



Chapter Sixteen

Politics in Iran

Comparative Politics Today, 9/e

Almond, Powell, Dalton & Strøm

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AZERBAIJAN

CASPIAN SEA

TURKMENISTAN

TURKEY

Tabriz

Mashhad

Tehran

Qom

Esfahan

AFGHANISTAN

IRAQ

IRAN

KUWAIT

Shiraz

PAKISTAN

SAUDI ARABIA

Bandar-e 'Abbās

PERSIAN GULF

QATAR

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

GULF OF OMAN

OMAN

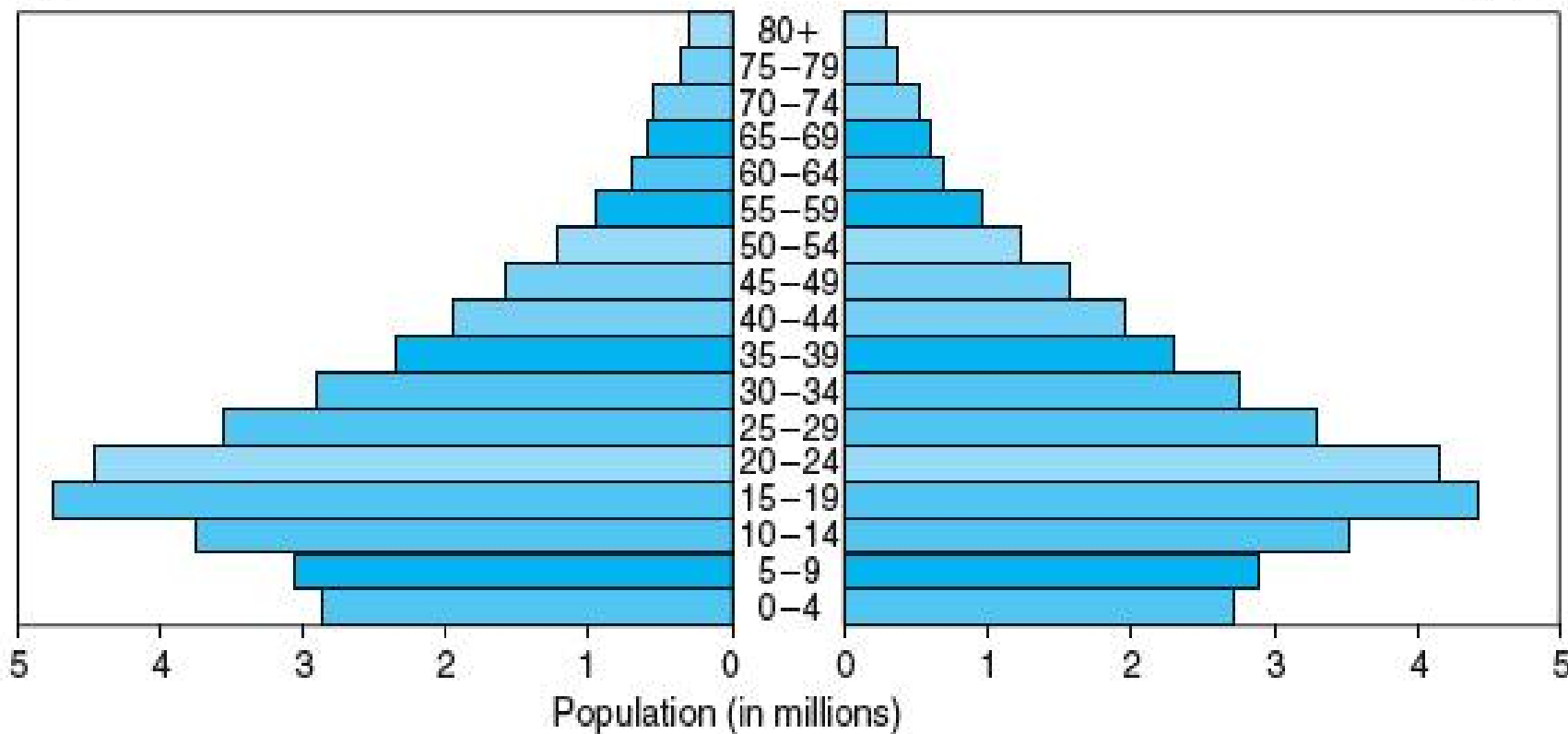
Country Bio: Iran

- **Population:**
 - 66.3 million
- **Territory:**
 - 636,296 sq. miles
- **Year of Independence:**
 - 550 B.C.
- **Year of Current Constitution:**
 - 1979, amended in 1989
- **Head of State:**
 - Ali Khamenei
- **Head of Government:**
 - Mahmud Ahmadinejad
- **Language:**
 - Persian, regional languages
- **Religion:**
 - Twelver Shiite Muslim 90%, Sunni Muslim 10%, non-Muslims less than 1%



Male

Female



Iran Population Pyramid for 2005

FIGURE 16.1

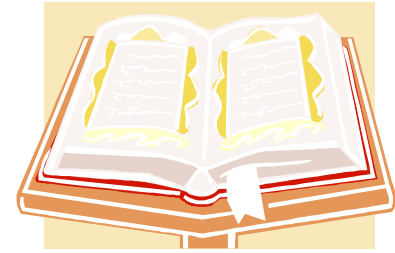
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

Background: Islamic Republic of Iran



- World's only theocracy
 - A form of government in which ideally all laws are grounded in religion and express the will of God, and the clergy exercises supreme power

Background: Islamic Republic of Iran



- Established in 1979
 - A few months after a popular revolution uniting poor and middle-class, religious and secular people overthrew Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi – the last ruler of the country’s ancient monarchy.
 - Ruholla Khomeini – charismatic clerical leader who had authored a blueprint for theoretic government in the 1970s, led the 1979 revolution
 - Opposed democracy on religious grounds
 - Sovereignty belongs to god alone
 - Divine law, know as the shari’a, as interpreted and applied by the ulema (religious scholars in the Muslim world) takes precedence over laws made by human legislators.

