

## The Development of Islamic Civilization in Iran: Persian Civilization and the Impact of Western Embargoes

Rizki Damayanti\*

### Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the dynamics of the development of Islamic civilization in Iran by exploring the complex relationship between Islam, history of Persian civilization, and impact of the Western embargo. Iran is the successor of the rich Persian civilization and has experienced significant social, political, and economic transformations since the Islamic revolution in 1979. Historical methods and contextual analysis are used to detail the development of Islam in Iran, especially in the context of Persian history. This covers the glorious period of Persian literature, art, and policy. Iran possesses an extraordinary influence in shaping world history and civilization. In addition, this research discusses the impact of the embargo imposed by Western countries in changing the economic and political dynamics of Iran. The results show that the integration of Islamic economic principles, such as social justice, equitable wealth distribution, and sustainability, has been important in the response of the country to the embargo. The interplay of Persian cultural heritage and Islamic values is reported in shaping national identity and strategic methods. A multidisciplinary theoretical framework is used to combine historical analysis, cultural analysis, and political economy theories. The method allows a comprehensive examination of religion, history, and geopolitics intersection in shaping the unique trajectory of Iran as a great Islamic civilization. By combining historical, cultural, and political analysis, this research is expected to provide a better understanding of Islam in the development of civilization, as well as the impact of Western embargo on internal and external dynamics. The results contribute to academic thinking about the interaction between religion, history, and geopolitics in the context of Iran.

**Keywords:** Iran, Islam, Islamic civilization, Persian civilization, Western Embargo

### Introduction

In an era of globalization and increasing interdependence, understanding the interactions between religion, history, and geopolitics is crucial in analyzing contemporary international dynamics. Religion is a cultural domain and a powerful force in shaping national identity, influencing foreign policy as a catalyst or barrier in inter-state relations.<sup>1</sup> History provides the foundational framework for interpreting the modern world, where events related to colonialism, imperialism, and religious conflicts have laid the groundwork for current geopolitical realities.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, geopolitics examines the interplay of geographic factors, military power, and political ambitions, offering insights into the shaping of the relationships between nations.<sup>3</sup> Religion and history are developed as essential components in the strategic considerations of global power politics. In this context, an impartial and honest analysis of Islam's war historiography (according to history's methods and principles) would disprove the occidental belief that Islam is more violent and tolerant of excessive or arbitrary violence than other major religions.<sup>4</sup>

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a case study of the intricate interaction between religion, history, and geopolitics. Iran boasts a civilization with roots stretching back over two millennia, marked by cultural, artistic, and intellectual achievements to significantly shape world history.<sup>5</sup> The Islamic Revolution of 1979 represents an important turning point in history, transforming the social, political, and cultural structures.<sup>6</sup>

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\* Rizki Damayanti, Department of International Relations, Universitas Paramadina, Jakarta, Indonesia. Email: rizki.damayanti@paramadina.ac.id.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and International Relations: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 328.

<sup>2</sup> Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 72.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2017), 106.

<sup>4</sup> Felix Idongesit Oyosoro, "Beyond Jihad: The Islamic Contributions to the Field of Strategic Studies," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* (2023): 44–52.

<sup>5</sup> Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, *The Age of the Parthians* (I.B. Tauris, 2021), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 63.

The transformation from pre-Islamic Persia to an Islamic republic is a remarkable journey marked by profound changes in art, architecture, literature, and values, blending Persian heritage with Islamic teachings.<sup>7</sup> Despite the rich civilizational legacy, Iran faces significant challenges, such as the economic and political ramifications of Western-imposed embargoes. These embargoes possess far-reaching impacts on the domestic dynamics, including economic stability, social welfare, and the trajectory of Islamic civilization.<sup>8</sup>

The central problem addressed is twofold, first, how has the historical and cultural legacy of Persian civilization shaped the evolution of Islamic civilization in Iran? Second, how has the Western embargo influenced the development of civilization, particularly in the socio-economic and political spheres? In addressing the questions, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between Islam, Persian history, and external geopolitical pressures.

The hypothesis shows that the development of Islamic civilization in Iran is deeply rooted in the Persian heritage to influence the cultural and ideological landscape. Additionally, the Western embargo imposed economic constraints and acted as a catalyst for internal resilience and innovation, shaping the trajectory of Islamic civilization.

The significance of this research extends beyond the borders of Iran as a nation that epitomizes the convergence of ancient civilization and Islamic influence. Iran also offers valuable lessons for understanding the broader dynamics of religion, history, and geopolitics in shaping modern civilizations. Therefore, this research adopts an interdisciplinary method, integrating historical, cultural, economic, and political analyses to build a comprehensive framework for understanding complex dynamics. Global academic discourse contributes to the interplay of religion, history, and geopolitics while offering insights into the navigation of challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative method is used to examine the dynamics of Islamic civilization in Iran, focusing on the interplay between Islam, Persian history, and the impact of the Western embargo. This research primarily relies on secondary sources, integrating historical analysis, contextual examination, and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to comprehensively understand the subject matter. Historical analysis serves as the central method for exploring the evolution of Persian civilization from the pre-Islamic period to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The integration of Islamic values with Persian traditions is traced by examining key historical events, cultural milestones, and societal transformations. This research draws extensively from secondary sources, including academic publications, historical research, and policy analyses, to construct an accurate and well-supported narrative.

