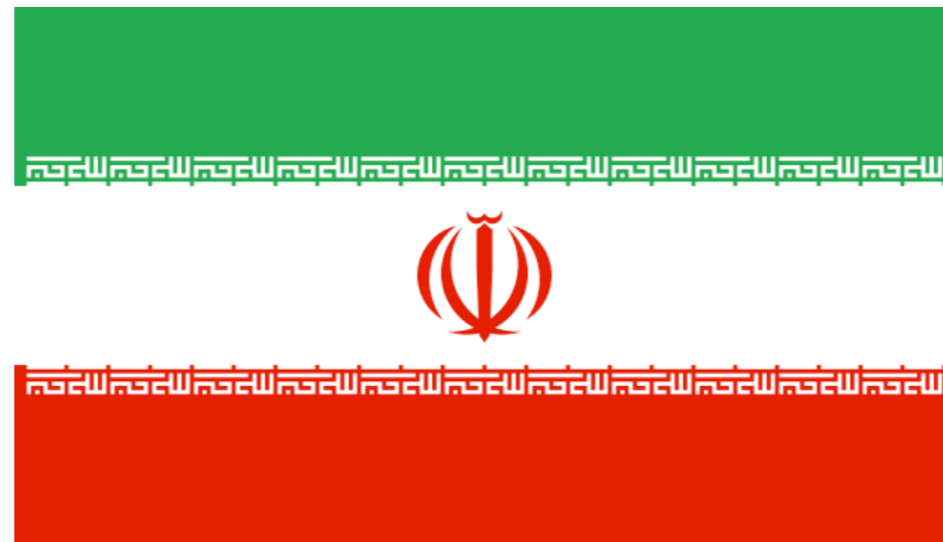


Islamic Republic of Iran

جمهوری اسلامی ایران



Political Science 175 (Clemens)

08 December 2015

Outline

- overview of Iran as a case in global politics
- political history of Iran
- political culture
- system of government and political institutions
- foreign policy and international relations of Iran
- contemporary global issues

Axis of Evil?



Hassan Rouhani @HassanRouhani · Sep 28

We support consolidation of power through people's vote rather than arms. We defend the rule of majority that respects rights of minorities.

← 67 ❤️ 103 ⋮

*Radical Islamist,
or pro-democracy?*

*Rogue state, or
regional power?*



Hassan Rouhani @HassanRouhani · Jul 14

To our neighbours: Do not be deceived by the propaganda of the warmongering Zionist regime. #Iran & its power will translate into your power

← 1.2K ❤️ 1.2K ⋮



Hassan Rouhani @HassanRouhani · Sep 28

We have repeatedly said that the only way to uproot terrorism in MidEast is by targeting its underlying social, economic and cultural causes

← 123 ❤️ 151 ⋮

*Terror sponsor, or
progressive ally?*

Basic Facts

- Area: 1.65 million sq. km
 - ▶ 2.5 times bigger than Texas
- Population: 81.8 million
 - ▶ 8.5 million in Tehran
 - ▶ 73% urban
 - ▶ 18.7% below poverty line
- GDP per Capita (PPP): \$17,100
- Avg. life expectancy: 71 years
- Infant mortality: 38 per 1,000



Political Overview



Green Movement protester during the riots against the stolen 2009 election (Tehran)

- Administration: Islamic Republic
 - theocracy (Shi'a Islam)
 - representative institutions subjected to control by nondemocratic institutions/actors
- Freedom House: 6.0 (Not Free)
 - weak political rights: unelected institutions can veto candidates, legislation
 - weak civil liberties: state-run media, lists on freedom of association and rule of law

Who Are Iranians?

- ethnic groups
 - ▶ Persian (61%) - Farsi is official state language
 - ▶ Azeri (16%), Kurdish (10%)
 - ▶ many smaller groups, including Arab and Turkic tribes
- religion
 - ▶ Shi'a Muslim (89%)
 - ▶ Sunni Muslim (9%)
 - ▶ small Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Baha'i



Note the location of the Azeri and Sunni Kurd minorities, which violently resist state control

