

# ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Continent: Asia

[Population](#): 85.0 million

[Life Expectancy \(at Birth\)](#): 77.3

[Governance System](#): Islamic Republic

Capital: Tehran

[Area](#): 1,628,760 km<sup>2</sup>

Major Languages: Farsi

[GDP \(2021\)](#): 231,548 US\$ millions

## **Select Global Rankings**

[Human Development Index](#): 76<sup>th</sup>

[Fragile States Index - Inverted](#): 141<sup>st</sup>

[Soft Power 30 rank](#): NR

[Human Freedom Index](#): 160<sup>th</sup>

[World Happiness Ranking](#): 110<sup>th</sup>

[Good Country Index](#): 138<sup>th</sup>

## **Elite Sport System Rankings**

[Global Cup Ranking](#): 43<sup>rd</sup>

[Per Capita Cup Ranking](#): 50<sup>th</sup>

[Olympic Medals – Summer '20](#): 7 (33<sup>rd</sup>)

[Olympic Medals – Winter '22](#): 0 (NR)

## **Football/World Cup Profile**

[FIFA Region](#): AFC

[FIFA Ranking](#): 20<sup>th</sup>

World Cup Appearances: 6

*Best World Cup Performance(s): Group Stages*

Qualification: AFC Group A winners

[World Cup Group](#): B

Last World Cup Appearance: 2018

## **IRAN in INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (by Jacob Benjamin)**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic republic based on Shia Islam; its head of state is a “Supreme Leader”. The ruling Supreme Leader is Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Khamenei has been in power since 1989, when he succeeded Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the original Supreme Leader who established the Islamic Republic after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Iran is ruled with strict authoritarianism, and is one of the most unfree countries in the world according to various metrics. Based on political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House appraises Iran as a [16/100](#) for freedom. Fraser Institute and CATO Institute rendered Iran as the [6th most unfree country](#). The World Economic Forum’s 2020 Global Gender Gap Index, comprised of political, educational, and social indicators, has Iran [as the 6th worst](#). Deep-seated frustration over a lack of gender rights and freedoms is currently erupting in Iran, after a 22-year-old woman was killed by Iranian security services in September 2022 for not wearing the hijab “properly”. Protests initially began as backlash to the law that makes mandatory hijabs for women, but have since evolved into broader anti-government demonstrations across the country.

As aforementioned, the Islamic Republic is a relatively new entity—it was born out of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 following the overthrow of “the Shah”. The Shah, whose real name was Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, consolidated power through a coup d'état in 1953 with the assistance of the United States and Britain. The [legacy of the Shah's regime is multifaceted](#): on the one hand, advancements for women, economic and educational modernization; on the other hand, severe political repression and [torture by the hands of SAVAK](#).

As a result of the Iranian government's sponsorship of terrorist groups, human rights violations, and nuclear program, the Islamic Republic lacks partners on the international stage. All of the world's strongest powers, specifically the P5 Security Council Members plus the broader EU, collaborated to establish the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to restrict Iran's nuclear program. The deal, however, was compromised by Trump's move to withdraw the U.S. in 2018; Iran is now on the [“nuclear brink”](#). As a state sanctioned for its abuses, Tehran seeks partnerships with other authoritarian regimes in order to mitigate the effects of international isolation. Of note, Iran will become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); Khamenei recently attended an SCO summit in Uzbekistan where he conducted business with the likes of Lukashenko, Putin, Erdoğan, and Xi (Putin and Lukashenko are similarly trying to avoid isolation after their aggressive war on Ukraine).

Within its locale, Iran has many Middle Eastern rivals. Perhaps Iran's main adversary is Saudi Arabia—Saudi proxies have regularly battled with Iranian proxies in regional conflicts, such as in Yemen.

Oil-rich Sunni Gulf states like the United Arab Emirates are also ideological and political competitors. Iran fought a bloody war with Saddam's Iraq from 1980-1988. Threat perceptions are mutually intense between Iran and Israel; many of Iran's leaders are openly anti-Semitic, and do not believe in Israel's right to exist.

To put it (overly) simplistically, Iran can be described as a country in a constant tug of war: between young and old, theocratic and secular, reform and conservative. The ongoing protests of many courageous Iranians, and the harsh crackdowns by a draconian government, are the manifestations of competing visions for the country.

Prior to the political history described above, Iran was [Persia](#), the home of ancient, complex, and worldly civilizations.