Contextual analysis is used to investigate the socio-economic and political impact of the Western embargo on Iran. This includes the evaluation of Islamic economic principles, such as social justice, equitable wealth distribution, and sustainability. Data for this analysis are obtained from reliable secondary sources, including peer-reviewed articles from journals, policy reports, and economic research, ensuring academic rigor and relevance. The theoretical framework combines cultural analyses and political economy to provide a nuanced understanding of the unique trajectory. Cultural analyses are used to explore the interaction between Persian cultural identity and Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, political economy theories are applied to analyze the effects of economic sanctions on the development strategies and societal resilience of Iran. This interdisciplinary method ensures a thorough examination of the complexities of the socio-political and cultural landscape.

The data analysis uses thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes within the secondary sources. This method enables the research to explore the integration of Islamic values with Persian traditions, the socio-political consequences of the embargo, and strategic responses to challenges. The intricate relationship between religion, history, and geopolitics is analyzed in shaping the development of Islamic civilization by using a comprehensive method grounded in secondary

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Foltz, *Iran in World History* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 17.

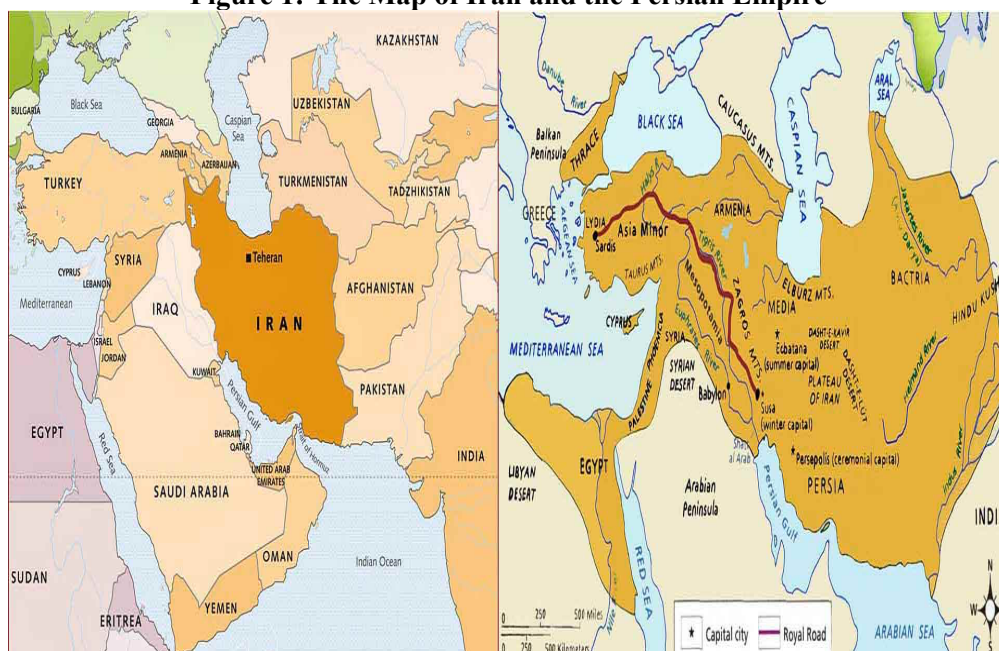
<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Iran Sanctions* (Congressional Research Service, 2021), 20.

*The Development of Islamic Civilization in Iran: Persian Civilization and the Impact of Western Embargoes* sources. This methodology ensures depth and reliability in understanding the position of Iran as a significant Islamic civilization with enduring global influence.

## History of Persian Civilization, the Entry of Islam into Iran, and the Iranian Islamic Revolution

Iran historically known as Persia refers to the Persian Empire in the ancient world with a large number of imperial dynasties. For 2600 years, until 1935, Iran was known by the ancient Greek name of Persia in the West. In 1935, the government decided to change the name to Iran. The name symbolized a new era in history and all embassies were required to call the country Iran.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 shows the map of Persia and Iran.

**Figure 1: The Map of Iran and the Persian Empire**



Source: <https://www.letsvisitpersia.com/iran/>

The Persian Empire in the past included several regions covering most of West and Central Asia. However, the boundaries of the regions changed over time due to political reasons, conquests, and variations in geographic boundaries. The Persian Empire reached the peak during the reigns of Darius I (522–486 BC) and Xerxes I (486–465 BC) as well as the Achaemenid Empire. There were changes in leadership and conquest by various empires such as Alexander the Great, Romans, and Byzantines. This region formed the Sassanid Empire (224–651 AD), which was also the successor of the previous dynasties. Since the 7th century AD, this region became part of the Islamic world after the conquest by Muslim Arabs. In the 16th century, the Safavid Empire dominated the region, introducing Shiite Islam as the dominant form of Islam. Briefly, the main territory of the Persian Empire (5th century BC - 7th century AD) consisted of Iraq, Iran (Persia), Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, part of modern Turkey, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and regions in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, the territory of Iran (Islamic State of the Republic of Iran), has modern territorial boundaries with Iraq, Afghanistan (part of the east), Azerbaijan (part of the northwest), Armenia (part of the northwest), and Turkmenistan (part of the northeast).

The rich history of Persian civilization dates back to ancient times, especially during the Achaemenid Empire led by King Darius I. Persian civilization reached the peak under the leadership of the Great Knight Cyrus the Great known as the founder of the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BC. This empire brought advances in administration, legal systems, and infrastructure development, creating a strong foundation for Persian glory.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Amini, *Pictorial History of Iran* (1st Books Library, 2001), 36.