Persia: Age of Empires

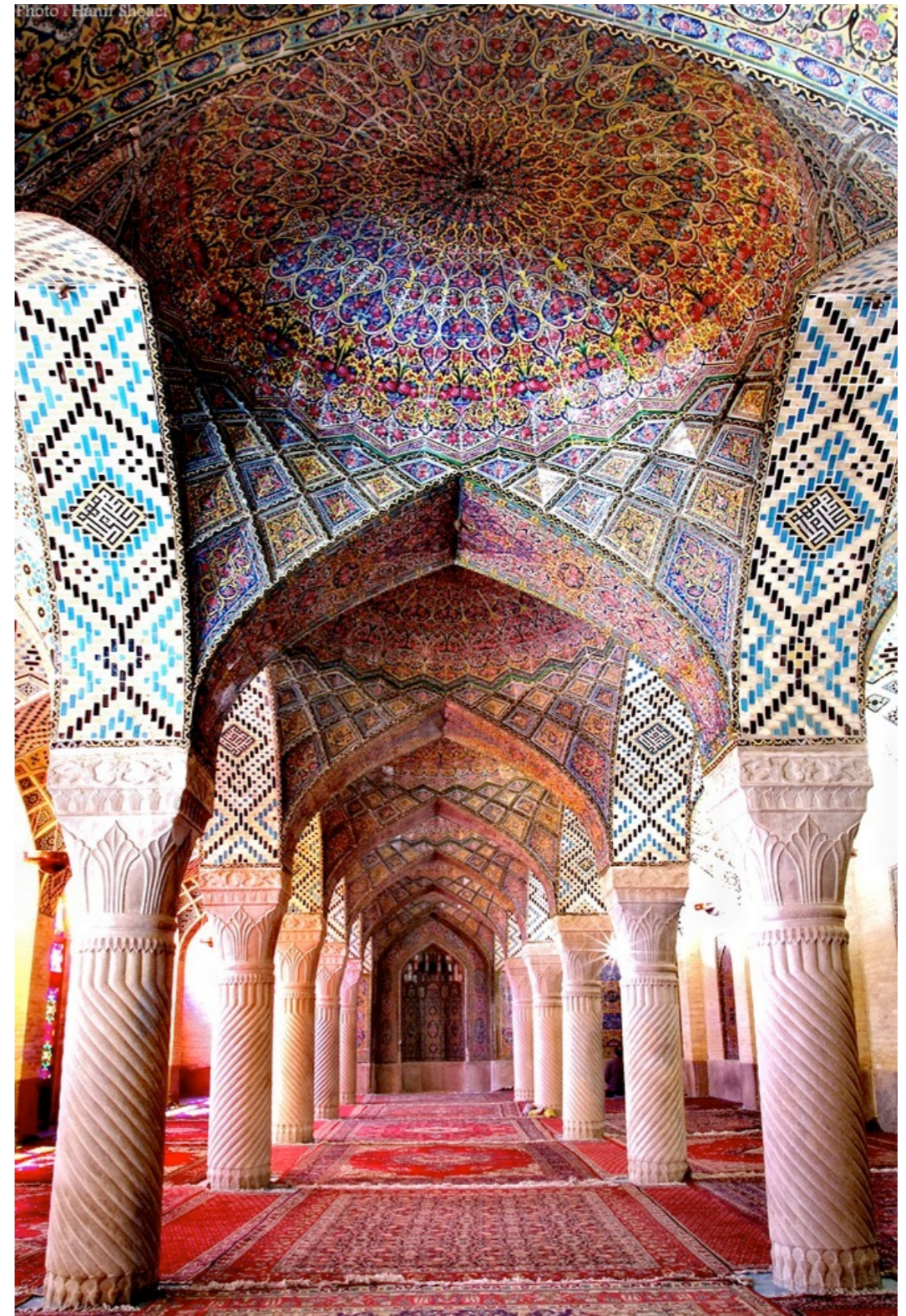
- first Persian empire (Achaemenian) controlled vast areas of the Middle East, North Africa, and Western Asia, defeated by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE
- second Persian empire (Sassanian) conquered parts of the Roman Empire and nearly defeated the Byzantines until Arab Muslims defeated Persia around 641 CE until the Mongols invaded in 1251 CE
 - ▶ this period was the “Persian enlightenment” with great cultural advances
- third Persian empire (Safavid) ruled 1501 to 1722 when Afghans conquered Iran
 - ▶ Shi’a Islam becomes the official state religion
 - ▶ the cultural and technological advances prior to the Mongol invasion were not revived
- decades later, the Turkic Qajars defeat other tribes and warlords to re-create most of the Safavid empire, but are poor rulers and suffer military losses and cannot control internal turmoil - their rule ends in 1925



