

DOCUMENTATION STATUS:

Both Maryam and Parsa currently hold a green card and are seeking to become US citizens. One year after the admittance to the US, those who are considered refugees must apply to become a lawful permanent resident (LPR). An LPR is a US resident who is not yet a citizen but is authorized to live and work in the country. Documentation of LPR status is a Permanent Resident Card, also known as a green card, which can be used as employment eligibility verification, used to apply for a social security card or to attain a driver's license. Permanent residency allows one to own property, attend school, vote in local elections, have access to some public benefits and have protections under the law at national, state and local levels. Five years after arriving as a refugee and being granted LPR status, one may apply for naturalization. Naturalization is the process in which citizenship is granted after the requirements set in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) are fulfilled.

GEOGRAPHY:

Iran, known officially as the Islamic Republic of Iran, is a geographically diverse landscape in southwestern Asia. Enclosed by mountains, the interior bears a large desert plateau in which a majority of the urban settlements are located at its edges, such as the highly populated capital, Tehran. These lands are rich with oil and account for around 10% of the world's reserves. This resource has vastly shaped Iran's history through its role as motive for government corruption and foreign military invasion, while it continues to shape relations in the present day.

SEXUALITY

In Iran sexual orientation outside of a cisheteronormative framework is deeply persecuted. Queerness directly violates Islamic Law and is seen as inhuman, immoral, a corrupt, Western sin. The government speaks anti-queer rhetoric openly. Shadi Amin, an LGBTQI+ Iranian activist said the government goes as far as to say it is "a great honour for the Islamic Republic to violate rights of homosexuals." Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it is estimated that upwards of thousands of queer Iranians have been executed solely on the grounds of their sexual orientation. LGBTQI individuals face oppression, discrimination, prejudice and violence in a multitude of ways - state, community, family, hate crimes. Homophobia is rampant among both culturally as well as politically. Because Iran is an Islamic governed country, queer relationships are not tolerated and to be outed in such relationship results in stoning, lynching and execution. Conversion and reparative therapies are a regular practice that continue to increase in commonality. These practices border torture using techniques such as electric shock therapy, prescribing psychoactive medication, hypnosis and coercive masturbation. Being openly queer means great risks of things such as economic instability or familial abandonment. As of 2014, it was estimated that 17% of young Iranians identified as gay, though this number could vary greatly due to the fact that many queer Iranians stay closeted to maintain their physical safety. There has been pushback from younger Iranian generations with changing cultural views as well as LGBTQI activists who seek to change laws that criminalize consensual queer relationships.

GENDER

Iran is a patriarchal society in which strict and discriminatory regulations are put on the lives of women. We see this in gender segregation, property rights, lack of protections surrounding spousal rape, and genital mutilation. Women have always had a strong role in Iranian life and conditions have improved since the 1990s with progress in education, jobs and politics. While queerness is vehemently opposed by the government, transgender individuals are not persecuted in the same ways. It is believed that those who are transgender have a mental disorder that need to be medically cured. For transgender Iranians, life is filled with danger and uncertainties. Receiving gender confirmation surgery is seen as a way to fix the "problem" of queerness from the country. The problems with gender confirmation surgery in Iran is the lack of accessibility, unsafe procedures from unqualified doctors, and the years long invasive path of procedures one takes for approval, including mental evaluations such as seeing a psychiatrist who determines whether or not the individual is just "going through a phase." These reasons, along with lack of resources, are why many trans individuals are forced to seek unsafe methods of gender confirmation such as self administered hormones from non reputable sources. After surgery, life is still not easy - there are high risks of houselessness, violent harassment, loss of family and friends, loss of access to schooling and limited options for safe job opportunities.

RELIGION

Iran is an Islamic republic with religious principles intertwined into culture and politics. Islam is split into two branches - Shi'a and Sunni, with the official religion being Shi'a Islam. This branch of Islam has been around of centuries as was established as the state religion in 1501. Religion is mandatory and over 99% of Iranians are Muslim with an overwhelming majority practicing the official Shia teachings. Before the Islamic Revolution, which sought to restore Islamic ideology in the country, Iranians were free to choose to be religious or not. The Revolution paved the way for the contemporary Iranian state which resulted in a stark culture shift with now mandated religious laws. Religion is highly politicized and seeps into every aspect of private, public and legal rights making sure to follow in line with Islamic principles. Things deemed anti-Islamic or in conflict with Islamic principles, such as queerness, are seen as a punishable and blasphemous offense. There are few religious minorities such as Christians, Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians and Mandaeans. This population makes up less than 1% of the population and suffers discrimination similarly to many oppressed minority groups in things such as educational and job discrimination. As with gender and sexuality, younger and more Westernized generations are shifting from the strict Islamic code and are seeking to shift the culture and law to represent and protect those in minority groups.