The continuity of Persian civilization was reported during the Sassanid empire, reaching the peak in the 3rd and 7th centuries AD. Under Sassanid rule, Persia experienced significant progress in art, literature, and science. This imperial system created an environment that favored cultural and scientific development, creating a profound legacy. A significant cultural transformation occurred when Islam entered Iran in the 7th century AD. Despite changes in the value system and way of life, Islam succeeded in blending with the Persian heritage. This process created a unique Iranian identity and shaped a thriving Islamic culture with Persian characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Cultural aspects such as art, literature, and architecture were subjected to adaptations that enriched local traditions when Islam touched Persian lands. There was also an integration of Persian science and philosophy with Islamic teachings, forming a unique understanding and practice in Iranian society. Subsequently, the implementation of Islam in Iran reflected a continuation of the past and the integration of distinctively Persian aspects in the social order and daily life. For example, the Achaemenid administrative legacy influenced the organization of government in Islamic contexts. Similarly, Persian art and literature made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic art and literature in Iran.<sup>12</sup>

The combination of Islam and Persian heritage creates a unique framework that distinguishes the Islamic experience in Iran from the Islamic experience in other regions. This is an important basis for understanding the identity and dynamics of Islamic civilization, especially in the context of relations with long-rooted Persian civilization.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 led to profound changes in the social structure. Factors such as religion, ethics, and Islamic values are integrated into the government system and daily life. A new understanding of identity is the basis for forming a more Islamic society and strengthening the role of religion in public life.<sup>13</sup> These changes include increasing the role of women in social and economic life, variations in the education system to reflect Islamic values, as well as transformations in the legal system and social policies. In this context, the development of Islamic civilization reflects efforts to form a society that includes Islamic principles.<sup>14</sup>

Art, literature, and architecture were subjected to a significant evolution after the Islamic Revolution. Certain restrictions in the fine arts and the influence of Islam in literature are reflected in the works produced. Furthermore, the use of religious symbols and moral representations in art and literature is becoming more prominent as a form of cultural expression that reflects Islamic values. Architecture in Iran, with the characteristic mosaics and calligraphy, is a symbol of the continuation of the richness of Persian culture colored by Islamic principles. The construction of mosques and Islamic cultural centers strengthens the identity of Islamic civilization amidst contemporary challenges and changes.<sup>15</sup>

The education system in Iran has been restructured to reflect Islamic values in the curriculum and teaching methods. This reform aims to form a generation that respects and understands Islamic teachings to integrate modern science and technology with religious values. This increased investment in scientific research and development has made a major contribution to the dynamics of civilization development. Higher education is important in forming critical thinking and bringing progress in various scientific disciplines to maintain the integrity of Islamic values.

### **Iran's Role as a Great Civilization in the World**

The role of Iran as a great civilization can be explained in three contexts, namely contribution to world civilization, influence in the development of science and culture, as well as diplomacy, and the role in international relations. Iran is the inheritor of Persian cultural wealth and has an important role in shaping world civilization. Iran's contributions are visible in a variety of fields, including art, literature, mathematics, science, and philosophy. The country has been a center of knowledge influencing the civilizations of the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Asia. The continuation of Persian glory is reflected

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<sup>11</sup> . Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, *Birth of the Persian Empire* (I.B. Tauris and Co., 2005), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Soraya R. Nadjmbadi, *Conceptualizing Iranian Anthropology: Past and Present Perspectives* (Berghahn Books, 2012), 51.

<sup>13</sup> Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Nasir Tamara, *Revolusi Iran* (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2017), 39.

<sup>15</sup> Naseraddin Alizadeh, "Imagined Iran after the Arrival of Islam in Aryanist, Orientalist, Nationalist and Islamist Historiography," *Journal of History School* 14 (2021): 25–53.

*The Development of Islamic Civilization in Iran: Persian Civilization and the Impact of Western Embargoes* in the spread of classical works, such as the Shahnameh, and contributions to the field of monumental architecture. Cultural centers such as Persepolis also became focal points for understanding history and policy. This influence can be found in art, architecture, and language, creating a continuation of Persian glory.<sup>16</sup> During the Sassanid era, significant scientific progress occurred, particularly in the fields of astronomy, medicine, and engineering, which served as a foundation for Islamic Golden Age advancements.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the development of science and culture, Iran has made a major contribution, especially during the Islamic empire. Centers of knowledge such as the House of Wisdom in Baghdad founded by the Abbasid Caliphate gained knowledge from Iranian scholars and scientists. Meanwhile, Figures such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Razi played a large role in the development of science, medicine, and philosophy. Al-Farabi is a philosopher and politician, who contributed to philosophy and music. Ibn Sina, a polymath, is famous for the “Canon of Medicine” which has been a reference for medical science for centuries. Al-Razi, a chemist and physician, made important contributions to pharmaceutical science and chemistry. The contribution to this field of medicine is very significant. Research originating from Iranian scholars was the basis for the development of medical science.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of Iranian culture is reflected in the spread of art, music, and literature throughout the Islamic world. Classical literary works such as Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* and Hafez's poetry possess a profound impact on literature. The mystical poetry of Rumi and the *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam shows the beauty and depth of Persian literary thought at a level of universality. In addition, Persian scientists, such as Al-Khwarizmi and Omar Khayyam, contributed to the fields of mathematics and science. Al-Khwarizmi was a major figure in the development of algebra, while Omar Khayyam made contributions to astronomy and calendars.<sup>19</sup> During the Renaissance period in Europe, Iranian art and architecture significantly influenced European artists, as evidenced by the adaptation of Persian patterns and motifs in textiles and manuscripts.<sup>20</sup>

Iran has played an important role in trade, diplomacy, and cultural relations in the association of diplomacy and the role in International Relations. As a bridge between East and West, the country has contributed ideas and trade for many societies and civilizations. Persian cultural influence extended to Europe, while exchange through the Silk Road shaped global civilization. In this context, the Silk Road stretched from the Middle East to Central Asia and China, as an important trade route. Iran connected trade and facilitated rich cultural exchange between various civilizations, creating harmony and diversity. The diplomatic ties with the Roman and Byzantine Empires also facilitated exchanges of knowledge, arts, and governance to influence the cultural systems.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural influence reached the peak during the Renaissance period in Europe. Persian art, architecture, and literature provided significant inspiration for European artists and scholars. Additionally, calligraphy, art objects, and literary works enriched European creativity and aesthetics. Iran is a trade center connecting East and West with a strategic geographical location. Cities such as Isfahan and Tabriz became busy trading centers, promoting the exchange of goods and ideas between cultures. There are also scientific centers in Iran, such as Qom and Isfahan, which are prominent places of research and intellectual exchange.<sup>22</sup> This legacy continues to influence the development of knowledge and thought at the international level.