Background:

Islamic Republic of Iran

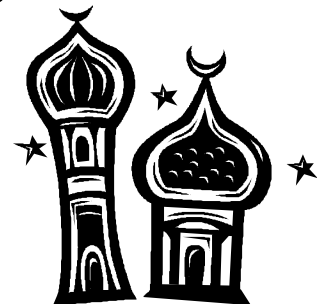
- Developed a very lively political system after Khomeini's death in 1989
 - Presidential, parliamentary, and local elections offer Iranian citizens a choice of candidates advocating differing policies.
 - One of many paradoxes found in Iran

Current Policy Challenges

- Iran is the first country in which Islamists have had to deliver on the promises of a society characterized by social justice and moral propriety.
- During the first decade of the Islamic Republic
 - Some redistribution of wealth
 - New leadership came mostly from humble or middle-class backgrounds and adopted populist policies that somewhat bettered the lot of the poorest.
 - Rural development
 - Health
 - Women's education
 - Roads
 - Poverty, inequality, and underemployment continue to be major public grievances.

Current Policy Challenges

- Job creation has been very inadequate.
- Need to increase economic output.
 - Population grows by one million a year.
 - Discontent spurred out migration from the country
 - One in four Iranians with higher education live abroad
 - Subsequently, Iranians often have family abroad in the U.S., Canada, and Europe
- Corruption
- Dissatisfaction with the status quo among some of Iran's ethnic minorities



Historical Legacy

- Never formally colonized by Europeans
- Borders arise from historical balance of power between its shahs and their neighboring rulers.
- Current Iranian state was set up in the early 16th century by the Safavid dynasty.
 - Establishment of Twelver Shiism as the official state religion and the conversion of most Iranians who had been Sunnis to Shiism
 - Political center of the Shiite world

Historical Legacy

- Twelver Shiism
 - Split between Sunnis (90% of all Muslims) and the Shiites came about after the death of the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad
 - Shiites believed that descendants of the Prophet could be the only rightful successors/leaders-- Imams.
 - Third Imama, Husayn, whose martyrdom in 680 C.E. symbolizes for Shiites for the struggle of the just against the unjust.
 - Most Shiites believe the Twelfth Imam was the last of the Imam, thus their name.
 - Believe he is alive and will come forth and show himself to establish a just rule at the end of time
 - He is a messiah-like figure.
 - Role and function of the ulema

Historical Legacy: Constitutional in Iran

- In 1905 widespread dissatisfaction with the way the country was governed
- Led to a popular movement that would rest the constitution from the shah in December 1905
- Shiite ulema played major role in the constitutional movement
- Powers of the monarchy needed to be curtailed

Historical Legacy: Constitutional in Iran



- Believed the citizenry had the right to elect a representative parliament
- Shah could name a prime minister only in agreement with parliament.
- Parliament could hold the government accountable.
- Constitutionalist ulema found ways to justify them in Islamic terms.
 - Ayatollah Muhammad-Husayn Na'inni
 - His argument implied the novel idea that as long as the Twelfth Imam chose to remain in hiding, the believers themselves were his deputies.
 - Reconciled Shiism's core beliefs with modern notions of constitutionalism and is a legacy that the revolutionaries of 1979 could not ignore as they set out to create an Islamic state.

Historical Legacy: The Pahlavi Monarchy

- In a 1907 secret agreement Britain and Russia divided Iran into two spheres of influence.
- During WWI, belligerents repeatedly violated Iran's neutrality and fought each other on Iranian territory.
 - Created strife in Iran

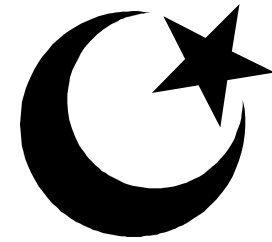
Historical Legacy: The Pahlavi Monarchy

- 1921 coup d'état put an end to the rule of the old establishment
- Between 1941 and 1953 Iran's political system included three main camps:
 - Pro-Western conservative establishment (Shah and landlords)
 - Pro-Soviet communist Tudeh party
 - Neutralist National Front, which aimed at establishing the full rule of law within the country and consolidating its standing among nations.
 - Mohammad Mossadegh: nationalizing the Iranian oil industry
 - British plotted his overthrow; accomplished with the help of the U.S. Central Intelligence (CIA) in August 1953

Historical Legacy: The Pahlavi Monarchy

- Reverted to royal autocracy as the second ruler of the Pahlavi dynasty (1963)
 - White Revolution
 - Land reform and granting suffrage to women
 - Westernizing policies
 - Traditionalists rioted
 - New opposition: Ruhollah Khomeini
 - Riots suppressed with violence
 - Khomeini arrested and exiled: settled in Najaf in Iraq until 1978 when he was expelled by Saddam Hussein until his triumphant return to Iran in 1979

Historical Legacy: The Pahlavi Monarchy



- Demands for free elections
- Shah's regime increasingly contested at home but it continued to receive support from the West in general and in the U.S. in particular
 - Opposition to the Shah also became opposition to the U.S.
 - Evidence suggests that Shah was successful at manipulating U.S. policymakers to achieve his ends rather than it being the other way around.