Achaemenid-era ruins of Persepolis (near Shiraz)



Imam Reza Shrine (in Qom) was a pre-Islamic fortress, has survived for hundreds of years



Example of Sassanid-era design at Nasir al-Mulk mosque interior (near Shiraz)

Constitutions and Revolutions

- Iran was first non-western state to institute constitutional monarchy after the revolution of 1906
 - ▶ signals failure of Qajar rule, paves way for Pahlavi dynasty
 - ▶ institutes the *Majles* (parliament) as a concession to politically active *ulema*, merchants, and western-educated elites
- military commander Reza Khan Pahlavi consolidates power in 1926 and engages in extreme modernization revolution as new Shah
 - ▶ march towards modernity seeks to rebuild Iranian power through westernization, economic development
 - ▶ it works too well: through the 1940s political liberalization flourishes, weakening the Shah

Constitutions and Revolutions

- newly appointed Prime Minister Mosaddeq nationalizes the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951
 - ▶ CIA operatives force a coup d'état in 1953 and Mohammad-Reza Shah Palavi takes the throne; rolls back all liberalization and increases push for modernity
- Islamic Revolution 1979 ends 2,500 years of monarchic rule; creates Islamic Republic
 - ▶ after 1963 moderate and progressive constitutionalists were driven out, radical *ulema* and Islamists take their place leading the anti-monarchists
 - ▶ revolution supported by Islamists (progressive, leftist, radical), students and teachers, merchants, factory workers, public sector employees, and white collar workers

Contemporary Chaos

- the broad coalition of revolutionaries fell apart after 1979
 - ▶ the radicals “won” the revolution and exclude the more liberal elements of society
 - ▶ Khomeini and the radicals benefit from the U.S. embassy debacle and from Iraq invasion and war 1980-1988
- political turbulence is now the norm, and the death of Khomeini in 1989 does not help
 - ▶ voters approve reform package eliminating prime minister and consolidating executive power in the presidency under moderate Rafsanjani in 1989
 - ▶ reformist Khatami elected president in 1997 due to popular mobilization, but by 1999 political violence, severe rioting, and censorship had peaked

Contemporary Chaos

- conservatives consolidate power, Ahmadinejad elected president 2004
 - ▶ fear of U.S. invasion post-2003 played into the conservatives' hands
 - ▶ widespread corruption, inflation, and political violence escalate; in 2009 the conservatives steal the national election and Khamenei calls the result “a divine assessment”
 - ▶ the Green Movement protests were anti-regime but not really controlled by the reformist camp; the regime brutally reacted by arresting thousands, killing and injuring dozens
- by 2011 Khamenei was fed up with the corruption and insubordinate actions of Ahmadinejad's conservative faction
 - ▶ elections in 2012 brought conservatives loyal to the Supreme Leader back in control of parliament
 - ▶ in 2013 moderate Rouhani wins presidency in a landslide and embarks on a series of reforms and rapprochement with the west, including the U.S.

they killed my brother because he asked
"where's my vote"