The importance of Iran as a geopolitical player is reflected in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Despite tensions with several Western countries, the role in advancing international cooperation and maintaining regional

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<sup>16</sup> Syed Raheem Abaas Shah and Muhammad Akram Zaheer, “Educational System and Institutions in Persian Civilization: A Historical Description and Its Impacts in Present Iran,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 267–76.

<sup>17</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2020), 47.

<sup>18</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western: An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 39.

<sup>19</sup> A. A. Gohrab, *The Great Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubaiyat* (Iranian Studies Series, 2012), 27.

<sup>20</sup> . Rustam Shukurov, *Byzantine Ideas of Persia, 650–1461* (Routledge, 2024), 16.

<sup>21</sup> Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sassanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (I.B. Tauris, 2020), 57.

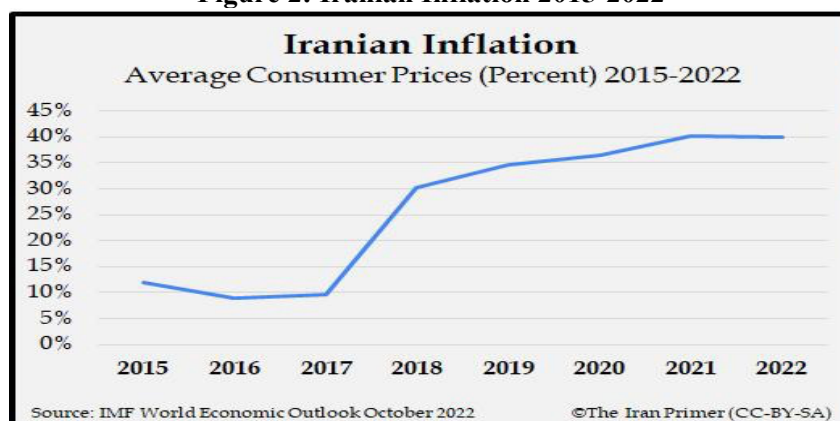
<sup>22</sup> Nematollah Fazeli, *Politics of Culture in Iran: Anthropology, Politics, and Society in the Twentieth Century* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

stability cannot be ignored. Iran contributes to international diplomacy, champions global issues, and plays a role in efforts to achieve international peace and justice. The presence of the empire in the diplomatic arena plays an active role in shaping relations between countries. Cooperation is built to strengthen bilateral relations with countries around the world by following diplomatic norms.<sup>23</sup>

### Western Embargo on Iran and its Impact

In the 2010s, the Islamic Republic of Iran became subject to one of the most comprehensive sanctioning regimes ever imposed on a modern economy.<sup>24</sup> The embargo imposed by Western countries on Iran has roots in several global political, economic, and security factors. The main reason is concern about the nuclear program and the potential as a threat to regional stability. The development of nuclear weapons could change the balance of power in the Middle East and increase the risk of proliferation. Factors such as human rights, support for militant groups, and differences in political views also form the basis for the restrictive measures. Differences in political views between Iran and some Western countries, especially regarding conflicts in the Middle East, contributed to worsening relations and became a factor in the implementation of sanctions. The embargo imposed by Western countries promotes changes in the behavior of Iran on issues and responds to international concerns about the policies and actions.<sup>25</sup> These sanctions are designed to apply economic and political pressure to achieve specific diplomatic goals.<sup>26</sup> The economic embargo from the West possesses a significant impact on the Iranian economy. Restrictions in the international trade sector have created major challenges for economic growth.<sup>27</sup> Figure 2 shows that inflation continued to increase from 2015 to 2022 due to the restrictions.

Figure 2: Iranian Inflation 2015-2022



Source: Henry Rome, Iran in 2022: Volatile Economy, (December 21, 2022), <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2022/dec/21/iran-2022-volatile-economy>

Figure 2 shows the value of the Iranian rial currency depreciated, inflation increased, and the unemployment rate rose due to restrictions. The high inflation rate eroded the purchasing power of Iranians, especially in the lower classes or on fixed incomes. Average food and beverage prices increased by 68% in November compared to the previous year. The prices of tomatoes and onions, staples in Iranian cooking increased about 16% in November compared to October.<sup>28</sup> This influence is felt in various levels of society, affecting the well-being of the Iranian people. In this context, the impact of the embargo is developed as an important factor in formulating policies and social dynamics in Iran.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Loft, "Iran's Influence in the Middle East," House of Commons Library, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9504/CBP-9504.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Zep Kalp, "Mobilized Resilience and Development under Sanctions in Iran," *Development and Change* 55 (2024): 933-964, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12859>.

<sup>25</sup> K. Mohammed, "Why is Iran a Regional Dilemma?" *The International Politics*, no. 214 (2018): 76-79.