LAW

Iran is constitutionally run as an Islamic Republic with laws based on the disciplines and principles of the Islamic faith. Up until 1979 Iran was ruled under an absolute monarchy but has since shifted to a democratic theocracy with a new constitution which implements Islamic Shari'a law as the basis for political decisions. The constitution contains articles that range from putting supreme power and authority to God as well as mandating democratic elections for the presidency, councils or parliament. Shari'a law has a diverse set of systems that consist of interpretations of Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an, from multiple groups and institutions. The highest held position is that of the Supreme Leader, or *faqih*, a religious head of the country that is responsible for domestic and foreign policies, appoints heads of varying positions and is the head of state as well as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Following the Supreme Leader in ranking is the president who is responsible for things such as the country's economic policy. The governmental structure is similar to the checks and balances of the US and consists of executive, judicial and legislative powers. Some are democratically elected, such as those in the executive branch, while others are co-opted by way of their religious dispositions. There is much critique on Iran's way of governing as there are harshly restrictive laws surrounding many social matters such as religious freedom or sexuality.

1979 IRANIAN REVOLUTION

There have been multiple revolutions in Iran's history but the most influential was the Iranian Revolution of 1979. This marked a pivotal moment in Iran's history in which a centuries-long secular, corrupt monarchical rule under Shah Pahlavi was overthrown and replaced under theocratic rule of the Islamic clergy, establishing an Islamic Republic. The beginnings of this revolution started decades before in the early 1950s with the US and Great Britain intervening in Iran's politics for the sake of control of oil production, a coup against the Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh as well as an arrest of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, both of which critiqued and fought against the corruption of Pahlavi. After years of the Shah's government and its failure to resolve any grievances that had been building over the course of the 1970s, protests erupted and continued to build and reached millions across the country by 1979. In 1977, some Iranians spoke out against the Shah's absolute power only to be met with US-backed publishing of anti-Khomeini rhetoric and governmental violence. In 1978 martial law was declared, Khomeini was deported, the economy was at a halt and protests continued to increase. The Revolution peaks in 1979 as students occupy the US Embassy and hold its personnel hostage in response to US allyship to and harboring of the Shah. This lasted 444 days and hostages were released on the basis of the releasing of the Shah to be put on trial and passing authority to Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council.

EARLY IRAN/US RELATIONS

Early history of the relations between the United States and Iran is that of amicability. The events and inclinations of the 18th and 19th centuries held a mutual curiosity and admiration of each other's cultures. The beginning of the 20th century strengthened the two countries' allyship. In 1919 the Wilson administration provided support in keeping Iran from being claimed as a protectorate of Britain and the same year held pro-American riots in Iranian streets. Up until World War II the relationship between the United States and Iran was cordial but soon came military intervention and political meddling. Early into the war the US was providing Iran with millions of dollars in foreign aid but troubles soon started around the time of the early 1950s. Iran sought to nationalize their oil industry, Britain and the CIA intervened to oust the Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, and a political revolt began throughout Iran, which brought about the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Directly following the revolution was the Iranian Hostage Crisis which led the US to sever ties with Iran. In the mid 1980s was the Iran-Contra affair which the Reagan administration was secretly selling weapons to Iran. The 1990s brought oil and trade embargos from the Clinton administration while the Bush administration of the early 2000s deemed Iran as part of the "axis of evil" due to assumptions of Iran holding weapons of mass destruction. Tensions continued to increase over the decade due to the growing concern of ongoing development of nuclear weapons.

US FOREIGN POLICY

In more recent years the relationship between the United States and Iran has shifted over the varying presidential administrations. Following the second Bush administration's accusations of nuclear weapon development came international negotiations and sanctions put in place against the rigidly ruling president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In 2009 Barack Obama aimed to ease tensions but with the discovery of a secret uranium-enrichment site, nuclear negotiations came to a halt. In 2013 with a newly elected president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, conversations with the US brought about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in which Iran agreed on a series of steps to pull back on nuclear work in exchange for easing of sanctions from the US, UN and EU. Relations with the US and Iran have again shifted with the most current presidential administration under Trump. He rescinded the Iran nuclear deal and put the debilitating economic sanctions back in place, which plummeted Iran into a recession. 2019 brings the US blaming Iran for many military attacks in the Gulf of Oman and Iraq, the Iranian shooting of a US military drone and resulting in Iran pulling back on previous nuclear deal agreements. In most recent events, early 2020 has Iran pull back fully from the 2015 nuclear deal because of a US drone strike in Iraq killing Iran's top military commander. This strike was done so by Trump's authorization without congressional approval and Iran responded with missile attacks on US bases in Iraq and a vow for revenge.