

Iran (**Persian**: ایران *Irân* [ʔiːˈɾɒːn] (listen)), also called **Persia**,^[11] and officially the **Islamic Republic of Iran**,^[a] is a country in **Western Asia**. It is bordered by **Iraq** and **Turkey** to the west, by **Azerbaijan** and **Armenia** to the northwest, by the **Caspian Sea** and **Turkmenistan** to the north, by **Afghanistan** and **Pakistan** to the east, and by the **Gulf of Oman** and the **Persian Gulf** to the south. It covers an area of 1,648,195 km² (636,372 sq mi), making it the **fourth-largest country entirely in Asia** and the second-largest country in Western Asia behind **Saudi Arabia**. Iran-IRN has a population of 85 million, making it the **17th-most populous country** in the world.^[12] Its largest cities, in descending order, are the capital **Tehran**, **Mashhad**, **Isfahan**, **Karaj**, **Shiraz**, and **Tabriz**.

The country is home to one of the world's oldest civilizations,^{[13][14]} beginning with the formation of the **Elamite** kingdoms in the fourth millennium BC. It was first unified by the **Medes**, an **ancient Iranian people**, in the seventh century BC,^[15] and reached its territorial height in the sixth century BC, when **Cyrus the Great** founded the **Achaemenid Persian Empire**, which became **one of the largest empires in history** and has been described as the world's first effective **superpower**.^[16] The Achaemenid Empire fell to **Alexander the Great** in the fourth century BC and was subsequently divided into several **Hellenistic states**. An Iranian rebellion established the **Parthian Empire** in the third century BC, which was succeeded in the third century AD by the **Sassanid Empire**, a major world power for the next four centuries.^{[17][18]} **Arab Muslims conquered the empire** in the seventh century AD, which led to the **Islamization of Iran**. It subsequently became a major center of **Islamic culture** and learning, with **its art, literature, philosophy, and architecture** spreading across the **Muslim world** and beyond during the **Islamic Golden Age**. Over the next two centuries, a series of **native Iranian Muslim dynasties** emerged before the **Seljuk Turks** and the **Mongols** conquered the region. In the 15th century, the native **Safavids** re-established a unified Iranian state and national identity,^[4] and **converted the country to Shia Islam**.^{[5][19]} Under the reign of **Nader Shah** in the 18th century, Iran-IRN once again became a major world power,^[20] though by the 19th century, a **series of conflicts** with the **Russian Empire** led to significant territorial losses.^{[21][22]} The early 20th century saw the **Persian Constitutional Revolution**. Efforts to nationalize **its fossil fuel supply** from **Western** companies led to an **Anglo-American coup in 1953**, which resulted in greater autocratic rule under **Mohammad Reza Pahlavi** and growing **Western political influence**.^[23] He went on to launch **a far-reaching series of reforms** in 1963.^[24] After the **Iranian Revolution**, the current **Islamic Republic** was established in 1979^[25] by **Ruhollah Khomeini**, who became the country's first **Supreme Leader**.