Historical Legacy: The Islamic Revolution & the Iran Iraq War

- 1977 Jimmy Carter – president of the U.S.
 - Focus on human rights
- Shah had terminal cancer; began liberalizing Iran's political system
 - Groups pushed for greater reforms
- Revolutionary uprising
 - Khomeini
- 1979 New Constitution
 - Maintained a parliament elected by universal suffrage
 - Shah replaced by an elected president
 - Principle of velayat-e faqih “guardianship of the jurisprudence”

Historical Legacy: The Islamic Revolution & the Iran Iraq War

- 1979 to 1981
 - Competition for power; violence
 - Khomeini gains the upper hand and began instituting Islamic law in all spheres of public life.
- Iran-Iraq War
- Legacy of Oil Wealth: A Rentier State
 - Sustain themselves independently of social pressures and powerful interest groups



Year	Head of State	President	Prime Minister
1941	Shah: Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi	—	—Various cabinets
1951	—	—	Mohammad Mossadegh (51–53)
—	—	—	—Various cabinets
1965	—	—	Amir-Abbas Hoveyda
1977	—	—	Jamshid Amuzegar
1979	Leader: Ruhollah Khomeini	—	Mehdi Bazargan
1980	—	Abolhasan Banisadr	—
1981	—	Ali Rajai, Ali Khamenei	Mir-Hosein Musavi
1989	Ali Khamenei	Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani	Position abolished
1997	—	Mohammad Khatami	—
2005	—	Mahmud Ahmadinejad	—

Institutions of the Islamic Republic

- Multiple power centers
- Leader
 - Highest authority in the Islamic Republic
 - Combines religious and temporal authority
 - Assembly of Experts
 - Choose the Leader
- President
 - Elected by universal suffrage every four years
 - Must be a Twelver Shiite and a male; does not have to be a cleric

Institutions of the Islamic Republic

- Parliament
 - Unicameral, the Majles, comprises about 290 members
 - Must be Muslims but the Constitution provides for five members of Parliament to represent Christians (3), Jews (one) and Zoroastrians (one)
 - Two features of the political system seriously limit the Majle's legislative role.
 - Many policies, rules, and regulations are set by unelected specialized bodies.
 - All its bills are subject to the veto of the Council of Guardians.

Women in Parliament

TABLE 16.1

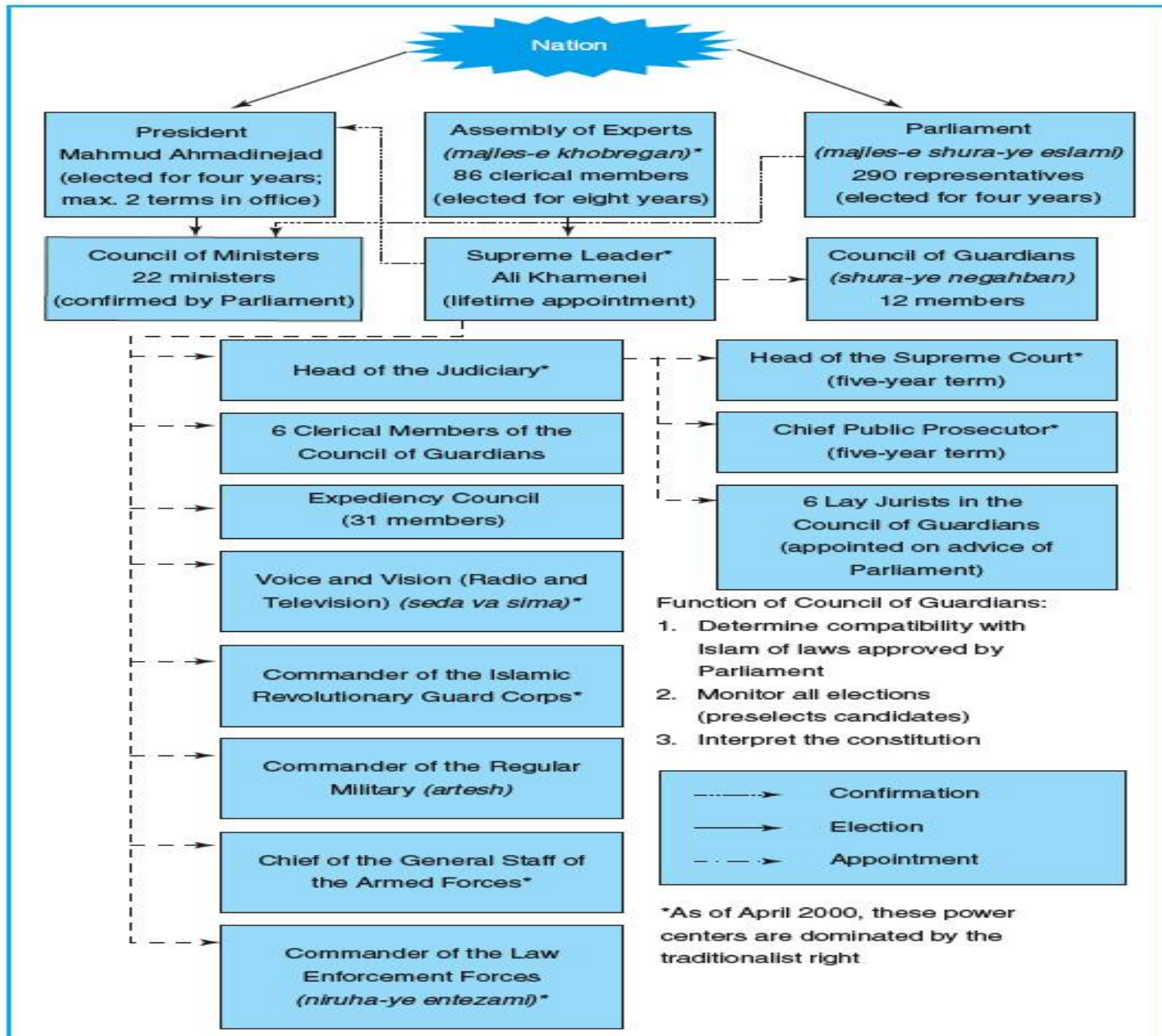
	Female MPs	Clerical MPs	Total MPs
First Majles (1980–1984)	4	131	263
Second Majles (1984–1988)	4	122	269
Third Majles (1988–1992)	4	77	267
Fourth Majles (1992–1996)	9	65	270
Fifth Majles (1996–2000)	10	53	274
Sixth Majles (2000–2004)	13	35	278
Seventh Majles (2004–2008)	12	42	281

