

Iran

If YOU lived there...

You are a student in Tehran, the capital of Iran. In school, you are taught that the way of life in the West—countries of Europe and the Americas—is bad. News reports and newspapers are filled with negative propaganda about Western countries. Yet you know that some of your friends secretly listen to Western popular music and watch American television programs that they catch using illegal satellite dishes at home. This makes you very curious about Western countries.

What would you like to know about life in other countries?

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Iran's history includes great empires and an Islamic republic.
2. In Iran today, Islamic religious leaders restrict the rights of most Iranians.

The Big Idea

Islam is a huge influence on government and daily life in Iran.

Key Terms and Places

shah, p. 235

revolution, p. 235

Tehran, p. 235

theocracy, p. 236

TAKING NOTES

As you read, take notes on Iran's history and life in the country today. Use the chart below to organize your notes.

Iran	
History	Today

BUILDING BACKGROUND Like Iraqis, Iranians have a proud and ancient history. While most people living in the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq are Arabs, the majority of Iranians are Persian. They have a distinct culture and language.

History

The early history of the country we now call Iran includes the Persian Empire and a series of Muslim empires. Iran's recent history includes an Islamic revolution. Today Iran is an Islamic republic, which limits the rights of many Iranians.

Persian Empire

Beginning in the 500s BC, the Persian Empire ruled the region around present-day Iran. For centuries Persia was a great center of art and learning. The Persian Empire was known for its spectacular paintings, carpets, metalwork, and architecture. In the empire's capital, Persepolis, walls and statues throughout the city glittered with gold, silver, and precious jewels.

The Persian Empire was later conquered by several Muslim empires. Muslims converted the Persians to Islam, but most people retained their Persian culture. They built beautiful mosques with colorful tiles and large domes.

The Shah and Islamic Revolution

In 1921 an Iranian military officer took power and encouraged change in Iran's government. He claimed the old Persian title of **shah, or king**. In 1941 the shah's son took control. This shah became an ally of the United States and Great Britain and tried to modernize Iran. His programs were unpopular with many Iranians.

In 1978 Iranians began a revolution. **A revolution is a drastic change in a country's government and way of life.** By 1979, Iranians overthrew the shah and set up an Islamic republic. This type of government follows strict Islamic law.

Soon after Iran's Islamic Revolution began, relations with the United States broke down. A mob of students attacked the U.S. Embassy in Iran's capital, **Tehran**. With the approval of Iran's government, the students took Americans working at the embassy hostage. More than 50 Americans were held by force for over a year.

READING CHECK **Drawing Conclusions** How did Iran's history lead to the Islamic Revolution?

Iran Today

Iranian culture differs from many other cultures of Southwest Asia. Unlike most of the Arab peoples living in the region, more than half of all Iranians are Persian. They speak Farsi, the Persian language.

People and Culture

With about 68 million people, Iran has one of the largest populations in Southwest Asia. Iran's population is very young. Over 35 million Iranians are younger than 25 years old. It is also ethnically diverse. Iranian ethnic groups other than the Persian majority include Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, and Turks.

Most Iranians belong to the Shia branch of Islam. Only about 10 percent are Sunni Muslim. The rest of Iran's people practice Christianity, Judaism, or other religions.

In addition to the Islamic holy days, Iranians celebrate Nowruz—the Persian New Year. Iranians tend to spend this holiday outdoors. As a part of this celebration, they display goldfish in their homes to symbolize life.

FOCUS ON READING

Re-read the paragraphs under The Shah and Islamic Revolution to better understand important parts of Iran's recent history.

Yazd, Iran

In the ancient city of Yazd, spectacular tilework covers the dome of an Islamic mausoleum built in the 1300s.

Iranian culture also includes close-knit families and respect for elders. Most family gatherings in Iran are centered around Persian food, which includes rice, bread, vegetables, fruits, lamb, and tea.

Economy and Government

Huge oil reserves, which are among the largest in the world, make Iran a wealthy country. In addition to oil, the production of beautiful woven carpets contributes to

Iran's economy. The country's strong agricultural sector employs nearly one-third of the Iranian workforce.

The current government of Iran is a **theocracy**—a government ruled by religious leaders. These religious leaders, or *ayatollahs*, control Iran's government. The head of the *ayatollahs*, or supreme leader, has unlimited power. Even though religious leaders control Iran, its government has an elected president and parliament.

Life in Iran and the United States

Iran

Daily Life

- An Iranian woman has to cover her head and most of her body with clothing in public.
- Iranians are forbidden to view most Western Web sites, and Internet use is monitored by the government.
- Boys and girls have separate schools, and they can not be alone with each other without adult supervision.

Government

- Iran is a theocracy.
- A supreme religious leader rules Iran.
- Only candidates approved by the government can run for political office.

Basic Rights

- Freedom of speech, religion, and the press is limited.



