

# Social Movements and Revolution: Iran



Religion and  
Populism in the 1979  
Iranian Revolution

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# Roots of 1979 Revolution



Mossadeq in Exile



Mohammad Reza Shah with President Eisenhower

# The 1979 Revolution

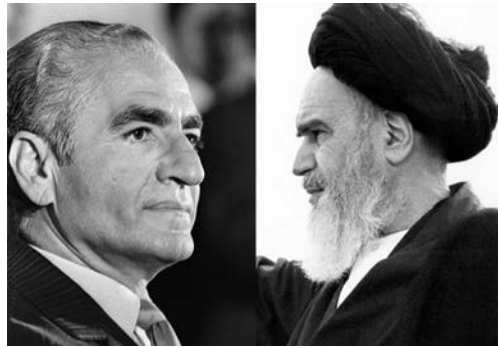
- Removed unpopular Pahlavi royal dictatorship
- Fueled by clergy and bazaar class
- Led by Ruhollah (Ayatollah) Khomeini
- Resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran



# Historiography

# Conventional Western History of 1979 Iranian Revolution

- Focuses primarily on:
  - Khomeini
  - The shah
  - US hostage crisis



Mohammad Reza Shah (left) and  
Khomeini (right)



Hostage outside the U.S. embassy  
in Tehrān

# Where this history falls short

- This conventional westernized history of 1979 undervalues:
  - Circulation of ideas through the bazaar
  - The central role of Shiite religion and ulama (clergy)
  - Mobilization of average Iranians for revolution
  - Overwhelming Iranian disdain for American influence





# My Project

# A “bottom -up” history of the Iranian Revolution

- My goal is to clearly define the 1979 revolution as a Iranian Shiite revolution with a focus on the leadership roles of ulama and bazaar in addition to Khomeini
- Highlight the larger structure of the revolution and the experiences of average Iranians rather than specific revolutionary figures



# Authoritarianism and westernization in the Pahlavi Dynasty

- Extreme inequality
- SAVAK and ignorance of public opinion
- The White Revolution and secularism



Pahlavi royal family



Closed bazaar



SAVAK  
insignia

# The Bazaar and The Mosque

- The bazaar markets and Shiite mosques are at the center of Iranian social, political and economic culture
- Revolutionary ideology spread between and throughout bazaar merchant groups and religious clergy
- By the late 1970s, ulama preachers were openly critical of the shah



Tehrān Bazaar during  
the White Revolution

# The role of religion

- Iranian Shi'ism was a unifying force within the revolution
- The shared goal of elevating religion within the Iranian government bridged divisions of gender, class, region, etc.
- Intellectual debates within Iranian Islam



Iranian mosque

# International Implications

- Removing the shah was a removal of western influence
  - This was especially clear when the shah fled Iran and received medical treatment in the United States
- I.R.I. has been distrustful of the US since conception in 1979
- Tensions remain today after the assassination of general Soleimani, withdrawal of the nuclear deal, and decades of trade embargoes/sanctions



President Trump  
reimposes sanctions on  
Iran

Iranian lawmakers chant  
“death to America” on the  
floor of parliament,  
Jan 2020



# Where my research will go from here

- This project is one case study in a larger theoretical framework on social movements and revolution I plan to develop throughout my time at Oxy
  - What do revolutions look like in former colonized states since the Cold War?
  - Where do social movements begin? (Revolutionary figures? Grassroots organization?)
  - How do state strength and social unity compare in states on the eve of revolution?