Institutions of the Islamic Republic

- Council of Guardians
 - Six members of the ulema and six lay Muslim lawyers.
 - Ulema appointed by the Leader; lawyers nominated by the Judiciary but approved by the Parliament

Institutions of the Islamic Republic

- Expediency Council
 - “A council for determination of what is in the interest of the regime”
 - Collective body for arbitration of conflict
 - Anchored in constitutional revision of 1989
 - Leader appoints over 30 members of this council
 - Help the leader formulate overall state policy
- An honestly undemocratic Constitution
- Multiple power centers



Formal Constitutional Power Structure in Iran

FIGURE 16.3

Source: Adapted from Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000). © Wilfried Buchta, Rabat 2000.

Elections and Parties

- The Pre-revolutionary legacy
 - Very limited competitive elections
 - Suffrage for women
 - Minimum voting age 15
- Post-revolutionary parties
 - Islamic Republican Party
 - Factionalism
 - Khomeini could arbitrate
 - Ideological differences became the basis of factional politics
 - 1990s
 - Khatami's election; more political parties appeared on the scene

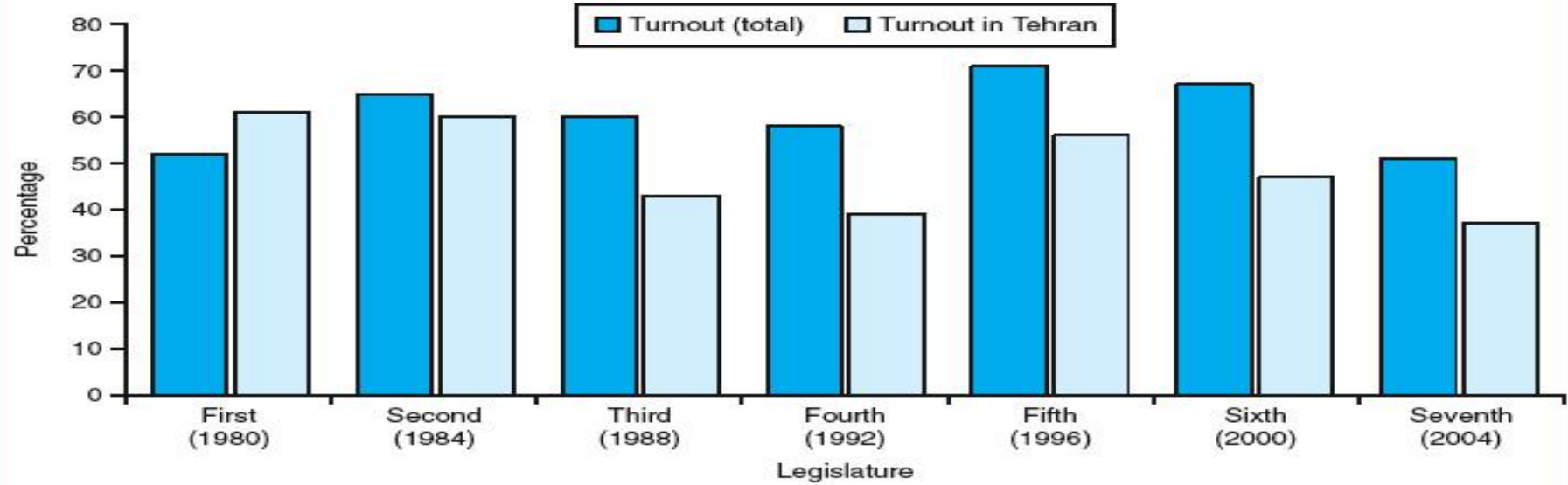
Elections and Parties

- Presidential elections
 - 1980 first ever presidential election
 - Victory of a lay Islamist: Banisadr
 - Impeached by Parliament and deposed by Khomeini in 1981
 - His successor and prime minister killed by a bomb two months later
 - The next four elections: Khomeini associates
 - Result: participation went down
 - Khatami – “outsider”; appealed to those who had been humiliated by the regime
 - Promised greater cultural openness and personal freedom
 - 2005 elections: arch conservative mayor of Tehran, Mahud Ahmadinejad
 - Some question as to voter fraud allegations