<sup>26</sup> Islam Abdelbary and Rasha Elshawa, "Economic Sanctions as a Foreign Policy Tool: A Case Study of the Iran-West Conflict," *Migration Letters* 20, no. S7 (2023): 215-237.

<sup>27</sup> E. Batmanghelidj, "The Ins and Outs of Iranian Industrial Resilience under Sanctions," *The Muslim World* 111 (2021): 96-112, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12374>.

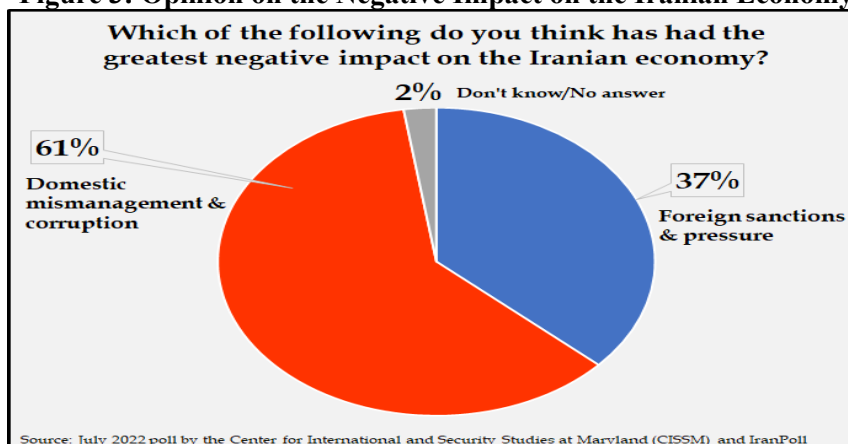
<sup>28</sup> Henry Rome, "Iran in 2022: Volatile Economy," December 21, 2022, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2022/dec/21/iran-2022-volatile-economy>.

The Western embargo had an impact on the economic sector as well as deep political and social consequences. These sanctions have caused or contributed to a wide range of negative macroeconomic outcomes including rapid currency devaluation, severe trade and fiscal deficits, elevated inflation, and rising poverty rates.<sup>29</sup> Economic challenges create social tensions and contribute to increasing internal political pressure. Political and societal leaders in Iran are faced with the difficult task of maintaining stability in a context of economic uncertainty. Furthermore, this embargo affects relations with the international community and has the potential to create diplomatic isolation. Under these conditions, the question relating to the adaptation of internal and external political policies to overcome the embargo becomes very relevant and important.<sup>30</sup>

The reaction of Iranian society to the economic embargo from the West was influenced by various factors, including religious beliefs and political thinking. In the Iranian context, Islamic thought has also played an important role in shaping views and responses to the situation. The economic embargo is seen as triggering sentiments of nationalism and solidarity among Iranian society. Despite the negative economic impacts, communities also feel compelled to unite in the face of external pressures. Political thought and ideology related to the Islamic Revolution in Iran have played a role in formulating societal views. Groups or individuals who support the government see the embargo as a form of external pressure.<sup>31</sup>

Islamic thought influenced the interpretation and response of Iranian society to the embargo. The principles of social justice and economic resilience in Islam are used to formulate arguments or justifications for policies in the face of embargoes. Some Islamic communities and thinkers view the embargo as part of Western efforts to limit the influence of Islam and engage in resistance to external pressure. A poll in July 2022 shows an interesting phenomenon regarding the response to the state of the Iranian economy.

**Figure 3: Opinion on the Negative Impact on the Iranian Economy**



Source: Henry Rome, *Iran in 2022: Volatile Economy*, (December 21, 2022), <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2022/dec/21/iran-2022-volatile-economy>

The majority of Iranians (61%) believed that the main cause of economic collapse was domestic mismanagement and corruption. According to 37%, foreign sanctions and pressure affect the economy. The embargo allows people to look for internal economic solutions, such as supporting local production and more independent economic businesses. This kind of initiative gets support from Islamic thought emphasizing economic sovereignty. In facing economic limitations, the Iranian people prioritize spending by choosing basic needs and reducing consumption of imported goods. This reflects Islamic economic values to emphasize wise spending. However, Iranian society has a diversity of political and social views, and some individuals possess uniform reactions or thoughts toward the embargo. Islamic thought and national values also functioned as unifying factors in facing external challenges.

<sup>29</sup> Mohammad Reza Farzanegan and Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, "Understanding Economic Sanctions on Iran: A Survey," *The Economists' Voice* 20, no. 2 (2023): 197–226.

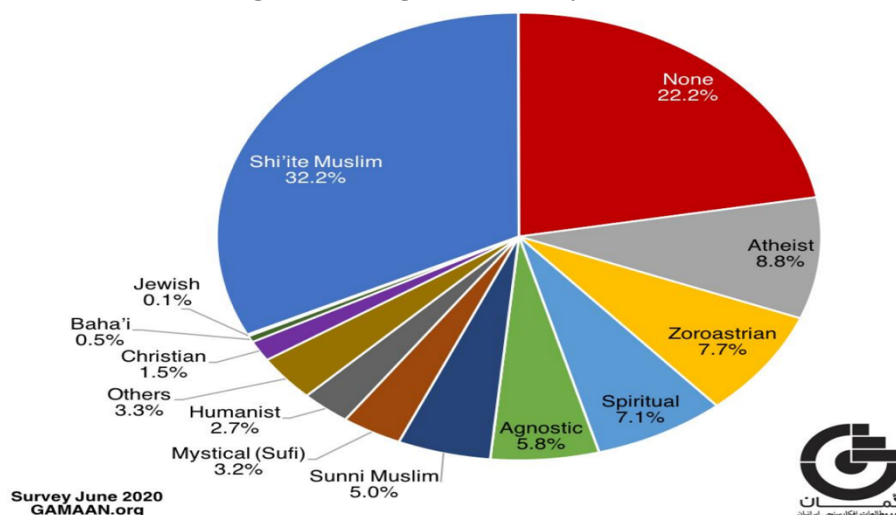
<sup>30</sup> A. Samira, "The Impact of Economic Sanctions on Iran's Economy and Foreign Policy," (Washington, DC, 2013), 1–5.

