

# The Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Iran

## Section 4



### 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.

## Key Terms and Places

**shah** king

**revolution** a drastic change in a country’s government and way of life

**Tehran** capital of Iran

**theocracy** a government ruled by religious leaders

## Section Summary

### HISTORY

Iran today is an Islamic republic. In the past, the region was ruled by the Persian Empire and a series of Muslim empires.

The Persian Empire was a great center of art and learning. It was known for architecture and many other arts, including carpets. The capital, Persepolis, had walls and statues that glittered with gold, silver, and jewels. When Muslims conquered the region, they converted the Persians to Islam. But most people kept their Persian culture.

In 1921 an Iranian military officer took charge. He claimed the Persian title of **shah**, or king. In 1941 his son took control. This shah was an ally of the United States and Britain. He tried to make Iran more modern, but his programs were not popular.

In 1979 Iranians began a **revolution**. They overthrew the shah. The new government set up an Islamic republic that follows strict Islamic law.

Soon after the revolution began, Iran’s relations with the United States broke down. A mob of students attacked the U.S. Embassy in **Tehran**. Over 50 Americans were held hostage for a year.

**Why do you think most people kept their Persian culture after Muslims conquered the region?**

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**Underline the phrase that explains what an Islamic republic does.**

**Section 4, continued**

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**IRAN TODAY**

Iran is unique in Southwest Asia, where most people are Arabs and speak Arabic. In Iran, more than half the people are Persian. They speak Farsi, the Persian language.

Iran has one of Southwest Asia's largest populations. It has about 68 million people, and over 35 million are younger than 25.

Iran is very diverse. Along with Persians, Iranian ethnic groups include Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, and Turks. Most Iranians are Shia Muslim. About 10 percent are Sunni Muslim. Others practice Christianity, Judaism, and other religions.

Persian culture influences life in Iran in many ways. People celebrate the Persian New Year, Nowruz. Persian food is an important part of most family gatherings.

Iran's economy is based on oil. There are also other industries, including carpet production and agriculture.

Iran's government is a **theocracy**. Its rulers, or *ayatollahs*, are religious leaders. The country also has an elected president and parliament.

Iran's government has supported many hard-line policies, such as terrorism. Today, the United States and other nations are concerned about Iran's nuclear program as a threat to world security.

Estimate the percentage of Iran's population that is under age 25.

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Circle two ways that Persian culture is part of people's lives today.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Making Inferences** Imagine that you are living in Persepolis at the time the Muslims conquered the Persian Empire. Write a diary entry about what is changing in your life, what is staying the same, and how you feel about what is happening.