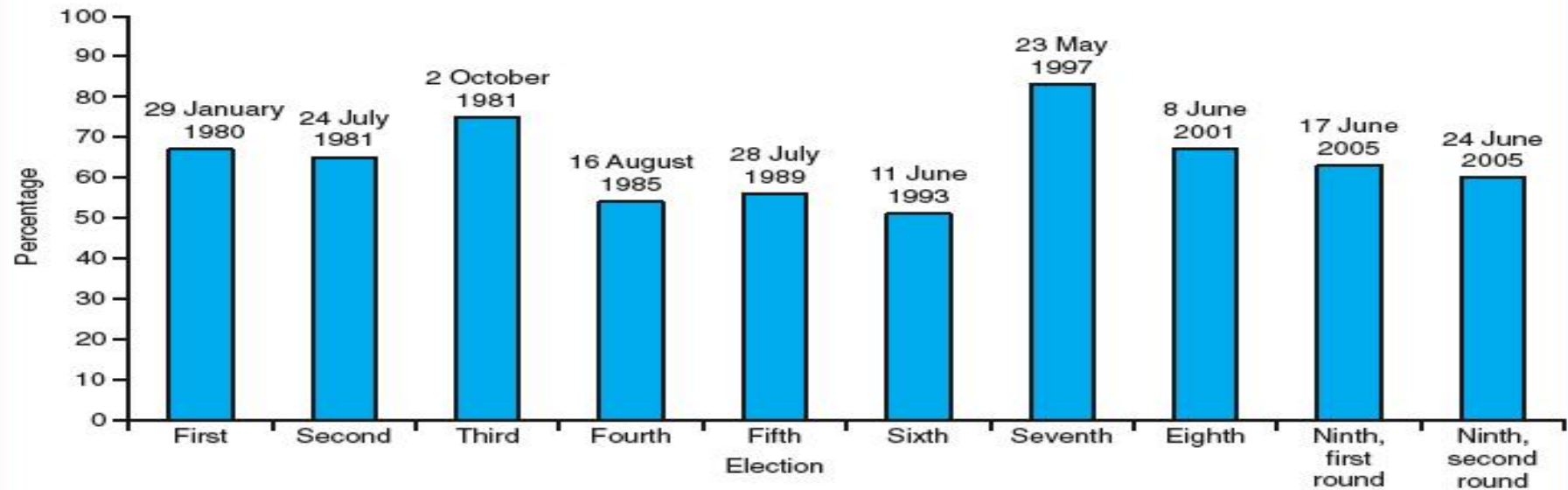
Elections and Parties

- Parliamentary elections
 - Divided into multimember constituencies
 - Largest is Tehran with 30 MPs
 - Each voter can write down the names of as many candidates as there are seats in a constituency.
 - Top vote-getters in each constituency are elected provided they receive over 50% of the total vote.
 - Second round determines the remaining MPs from among the runner-ups.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS



Elections and Parties

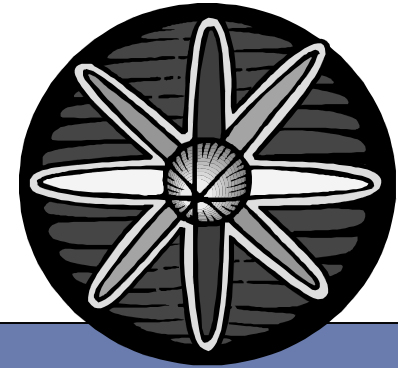
- Elections of 2004
 - Council of Guardians disallowed about 2,000 reformist candidates, including about 80 sitting MPS (unprecedented)
 - Call for a boycott of the election
 - 50% of the population still went to the polls

Elections and Parties



- Local elections
 - Constitution of 1906 provided for elected local government councils but these were never constituted.
 - Similar provision of the 1979 Constitution first put into action in 1999.
 - Iranians for the first time went to the polls to elect city, town, and village councils.
 - Reformists won control over most councils; stymied by conservatives
 - Voters stopped participating.
 - Elections in 2003 – only 15 turnout in Tehran- even though the freest election in Iranian history. Mostly conservatives voted. Result: very conservative council
 - December 2006 new elections
 - Participation increased; Ahmadinejad conservatives won only a few seats; rebuke for the President's handling of the economy.