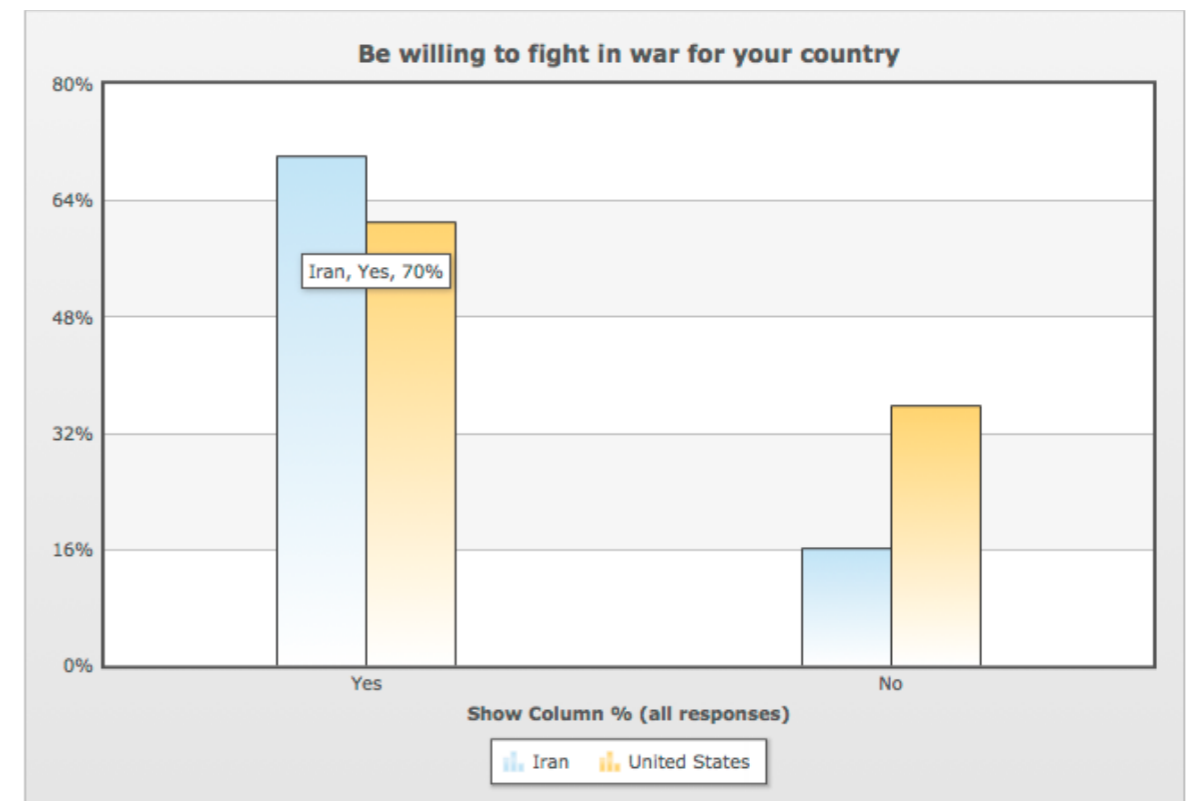
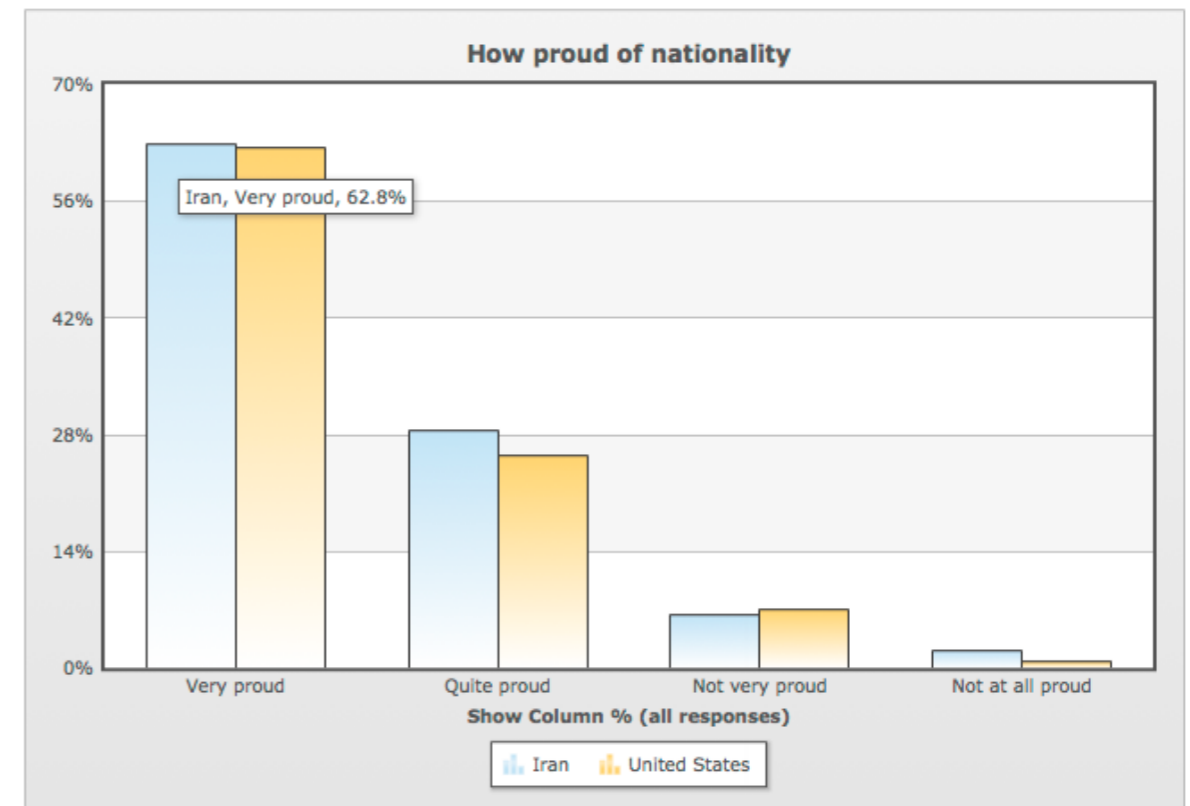
protesters move towards Azadi Tower, Tehran