<sup>31</sup> A. Ahmadi, "The Impact of Economic Sanctions and the JCPOA on the Energy Sector of Iran," *Global Trade and Customs Journal* 13, no. 5 (2018): 198–223.

## Interaction Between Islam, History, and the Western Embargo in Iran's Dynamics

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a country in the Middle East with the special characteristics of being an Islamic-dominated country. The Iranian revolution began in January 1978 as a series of urban riots, demonstrations, and strikes. It is estimated that about 10 percent of Iran's population participated in at least one of the protests that led to the fall of the monarchy.<sup>32</sup> Since the Revolution in 1979, Iran has been a country with a Shia-based government system governed by Islamic principles. Figure 4 is a description of the composition of religions believed by the Iranian people.

Figure 4: Religious Diversity in Iran



Source: Ammar Maleki & Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Iranians' Attitudes Toward Religion: A 2020 Survey Report* (August 2020), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 6.

Even though approximately one-third identifies as Shiite Muslim, a significant percentage of the population identifies with atheism (*āti'īst, khudānābāvar*), Zoroastrianism, spirituality (*ma'navīyyat 'girā*), Sunni Islam, Sufi mysticism (*'irfān 'girā, taṣavuf*), Christianity. Only 22% of the population do not identify with a religion (separate from atheism or agnosticism).<sup>33</sup> The diversity creates a unique social and religious environment. Even though the majority of the population is Shiite Muslims, the Iranian government officially recognizes religious minorities and grants certain rights. This diversity can also cause social tensions, especially in the complex political and social context.

In the face of the Western embargo, society and leaders are faced with critical questions about the integration of Islamic values into economic development strategies. How can Islamic economic principles, such as social justice, equitable distribution of wealth, and sustainability, form the basis for new economic policies? The economic principles, particularly the concept of justice and equity in wealth distribution, are derived from primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), such as the Qur'an (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:177) and the Hadith, where Prophet Muhammad emphasized the importance of wealth sharing and the rights of the poor.<sup>34</sup> The following are some of the main principles of Islamic economics that form the basis of economic development strategy amidst the Western embargo.

1. Social justice: The principles of social justice in Islam emphasize the fair distribution of wealth and equal distribution of economic opportunities. This is grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, where wealth should not be hoarded by the rich and must be circulated within society (Qur'an 59:7).<sup>35</sup> In the context of the embargo, the implementation policies ensuring that the economic impact is not burdensome for certain layers of society is seen by the Iranian government as a step in line with Islamic values.

<sup>32</sup> Mohammad Reza Farzanegan and Mohammad Ali Kadivar, "The Effect of Islamic Revolution and War on Income Inequality in Iran," *Empirical Economics* 65 (2023): 1007–1026.

<sup>33</sup> Ammar Maleki and Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Iranians' Attitudes Toward Religion: A 2020 Survey Report* (The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN [GAMAAN], August 2020), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Collection of Authentic Hadith* (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Islamic Texts Society, 2020), 39.



2. Equal distribution of wealth: Islamic economics emphasizes equal distribution of wealth to prevent excessive inequality. Islamic legal sources call for the equitable treatment of all individuals, promoting zakat (almsgiving) and other charitable contributions to address economic disparity.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the Iranian government ensured that economic benefits were distributed fairly across all levels of society.
3. Sustainability and environmental awareness: The principle of sustainability emphasizes responsibility towards the environment and natural resources. This is in line with Islamic jurisprudence, which promotes responsible stewardship of the earth (Qur'an 2:164; 7:31). In the face of the embargo, economic policies are designed with environmental sustainability, such as the development of renewable energy and responsible management of natural resources.
4. Community participation: Islamic economics promotes active community participation. In the context of the embargo, the implementation of policies that enable community participation in economic decision-making and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises is declared by the government.
5. Interest and transparency: Islam prohibits the practice of usury or interest which is considered unfair. The prohibition of interest (riba) is clearly articulated in Islamic jurisprudence, including in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:275-279).<sup>37</sup> In designing economic policy, the Iranian government looks for alternatives in compliance with principles, such as profit-based financing or lower interest policies.
6. Human development and education: Islamic economic principles emphasize the importance of human development and education. The Qur'an and Hadith place significant importance on acquiring knowledge (Qur'an 96:1-5) and the development of human capabilities. In facing the embargo, investment in the education sector and human resource development is an important strategy implemented by the Iranian government.

The integration of Islamic economic principles creates a framework that fits the values of Iranian society and mitigates the impact of the embargo. In this context, the leaders and society designed policies to address acute economic challenges in line with Islamic moral and ethical principles.

The Western embargo on Iran had an economic impact and influenced the social structure, culture, and dynamics of the development of Islamic civilization. In this context, Iranian people feel stronger in maintaining and celebrating Islamic identity as a form of resistance to external pressure. This can be reflected in increased religious practices and awareness of Islamic values. Subsequently, the embargo allowed the Iranian people to strengthen and defend the local and traditional cultural values. This cultural independence is used as a form of resistance to foreign influence. The embargo situation has also become a driving force for improving education and promoting Islamic values as an integral part of national identity. The Iranian government and educational institutions are focusing on developing curricula that emphasize Islamic values. However, the society experienced changes in the consumption patterns in response to economic constraints. Increased sustainability and awareness of local products were reported as part of the response.<sup>38</sup>

The Western embargo has created new complexities in the national identity. The questions considered are related to 1) the role of Islam in shaping the national narrative amidst the pressure of embargo and political tensions, and 2) the role of Islamic values as a connecting factor to strengthen national unity.