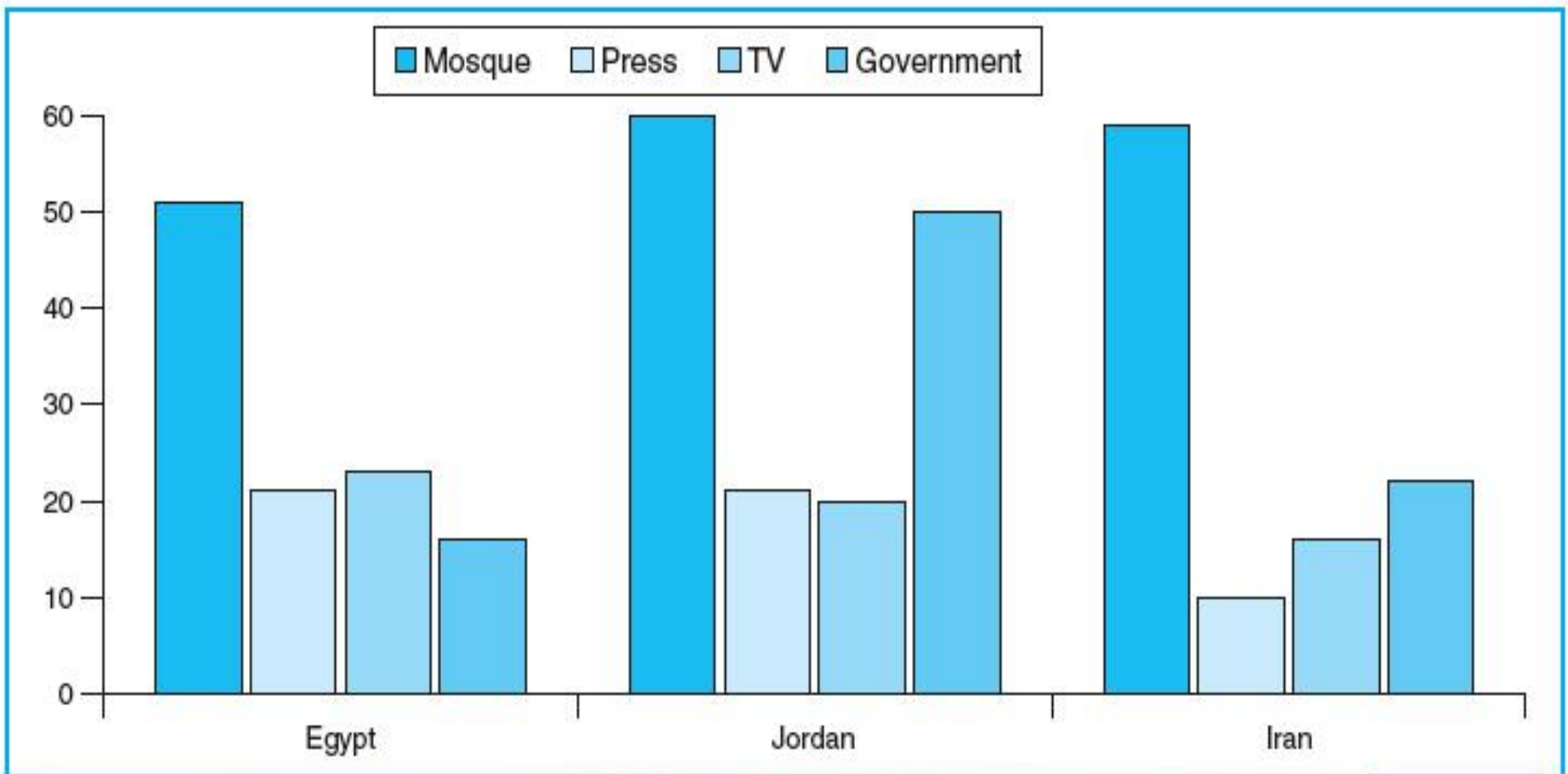
Political Culture



- System level
 - Iranian nationalism/ancient Persia
 - Vanguard of the Islamic world's struggle against Western domination
 - Ethic nationalism has become stronger among Iran's non-Persian populations
 - "right" to develop nuclear energy
 - Government used this issue to shore up their legitimacy.

Political Culture

- Process level
 - Islamic revolution increased participation in politics
 - Some disaffected
 - Extreme individualism and lack of trust of government
 - Long history of despotism
 - Periodic emergence of charismatic leaders



Percentage Expressing Very Great Trust

FIGURE 16.5

Source: Mansoor Moaddel and Taghi Azadarmaki, "The Worldviews of Islamic Publics: The Case of Egypt, Iran, and Jordan," in Ronald Inglehart, ed., *Human Values and Social Change: Findings From the Values Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 81.

Political Culture

- Policy level
 - Oil- Iranians have tended to expect the state to provide welfare and material well-being for everybody and alleviate the gap between rich and poor.
 - Corruption
 - Suspicion of private enterprise
 - Populism

Political Socialization

- Educational system
- The military
- Religion and religious institutions
- Mass media
- Family and social groups

