Qazvin, Qom, Semnan, Sistan va Baluchestan, Tehran, Yazd, Zanjan.

Judicial system

Judges in Islamic Revolutionary Courts must use Islamic law to reach their verdicts. The constitution requires that the head of the judiciary be a cleric chosen by the supreme leader. In 2007, the head of the judiciary was Ayatollah Sayed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi. The Supreme Court has 33 branches, each of which is presided over by two judges. The two most active court systems are the traditional courts, which adjudicate civil and criminal offences, and the Islamic Revolutionary courts, which deal with suspected crimes against national security such as "anti-state activity" or "warring with God," as well as crimes involving narcotics, economic crimes and official corruption. The Special Clerical Court is outside the court system and overseen directly by the supreme leader. It deals with crimes committed by members of the clergy, such as "ideological offences." A military court investigates crimes connected with military or security duties. A press court hears complaints against publishers, editors, and writers.

Elections

Iran has universal suffrage and persons 18 years of age or over are eligible to vote. The 86 members of the Assembly of Experts are elected by popular vote for an eight-year term. The last elections were held on 15 December 2006 concurrently with municipal elections.

The 290 members of the Majlis are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The last election was held 20 February 2004 with a runoff held 7 May 2004. The results by type of party were: conservatives/Islamists 190, reformers 50, independents 43, and religious minorities 5. Sources did not identify the type of party holding the remaining 2 seats. The next election is expected to be held in February 2008.

The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term. The last election was held on 17 June 2005 with a two-candidate runoff on 24 June 2005. Mahmud Ahmadinejad was elected president with 62% of the vote. The next presidential election is expected in 2009. The constitution permits presidents to serve no more than two consecutive terms and one additional non-consecutive term.

Defence

In November 2006, the regular armed forces totalled an estimated 420,000 personnel:

Army: 350,000 (including 220,000 conscripts).

Navy: 18,000.

Air force: approximately 52,000.

There are 350,000 army reserves.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) are thought to total at least 125,000 men, and can draw upon volunteers of the *Basij* Resistance Force. The *Basij* is a volunteer paramilitary group, which officials claim has 11-20 million recruits. It is considered to be a unit of the Revolutionary Guard. The minimum age for recruitment to the *Basij* is 15 years.

There were also some 40,000 paramilitary forces under the command of the Ministry of the Interior.

Military service is compulsory for males at approximately 18 years of age and can be performed in the Iranian Armed Forces or the Revolutionary Guard corps. Compulsory military service is at least 18 months.

Defence expenditure for the Iranian year ending 20 March 2007 was budgeted at 61,200,000 million Iranian Rials.

Media

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and the press, but limits these rights. The penal code provides penalties for anyone who undertakes any form of "propaganda" against the state but does not define propaganda. The press law forbids censorship, but also forbids disseminating information that may damage the Islamic Republic or offend its leaders and religious authorities. It also subjects writers to prosecution for instigating crimes against the state or "insulting Islam."

The chief news agency is the state-controlled Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). Other domestic news agencies are the Fars News Agency (English and Persian), Iranian Quran News Agency (IQNA) and the Mehr News Agency (Persian and English). Several foreign news agencies are represented in Iran, including Agence France-Presse (AFP), Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (ANSA) from Italy, Reuters, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the New China News Agency (Xinhua), ITAR-TASS from Russia, Anadolu Ajansi from Turkey and Kyodo Tsushin from Japan.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which answers directly to the office of the Supreme Leader operates a comprehensive monopoly on television and radio over two networks and home-service radio broadcasting in a variety of languages. Although satellite dishes that receive foreign television broadcasts are forbidden, many citizens own them despite the risk of

confiscation and in spite of government attempts to block foreign satellite transmissions.

There were approximately 10.7 million television receivers in 2005. There were approximately 18 million Internet users in 2006.

Daily newspapers under direct supervision of the supreme leader include: *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan*. Daily newspapers otherwise connected to government include: *Hamshari* (owned by Tehran city council), *Iran* (connected to IRNA), *Iran Daily* (English, published by IRNA), and *Jam-e Jam* (English, Persian, French, linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting).

Other daily newspapers include *Jomhuri Islami*, *Ressallat* (also spelled *Resalat*), *Siasat-e-Ruz*, *Sharqh*, *Hambastegi Daily*, *Etemaad*, *Aftab-e Yazd*. Other English-language dailies include the *Tehran Times*.

United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and Country Rankⁱⁱⁱ

Value: 0.746/1 (2004).

Rank: 96 out of 177 countries (2004).

United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Country Rank^{iv}

Value: 0.736/1 (2004).

Rank: 74 out of 136 countries (2004).

Population below the national poverty line

Information not available.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2007 (CPI)^v

Score: 2.5/10 (2007).

Rank: 131 out of 180 countries surveyed (2007).

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)^{vi}

This information was not included in Transparency International's 2007 report.

[Information compiled from: BBC 18 July 2007; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2004; Europa 2007 2007, 2281-2313; Iran N.d.a; Iran N.d.b; Iran Chamber Society N.d.; PHW 2007 2007, 559- 570; TI 26 Sept. 2007; TI 7 Dec. 2006; UK 24 July 2006; UN 2006; US 20 Sept. 2007; US June 2007; US 6 Mar. 2007; US Mar. 2006; Xe.com 16 Nov. 2007]

ⁱ Although the *toman* or *tuman* no longer exists as a unit of currency, in daily life Iranians use this terminology to describe transactions. [\[back\]](#)

ⁱⁱ Some dates may vary by several days due to the different calendars used. [\[back\]](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are as follows: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low human development). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value. [\[back\]](#)

^{iv} The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women. [\[back\]](#)

^v The Transparency International CPI 2007 is calculated using data from 14 surveys of business people and 12 assessments from independent institutions. The data reflect the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts regarding the overall extent of corruption (frequency and/or size of bribes) in the public and political sectors. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (180). [\[back\]](#)

^{vi} The Transparency International GCB is a public opinion survey used to gauge people's perceptions of corruption within their own state. Scores range from 1 (not at all corrupt) to 5 (extremely corrupt). [\[back\]](#)




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