national police suppress protests following the beating of the opposition leader's son by regime militiamen (*basji*)

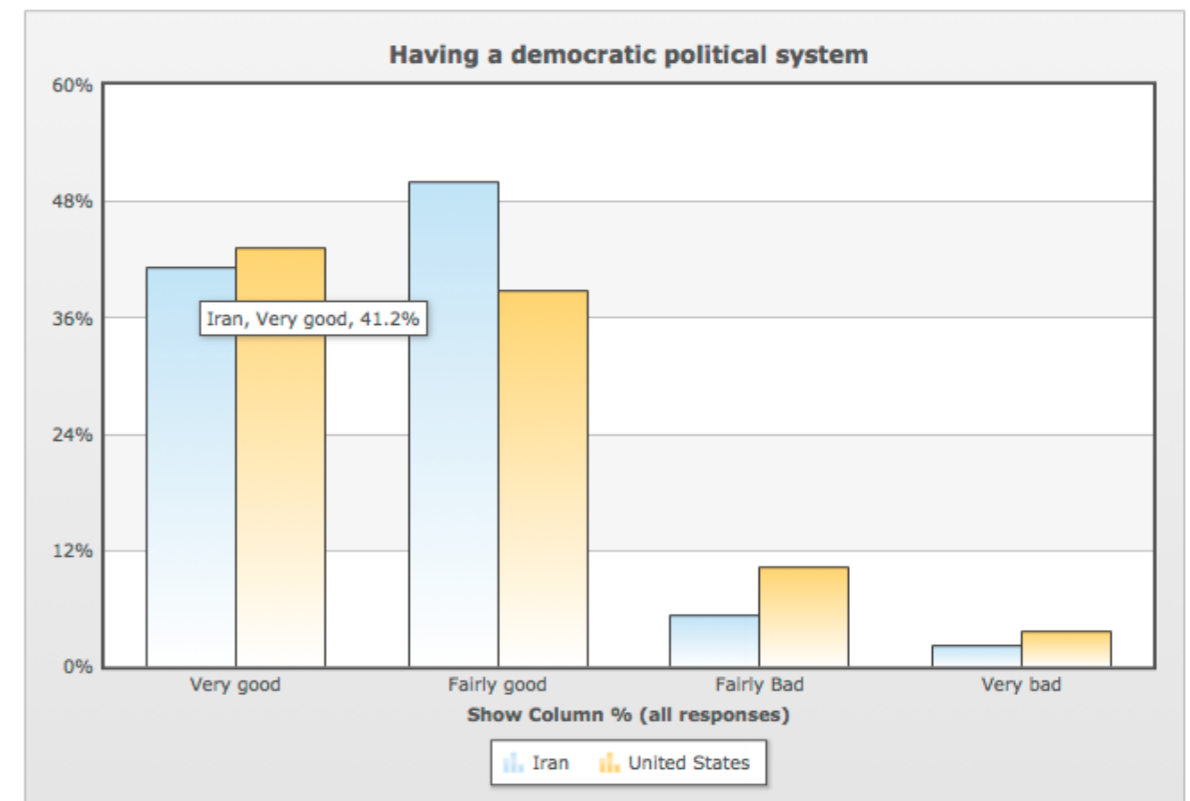
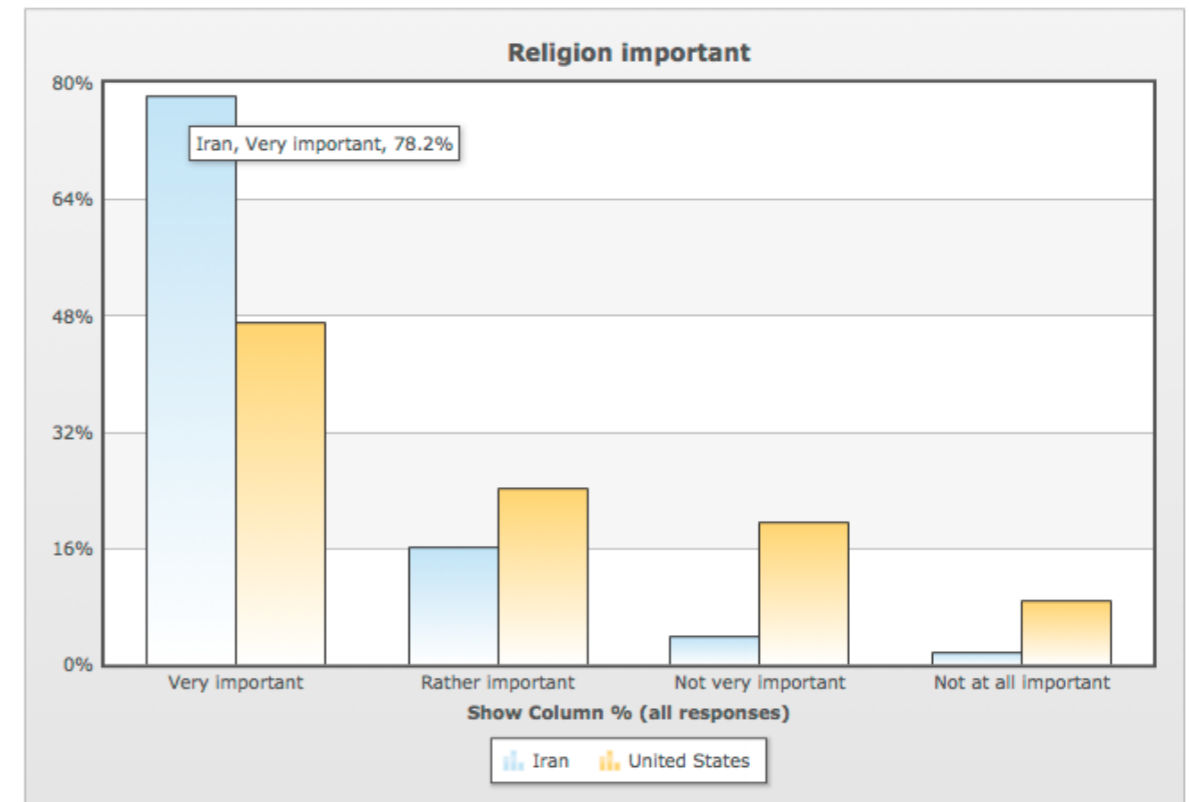
Political Culture