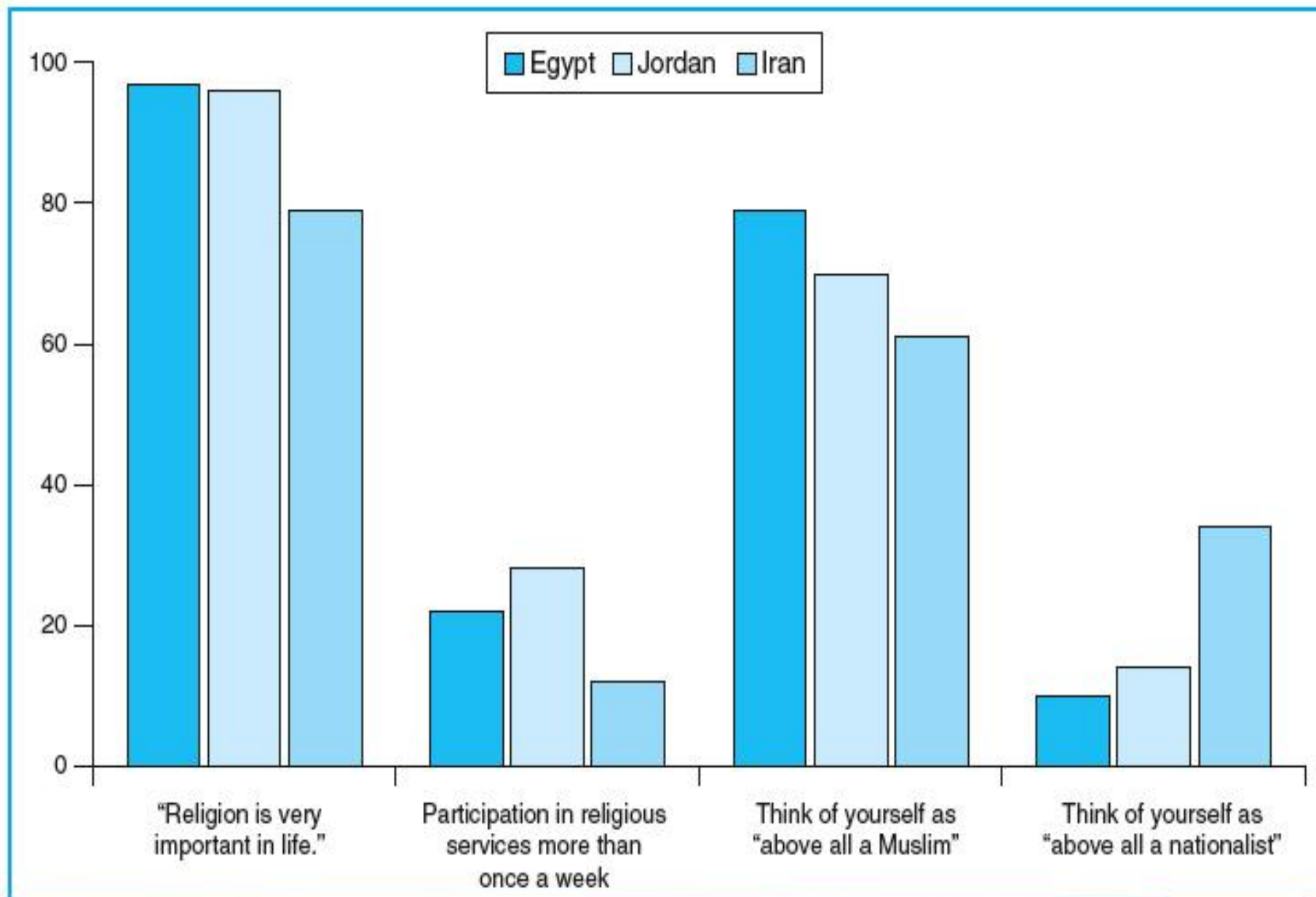


Percentage of People Describing Self as "a Religious Person"

TABLE 16.2

Egypt	98
Nigeria	94
Jordan	85
Iran	82
United States	82
India	80
Turkey	75
Spain	75
Mexico	65
Russia	64
Germany	50
Sweden	33
Japan	24

Source: Mansoor Moaddel and Taghi Azadamaki, "The Worldviews of Islamic Publics: The Case of Egypt, Iran, and Jordan," in Ronald Inglehart, ed., *Human Values and Social Change: Findings From the Values Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 75.



Religious Beliefs and Practice

FIGURE 16.6

Recruiting the Political Elite

- Who governs Iran?
 - Under the Shah
 - Small class of educated and secular Iranians who had personal loyalty to the monarch
 - Under the Islamic Republic
 - Personalism
 - Revolutionary pedigrees
 - Clergy recruited into the state
 - Nonclerical parliamentarians and ministers tend to emerge from educational and military institutions
 - Many of the new elite have come from the ranks of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Basij.
 - Kinship ties

Interest Articulation and Aggregation

- Forms of interest articulation and aggregation
 - Noninstitutional
 - Clientelism and patron-client networks
 - Institutional
 - Voting
 - Weakness of party organizations
 - Unable to maintain party organization and formalized links to the citizenry
- Institutionalized groups
- Professional organizations
- Nonassociational social groups
- Demonstrations and public protests

Policy Formulation

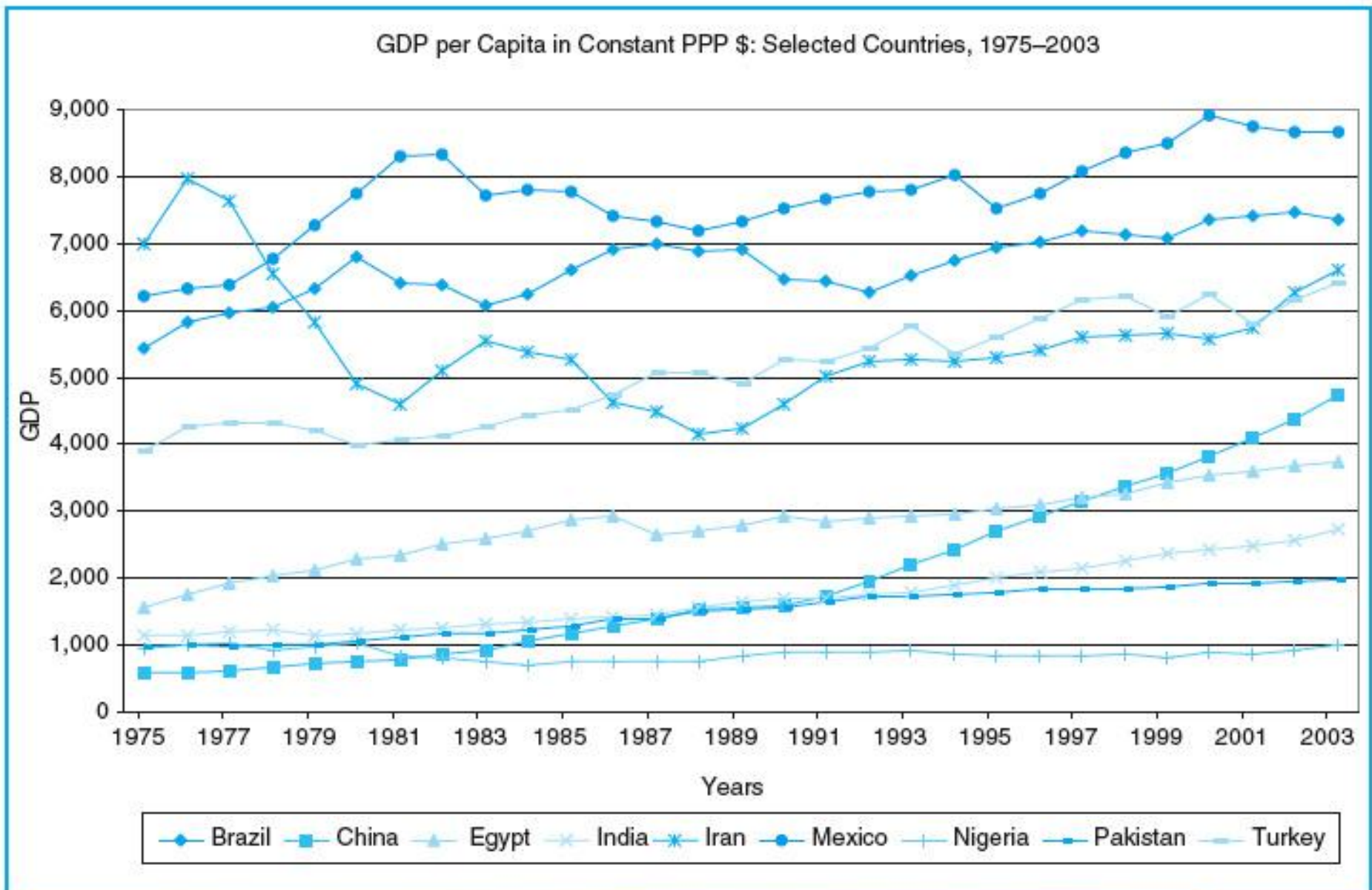
- State institutions mentioned in the Constitution
 - In theory, no state policy may contradict Islam, so those who determine this have a preponderant voice in setting policy.
 - The Leader
 - The Expediency Council
 - The National Security Council
 - The Council of Guardians
 - Executive branch and parliament