Islam is seen as playing a key role in shaping the national narrative in Iran, especially amidst the pressure of the embargo and political tensions with the West. Islamic values are considered a connecting factor that strengthens national unity and creates a strong identity. Furthermore, the concept of resistance (*mujahada*) and self-reliance is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and used as a central tenet in the narrative against external interference.<sup>39</sup> Under the pressure of an embargo, societies, and governments view resistance as a response to foreign interference and an attempt to defend national sovereignty.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Economics and the Contemporary World* (Al-Risalah Publishers, 2018), 61.

<sup>37</sup> . Muhamed Umer Chapra, *The Islamic Vision of Development in the Light of Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (Islamic Research and Training Institute, 2008), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Mohammad Reza Farzanegan, *Years of Life Lost to Revolution and War in Iran* (SSRN Scholarly Paper, 2021), 18–19.

<sup>39</sup> P. Walter, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism: The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy* (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2015), 9–10.

<sup>40</sup> Fikret Demir and S. S. Tabrizy, "Gendered Effects of Sanctions on Manufacturing Employment: Evidence from Iran," *Review of Development Economics* 26, no. 4 (2022): 2040–69.

Based on the description above, Islamic values, such as patriotism and solidarity, are used as the basis for building national unity amidst external pressure. Awareness of a shared identity has also strengthened solidarity among Iranian society. Meanwhile, there is a view of resistance to Western values to maintain Islamic values and strengthen national identity. This includes a rejection of Western consumer culture and an effort to maintain local and religious values. The Islamic identity amidst modernity should be maintained even though Iran has achieved economic and technological progress. This creates a narrative about the synergy of Islamic values with modern developments without losing cultural roots.<sup>41</sup>

Islam plays a central role in the educational and cultural system of Iran. The government places special emphasis on promoting Islamic values through the school curriculum and the media. This shapes the understanding and perception of national identity. In the context of the embargo, the national narrative powered by Islamic values can be considered a source of strength and cohesion. A strong Islamic identity is used to overcome external economic and political pressures as well as to maintain national dignity.

### **Iran's Challenges and Opportunities in Maintaining and Building Islamic Civilization in the Future**

Iran possesses a rich legacy of Persian civilization and contributes to the development of science and culture. The role as a global actor remains relevant, especially in diplomacy and international relations despite facing an embargo from Western countries. The Western embargo had a significant economic, political, and social impact on Iran. These challenges include reduced economic growth, internal political uncertainty, and pressure on society. Most of the challenges result from restrictions on trade and access to the global financial system.

#### ***Challenges Iran Faces in Defending Islamic Values***

The future challenges of Iran include the critical question relating to the maintenance and strengthening of Islamic values amidst global dynamics and pressure from the Western embargo. The integrity of Islamic values is maintained in the face of complex economic, political, and cultural challenges. In this context, globalization brings challenges for Iran in maintaining Islamic identity. The influence of foreign culture, media, and modern lifestyles threatens the stability of traditional Islamic values. Social and cultural changes within the country also create tension between traditional Islamic values and modern aspirations. The challenges include changes in gender roles, family structures, and moral values. The economic embargo from the West complicates the ability to defend Islamic values. Economic limitations lead to social inequality and societal dissatisfaction, affecting the stability of religious values.<sup>42</sup>

Regional challenges can have an impact on stability and security in Iran. Geopolitical tensions also pose threats to cherished Islamic values. Meanwhile, internal political dynamics, including competition and polarization among different groups, create challenges in maintaining consensus on Islamic values.

Media and technological developments create new challenges in disseminating information. The use of social media and the internet have an undesirable influence on the understanding and practice of Islamic values. In this context, challenges arise from the pressure of the international community on human rights standards and secular values conflicting with Islamic principles. This foreign interference in internal affairs creates instability and affects the ability to maintain Islamic values through vision and principles.<sup>43</sup> Maintaining the consolidation of religious authority and managing dissent is a particular challenge for the Iranian government, especially in the context of changing social and political dynamics. The various challenges contributed to an increase in the unwillingness of the Iranian people to maintain the Islamic Republic as a system of government.

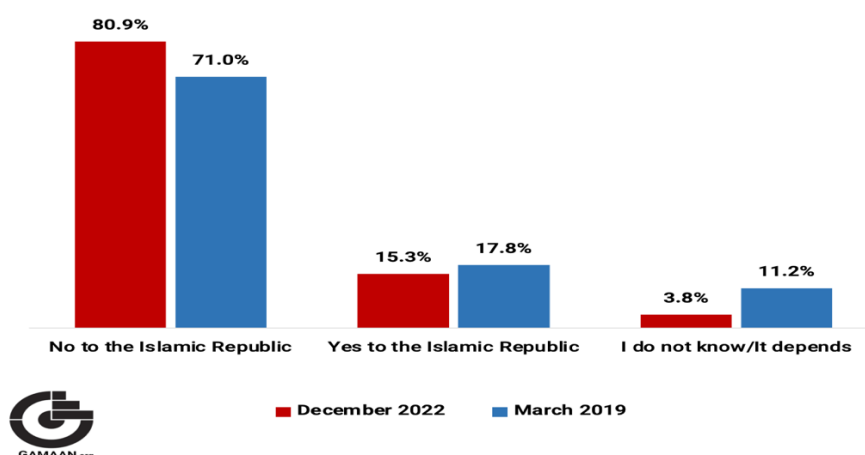
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<sup>41</sup> Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, February 11, 2019, <https://www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/fundamentals-irans-islamic-revolution>.