- Iran's history has created a deeply nationalistic culture which has at times been prone to violence and rhetoric
 - ▶ bloody revolutions and popular anti-regime sentiments
 - ▶ deep resentment of most Sunni Arab states, the U.S. and Israel
- memories of vast empires and pride of distinctive culture and desire to “make Iran great again”
- suspicion of foreign intervention and meddling by U.S. and Arab states
- willingness to sacrifice for Iran, also a product of Shi'a religious tendencies

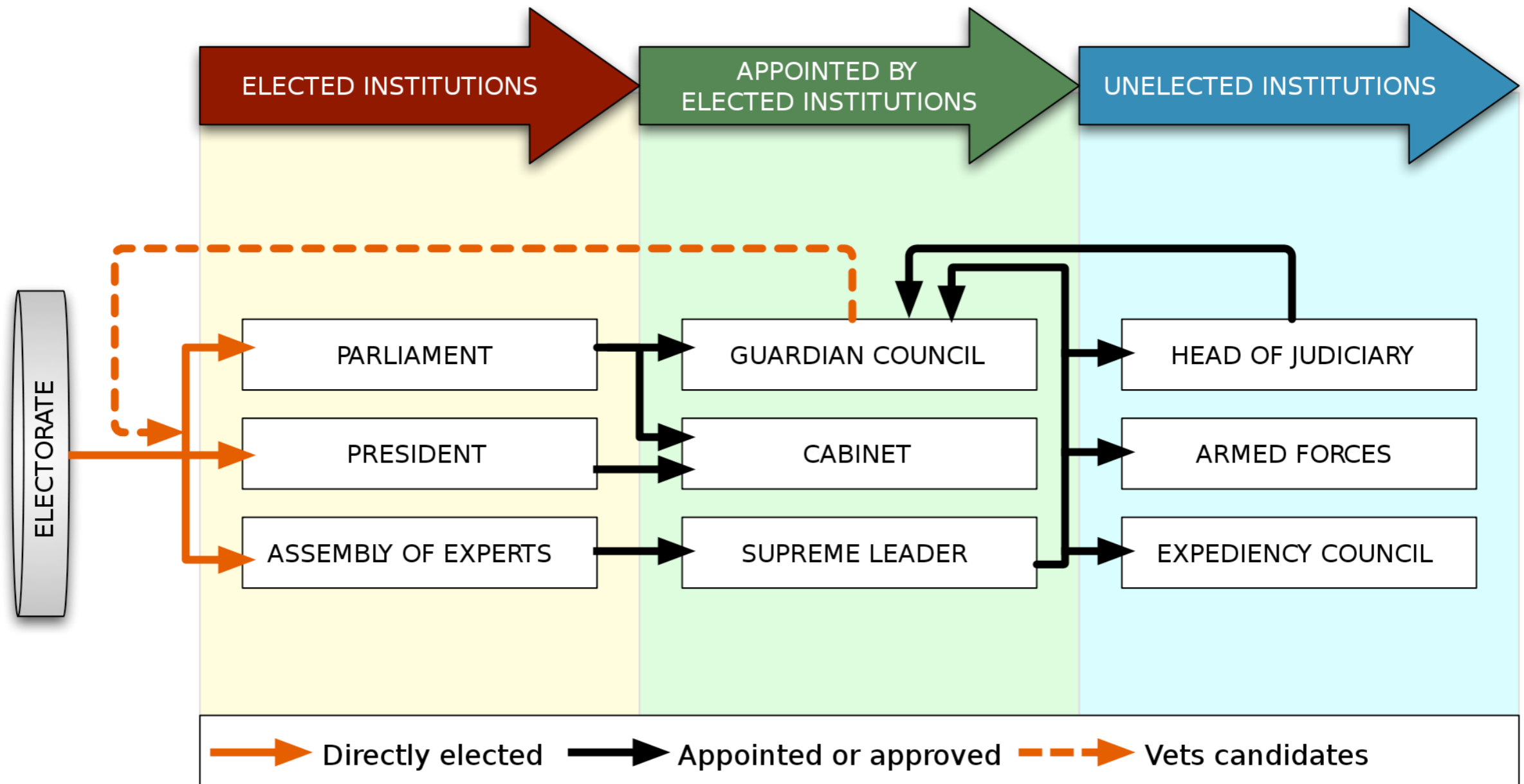


Political Culture

- Iran's "Twelver" Shi'a religion is not incompatible with politics like Sunni-based "Wahhubbism" (Saudi, al-Qaeda, ISIS)
- martyrdom is popular with Shi'a, and political revolution is seen as a just cause
- political pluralism is a natural tendency since Shi'a support multiple religious leaders and ideals like consensus, inclusiveness, and legalism
- both religion and politics are very important to Iranians, as is having a democratic political system



System of Government



The Big Three



Ayatollah
Ruhollah Khomeini

President
Hassan Rouhani

Ayatollah
Ali Khamenei

Executive Institutions

- Head of state/government: Supreme Leader
 - appointed for life by Assembly of Leadership Experts, *ulema* who are popularly elected by universal suffrage
 - the Leader is the highest political authority and source of religious emulation
 - sets domestic and foreign policy agendas; appoints key figures like the Head of Judiciary; appoints own advisory Expediency Council
- Head of government: President
 - elected by universal suffrage every four years with two term limit; must be male and Twelver Shi'a
 - signs bills into law, appoints cabinet, handles executive functions not preempted by the Leader