Iranian teenagers can shop for computers, but a girl must wear clothing that covers most of her body.

United States

Daily Life

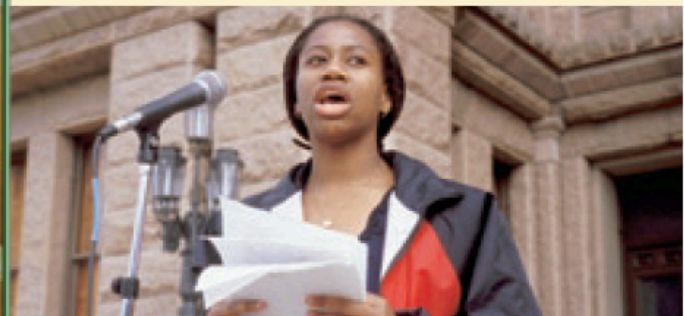
- Americans are free to wear any type of clothing.
- Americans are free to surf the Internet and view most Web sites.
- Boys and girls can attend the same school.

Government

- The United States is a democracy.
- A president is the leader of our country.
- Any U.S. citizen can run for political office.

Basic Rights

- Freedom of speech, religion, and the press is allowed.



Unlike Iranians, Americans are free to speak in public. Here a teenager speaks on the steps of the Texas State Capitol in Austin.

Contrasting In what ways does Iran's government differ from the U.S. government?

Iran's government has supported many hard-line policies. For example, it has called for the destruction of Israel. It has also supported terrorist groups in other countries. With a newly elected president in 1997, some signs indicated that Iran's government might adopt democratic reforms. This government attempted to improve Iran's economy and rights for women.

However, in 2005 Iranians moved away from democratic reforms by electing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (mah-MOOD ah-mah-di-nee-ZHAHD) president. He wants Iranians to follow strict Islamic law. After the election, a reporter asked the new president if he had any plans for reforms. He responded, "We did not have a revolution in order to have a democracy."

Iran's government and future as a peaceful nation remains uncertain. The United States and many European countries are concerned that Iran might try to build nuclear weapons. The U.S. and other nations see Iran's nuclear program as a threat to world security.

READING CHECK Analyzing What are Iran's government and people like?

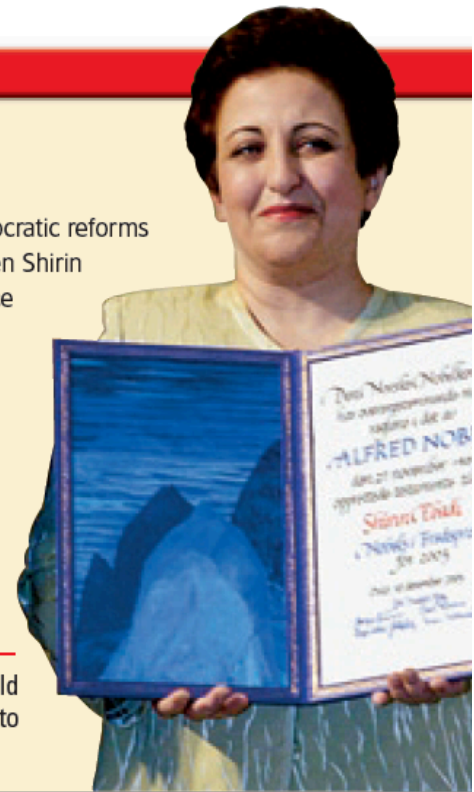
BIOGRAPHY

Shirin Ebadi

(1947–)

Iranians hoping for more democratic reforms were encouraged in 2003 when Shirin Ebadi received the Nobel Peace Prize. Ebadi is a lawyer, judge, and author. However, her work attempting to improve human rights in Iran has at times made her unpopular with the country's government leaders. Ebadi's goals include to attain better conditions for women, children, and refugees.

Drawing Inferences Why would Iran's government be opposed to Ebadi's human rights efforts?



SUMMARY AND PREVIEW In this section you learned about Iran's history, people, culture, economy, and government. In the next chapter, you will learn about the countries of Central Asia that lie to the north and east of Iran.

Section 4 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP9

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Define** What is a **revolution**?
 - Explain** What was the Persian Empire known for?
 - Elaborate** What changes were made in Iran after the Islamic Revolution?
- Recall** What kind of leaders have authority over their people in a **theocracy**?
 - Compare** In what ways does Iran's culture differ from cultures in other countries of South-west Asia?
 - Predict** How do you think the United States and other nations will deal with Iran's nuclear weapons program?

Critical Thinking

- Finding Main Ideas** Use your notes on Iran today to fill in this diagram with the main ideas of Iran's people, culture, economy, and government.



FOCUS ON WRITING

- Writing about Iran** Record details about Iran in your log. What types of things would you see if you were traveling around Iran?