Policy Formulation

- State institutions not mentioned in the Constitutions
 - Supreme council for the Cultural Revolution
- Power centers and the difficulty of coordination
 - Multiple power centers so policies are often not coordinated
 - Judiciary
 - Revolutionary Guards

Policy Formulation

- Economic policymaking
 - One of the most contentious topics
 - 1980s liberal approach: private sector and market mechanisms
 - Mixed results
 - Led to hardship and therefore faced opposition
 - Khatami's efforts limited due to economic foundations' and parastatal organizations' autonomous and privileged access to resources and markets.

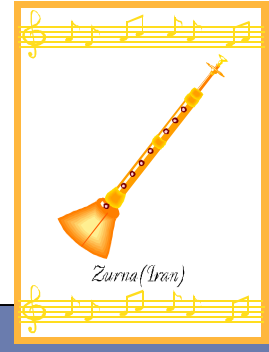


Comparative Growth Rate

FIGURE 16.7

Source: Based on data from Massoud Karshenas and Hassan Hakimian, "Oil, Economic Diversification and the Democratic Process in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 1 (March 2005), 67–90.

Policy Outcomes



- Incoherent policies
 - Sometimes paralysis
 - Example of cultural policy: banning of music
- Spreading progress and prosperity
 - State educational system astonishingly good
 - Science and literacy
 - Birth control
 - Health care
 - Roads and the provision of basic services

Comparison of Development Indicators, 2003

TABLE 16.3

Country	Population	Population Growth	Life Expectancy	Infant Mortality (before age 1)	Access to Sanitation (%)
Iran	66 million	1.3	69	33	84
Turkey	70 million	1.5	69	33	83
Egypt	67 million	1.8	69	33	68
Pakistan	148 million	2.4	64	74	54
India	1 billion	1.5	63	63	30
China	1.3 billion	0.6	71	30	44
Mexico	102 million	1.4	74	23	77
Nigeria	136 million	2.4	45	98	38

Country	Literacy/Men	Literacy/Women	Education as Part of GNP	GNP/Capita \$	GNP/PPP \$
Iran	84	70	4.9	2,010	7,000
Turkey	94	79	3.7	2,240	6,710
Egypt	67	44	?	1,390	3,940
Pakistan	57	28	1.8	520	2,040
India	68	45	4.1	540	2,880
China	95	87	?	1,100	4,980
Mexico	93	89	5.2	6,230	8,980
Nigeria	74	59	?	350	900

PPP: Purchasing Power Parity.

Policy Outcomes: Islamicization of Society

- Alcohol consumption banned except for the non-Muslim minorities
- Veiling enforced in public spaces
- State committed in theory to the minimizing contact between unrelated men and women
- Religious content of education is vastly expanded
- Gruesome physical punishment to chastise adulterers, homosexuals, and other offenders of religious morality
- Outwardly a success; but underneath the surface – bootlegging, prostitution (driven by poverty), over 2 million Iranians are drug addicts, corruption
- Religious practice has become more private
 - Anticlericalism

Policy Outcomes: Gender Relations

- Legal restrictions on women's rights
- Many ad hoc discriminations instituted by the Islamic Republic
 - Fields of study closed to women
 - Women's sports restricted; attire incompatible with veiling
- Women increasing their participation in public life
- Many are working outside of the home
- 60% of the student body at universities' restrictions on what they can study having been gradually lifted
- More novels- written by women
- Women compete in sports but at locations to which men are not admitted
- Mal-veiling
- Islamic feminism



Policy Outcomes: Foreign Policy

- Under the Shah
 - U.S. an ally
- 1990s “national interest”
- Third Worldist
 - Desire to escape the hegemony of Western world
- Main issue confronting current Iranian diplomacy is the nuclear program.

Iran and Its Challenges

- Faced many challenges and has survived
- Reopening of the debate: What is the proper relation between religion and politics in Iran?