<sup>42</sup> M. Sariolghalam, "Globalization and Iran National Sovereignty: Challenge of Compatibility," *Iranian Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2015): 21–26.

<sup>43</sup> Sima Shine, *Iran and the International Arena: Challenges and Opportunities* (Institute for National Security Studies, 2021), 69.

**Figure 5: Islamic Republic: Yes, or No?**



Source: Ammar Maleki & Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests* (February 2023), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 6.

The question on a hypothetical referendum was asked in a previous survey, conducted by GAMAAN in March 2019 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the 1979 referendum on the Islamic Republic in Iran. Subsequently, a survey was conducted in December 2022. The comparison shows that in the period between the two surveys, the percentage of those who selected “No” to the Islamic Republic increased by 10%.<sup>44</sup>

In the period between the two surveys, Iran experienced significant economic pressure due to international sanctions and internal economic factors. The increase in the percentage opposing the Islamic Republic reflects dissatisfaction with economic performance. The 40th anniversary of the Islamic Republic referendum in 1979 triggered reflection and public discussion about the future direction of the country. These warnings have the potential to strengthen or undermine support for existing systems.

A significant increase in the percentage opposing the Islamic Republic potentially changed the political dynamics in Iran. Political parties or opposition groups may try to exploit public dissatisfaction to gain support. The continued trend of increasing “No” to the Islamic Republic emphasizes the importance of government response to public aspirations and demands to ensure political and social stability.

### ***Opportunities for the Development of Islamic Civilization in the Future***

There are opportunities to affirm and expand the role of Iran as a great Islamic civilization. These include developing an economic sector based on Islamic principles, strengthening education and science integrated with Islamic values, as well as promoting arts and culture to reflect Persian heritage and Islamic principles.

Regarding the development of an Islamic-based economy, Iran has the opportunity to promote economic sectors in line with Islamic principles, such as Sharia finance, fair trade, and economic empowerment of the people. This is achieved by supporting Sharia financial institutions, implementing justice-based trade policies, and providing incentives for sustainable economic projects.

In terms of empowering education and science, Iran has the opportunity to improve education based on Islamic values which include science, technology, and innovation. This is pursued through investment in research and development, preparing a curriculum that is integrated with Islamic values, and supporting universities focused on science and technology. Efforts to empower women are also seen as an opportunity for Iran in line with Islamic values that respect rights and potential. This condition is achieved through implementing inclusive policies, increasing access to education and employment, as well as establishing organizations in support of women.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ammar Maleki and Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests* (The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), February 2023), 6.

<sup>45</sup> A. S. Soofi, *Science and Innovations in Iran: Development, Progress, and Challenges* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 46–47.

In the context of diplomacy and international partnerships, Iran strengthens Islamic diplomacy and builds positive partnerships with other countries. Therefore, the country needs to play an active role in international organizations to support Islamic values, establish mutually beneficial cooperative relations, and promote a positive image in the world.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the revitalization of cultural heritage, Iran has the opportunity to maintain and restore Persian culture as an integral part of Islamic civilization. In this context, Iran needs to develop heritage preservation programs, support restoration projects, and promote global recognition of Persian cultural heritage. Iran has the opportunity to strengthen the dual identity as an Islamic country and the successor of Persian civilization to consolidate Islamic and Persian identities. Educational and information campaigns should be performed to increase public awareness of Islamic and Persian heritage, as well as integrate the elements into institutions and policies.<sup>47</sup> Iran can shape the future as a thriving Islamic civilization, combining Islamic values with the richness of Persian heritage and overcoming the impact of the embargo to achieve sustainable progress by exploring and exploiting opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the dynamics of the development of Islamic civilization in Iran showed the process of integrating Islamic values with Persian cultural heritage. Even though different challenges and adjustments were reported, this civilization continued to develop by combining unique Persian elements with Islamic teachings. The integration showed the successful preservation of cultural identity and adaptation of Islamic principles, as a distinctive model of civilizational growth. Social transformation, art, and science were reported as an integral part of Islamic civilization in Iran.

The main results of this research showed several critical findings. First, the historical foundation of Persian civilization significantly influenced the character and development of Islamic identity particularly through the contributions to art, science, and governance. Second, the Western embargo was developed as a key external force shaping the economic policies of Iran, social structures, and cultural dynamics. The integration of Islamic economic principles, such as social justice and sustainability played an important role in mitigating the challenges posed by the embargo. Third, the resilience of Iranian society in preserving Islamic values amidst global pressures showed the interplay of religion and geopolitics in maintaining national cohesion.

The interaction between Islam, the history of Persian civilization, and the Western embargo formed a complex narrative about Iranian civilization. Islam provided a guide in facing economic and political challenges, while the history of Persian civilization reported a unique foundation for Iranian national identity. The Western embargo played a key role in shaping the response and strategy of Iran, with the potential to strengthen the role as an Islamic civilization. This dual role defined internal strategies and influenced global Islamic identity and international relations. The results contributed to academic discussions about the role of religion, history, and geopolitics in shaping civilizations, particularly within the context of Iran. These insights were valuable for understanding the navigation of contemporary challenges while preserving cultural and religious heritage.

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<sup>46</sup> Hossein Karimifard, "Iran's Foreign Policy Approaches toward International Organizations," *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 35–68.

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