



Iran — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the Islamic Republic of Iran; also known as Persia]

03/20/1794 Start Autocratic Monarchy: Sovereignty was reached on 678 BC. The Qajar dynasty started with the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar and the death of Lotf Ali Khan, the last of the Zand Dynasty, on 03/20/1794.¹ Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar ruled as the fifth Qajar shah of Iran from 05/01/1896 until 01/03/1907.² The period from 1906 to 1911 was characterized by an era of constitutional revolution. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 was sparked by a variety of factors, reflecting a range of intellectual movements, social backgrounds, and political demands (Mansourian 2007: 221). According to LIED no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Moreover, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate political liberties as absent for this time. On 08/05/1906, Mozaffar al-Din Shah issued a royal proclamation establishing the first constitution. The 1906 fundamental and electoral laws set up the electoral system and outlined the internal structures of the Majlis, the Parliament, and the Senate. Further amendments to the constitution that year included the introduction of male suffrage and the bicameral legislature. On 12/30/1906, due to significant public pressure, the Shah enacted the fundamental laws (Lockhart 1959: 377). As anticipated, the Shah's powers were restricted by several articles. While he remained the head of state, he was required to govern through his ministers, who were accountable to parliament rather than to him (Lockhart 1959: 378). The constitution also stipulated the separation of powers.³ On 01/03/1907 Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar took over as Shah after the death of his father Mozaffar al-Din Shah. According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held in 1906 and only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held in 1907. LIED still codes political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI increased into a range which we interpret as not really present. For the year 1907, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1908, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. On 06/23/1908 Mohammad Ali was by no means a defender of the constitutional movement from the time he took over from his father. On 06/23/1908 he did not hesitate to dissolve the Majlis by force. This drastic measure was carried out by his Cossack Brigade, commanded by an officer on loan from the Russian Army. Furthermore, the Majlis building was bombarded by artillery under the direction of other Russian officers serving the Shah. This marked the beginning of the period known as Istibdad-i-saghir or the Minor Tyranny, when the Shah ruled unrestrained by parliamentary control (Lockhart 1959: 383). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. On 07/16/1909 nearly the entire nation rallied behind

the Constitutionalists due to Mohammad Ali's excesses, which eventually led to their success and forced him to abdicate in favor of his son Ahmad Shah Qajar on 07/16/1909 (Lockhart 1959: 383). The second Majlis was elected on 11/15/1909. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held in 1909 and 1910. No multiparty executive and legislative elections were held from 1911 to 1913. Only multiparty legislative elections were held in 1914. From 1915 to 1920 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Political liberties continued to be coded as absent (LIED) and can be interpreted as not really present per V-Dem's PCLI. For the years 1910 and 1911, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1914 and 1915, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For the rest of the assessed period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

02/21/1921 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, Ahmad Shah was pushed aside in a military coup by Colonel Reza Khan, Minister of War and commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, who subsequently seized the post of prime minister".⁴ A civilian ally was appointed prime minister and in turn appointed Reza Khan commander of the armed forces. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. The state of political liberties is coded as absent by LIED. V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as not really present, except in 1924 they were absent. From 1922 to 1924, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1925, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

12/15/1925 End Military Autocracy/Start Autocratic Monarchy: After the Majlis deposed the Qajar dynasty in October 1925, the Majlis crowned on this date, Reza Khan as Reza Shah. The crowning marks the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty (Metz 1989, Roshandel 1987, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 69). Under Reza Shah, independent parliamentary work became impossible. Elections were undemocratic, and the parliament was structured to follow the Shah's agenda (Abrahamian 1982: 138). On 08/19/1953 the CIA and UK intelligence agencies manufactured a popular uprising and coordinated a military coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh.⁵ The effective executive leadership was returned to Shah Pavlevi. In the "Constitutional", White Revolution women gained the right to vote in 1963.⁶ Until 1962, V-Dems EF&FI score for Iran is labeled as none, indicating that any elections held before this time cannot be considered free or fair at all. According to LIED only multiparty legislative were held from 1921 to 1927. From 1928 to 1942 only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. From 1943 to 1951 only multiparty legislative elections were held. In 1952 and 1953 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. From 1954 to 1960 only multiparty legislative elections were held. In 1961 and 1962 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. From 1963 to 1966 only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. From 1967 to 1974 only multiparty legislative elections were held. From 1975 to 1978 only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. From 1925 to 1940, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. Between 1941 and 1952, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. Since 1953, as per Polity5's classification, the executive experienced moderate limitations on authority, placing it in the second intermediate category. Until 1941, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. For the years 1942-1944, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. From 1945 to 1949, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us