Legislative Institutions

- parliament (*majles*): 290 member unicameral body elected by universal suffrage for four year terms
 - ▶ members must be Muslim, but five seats are reserved to represent Christians (3), Jews (1), and Zoroastrians (1); women serve as MPs
 - ▶ has restrained lawmaking capability (by the Council of Guardians)
 - ▶ Khomeini originally envisioned the *majles* as relatively unimportant since Islamic law covers most aspects of society but the legislature has been active “updating” Islamic law for governing a modern state
- Council of Guardians: six *ulema* appointed by the Leader and six Islamic lawyers appointed by the Head of Judiciary and confirmed by the *majles*
 - ▶ enforces the preeminence of Islamic law and the Constitution over new legislative initiatives; ability to vet candidates
- disagreements between these two bodies are settled by the Expediency Council

Foreign Policy

- Iran's foreign policy is a product of Iranian history, complicated regional issues, and who controls the process (Supreme Leader)
 - ▶ Iran distrusts the west, especially the U.S. and Britain, which have meddled in its internal politics several times before 1979
 - ▶ Iran has sought to destabilize non-Shi'a regimes in neighboring states by supporting separatists and Hizbollah, making for tense relations with other states in the region
 - ▶ currently supports the pro-Assad regime forces in the Syrian conflict and has been friendly with Russia and China
- reformist elected officials have found it impossible to steer foreign policy towards normalizing relations with the west until recently

International Relations

- Iran sees itself as an important regional power since it is the only Islamic Republic, the only Shi'a majority state, and was not colonized
 - long standing rivalry with Iraq; seeks to usurp Saudi position in Muslim world; militantly anti-Israeli; large ethnic minorities lead to tense relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan
- since the 1979 revolution Iran has been confrontational with its former ally, the U.S., and has suffered severe economic sanctions since
 - in the 1980s Iran desperately needed regional allies, and bought U.S. weapons from Israel for defense against Iraq (Iran-Contra Affair) which ended up alienating it from all parties involved
- tense relations and porous borders with Afghanistan and Turkey have made Iran a trafficking hotspot for sex slaves, money, and drugs (usually heroin)

Aspiring Regional Power

- Iran sought to export its revolution to Shi'a groups in Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain in the 1980s
 - ▶ all this has done is destabilize neighbors, created diplomatic tensions; increased international perception it is a rogue state
- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (not regular forces) have been deployed in Syria and have trained militia to support the pro-Assad regime military forces
 - ▶ Iran is “betting” on the winner in Syria; drawing closer to Russia to bolster support for its regional agenda
- use of strategies in dealing with neighbors and the west; terrorism support and nuclear enrichment activities (low cost) instead of direct confrontation (high cost, Iraq)

Terrorism

- Iran has been on the U.S. Department of State's list of state terror sponsors since 1984 (means they fund and inform terrorist groups)
 - ▶ openly support Hizbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine
 - ▶ covertly supported various Shi'a and Islamist actions against secular, Israeli, or western targets in the region
- low cost relative to open war, low risk of retaliation by U.S. military or allies, but very high risk of retaliation by Sunni militant groups like the Kurds - "vicious cycle"
- after the 9/11 Iranian officials publicly denounced the attacks and provided support and intelligence for the Afghanistan invasion until the "axis of evil" speech by GW Bush in 2003

Nuclear Controversy

- Iran is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and received technology assistance for its domestic program
- it was widely held that advanced enrichment was intended to spur weapons development
- U.S. allies in the region (Israel) push for military response



Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in 2012 publicly declared at a UN hearing that Iran was a year away from a nuclear bomb; Israeli intelligence later contradicted his statement

2015 Nuclear Deal

- in July 2015 Iran and all major powers signed the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* to alter the Iranian nuclear program
- this agreement was a product of years of negotiations, and is supported by the P5+1 (China, Russia, France, Britain, U.S. and Germany)
 - ▶ International Atomic Energy Association will monitor to ensure Iran is no longer enriching uranium to levels that could be weaponized
 - ▶ the west will relax the economic sanctions on Iran, which is Rouhani's ideal outcome for increasing economic development
- opponents argue that this only rewards cheating on the NPT and that monitoring is ineffective; military intervention was not supported by the international community

— *Thanks* —

Additional information on Iran and international relations

- ▶ Gasiorowski, M. (2014). “Islamic Republic of Iran.” In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, Mark Gasiorowski eds. 7th Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
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- ▶ Milani, Mohsen M. (2011). “Iran’s Strategies and Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq.” In *Iraq: Its Neighbors and the United States*, Barkley, Lasensky, and Marr eds. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.