as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1950-1953, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1954 to 1978, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1979, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1972 to 1977, according to FH, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Per FH's evaluation for 1978, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. LIED still codes political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies them as absent until 1941 and from 1954 onwards, as not really present from 1942 to 1944, 1946 to 1947 and in 1953 and as ambiguous between 1948 and 1952.

01/16/1979 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Popular uprising forced the Shah to flee the country to Egypt once his security forces proved impotent against the demonstrations, strikes, and riots against his rule. Shapour Bakhtiar, still appointed as prime minister by the Shah, became the effective head of government as an interim ruler (Curtis/Hooglund 2008, Metz 1989, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 69).⁷ Per FH's evaluation for 1979, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free.

05/02/1979 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Islamist Ideocracy: Upon his return to Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini rejected Bakhtiar's government. On 02/05/1979, at his headquarters in the Refah School in Tehran, Khomeini declared a provisional revolutionary government and appointed Mehdi Bazargan as his own prime minister, instructing Iranians to obey Bazargan as a religious duty.⁸ By 02/11/1979, the Supreme Military Council declared neutrality in the political disputes, effectively yielding control of the country to Khomeini. Estimates of the number of casualties during the revolution vary. Some sources claim around 2,781 protesters and revolutionaries were killed. Khomeini's regime reported a much higher figure of 60,000, but this is believed to be an overstatement for propaganda purposes.⁹ On 06/22/1981 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini used troops and supporters to drive out his independently powerful president Baniadr from power.¹⁰ The Ayatollah thus gained the powers reserved to the president for himself. Later he had his parliament legalize the self-coup (Marshall 2018h). Khomeini was succeeded on 06/03/1989 by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the Supreme Leader. Khamenei, previously serving as President, was not as widely recognized as a religious authority as Khomeini. His elevation involved a change in the constitution to allow a less senior cleric to assume the position. The regime was and is marked by the suppression of opposition, including the execution and imprisonment of political dissidents. Hashemi Rafsanjani became President shortly after Khomeini's death, serving from 1989 to 1997. He was followed by Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021), Ebrahim Raisi (2021-2024), Mohammad Mokhber (2024) and Massud Peseschkian (2024-present). Each president brought different policies and approaches, reflecting the evolving political landscape in Iran. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1979. From 1980 onward, only multiparty legislative elections were held. From 1979 to 1996, according to Polity5, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Between 1997 and 2003, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. Since 2004, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the year 1980, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1981 and 1982, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1983 to 1988, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as

indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1989-1991, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1992, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Again from 1993 to 2018, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 2019 and 2020, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Since 2021, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Per FH's evaluation for 1979 and 1980, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. As classified by FH for the rest of this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, political liberties continued to be coded as absent per LIED and can be interpreted as not really present in 1979 and from 1997 to 2005 and as absent for the remaining years by V-Dem's PCLI.

Islamist Ideocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Arjomand 1988, Arjomand 2009, Brownlee 2007, Chehabi 2005, Milani 2009, Wahdat-Hagh 2003)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_monarchs_of_Persia
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozaffar_ad-Din_Shah_Qajar
- ³ <https://fis-iran.org/document/iran-1906-constitution/>
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shah_Qajar
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Mosaddegh
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁷ http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/16/newsid_2530000/2530475.stm;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Revolution
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Revolution
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Revolution
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolhassan_Banisadr

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