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A Critical Introduction to Khomeini

As the architect of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini remains one of the most inspirational and enigmatic figures of the twentieth century. The Revolution placed Iran at the forefront of Middle East politics and the Islamic revival. Twenty years after his death, Khomeini is revered as a spiritual and political figurehead in Iran and large swathes of the Islamic world; in the West, he is remembered by many as a dictator and the instigator of Islamist confrontation. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam brings together both senior and emerging scholars in this comprehensive volume, which covers all aspects of Khomeini's life and critically examines Khomeini the politician, philosopher, and spiritual leader. The book details Khomeini's early years in exile from Iran, the revolution itself, and events that took place thereafter, including the hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war. Lastly, the book considers his legacy in Iran – where Khomeini's image has been used by both reformist and conservative politicians to develop their own agendas – and further afield in other parts of the Islamic world and the West. Written by scholars from varying disciplinary backgrounds, the book will prove invaluable to students and general readers interested in the life and times of Khomeini and the politics of Islam that he inspired.

Dr. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is a Reader in Comparative Politics and International Relations and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Cambridge educated, he held the first Jarvis Doctorow Fellowship at Oxford University.

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A Critical Introduction to Khomeini

Edited by
ARSHIN ADIB-MOGHADDAM
SOAS, University of London



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Contents

<i>List of Map and Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>About the Authors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Glossary</i>	xv
<i>Timeline: The Life of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989)</i>	xxi
Introduction: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini: A Clerical Revolutionary? <i>Arshin Adib-Moghaddam</i>	I
1. Khomeini and the “White Revolution” <i>Fakhreddin Azimi</i>	19
2. The Rise of Khomeinism: Problematizing the Politics of Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Iran <i>Mojtaba Mahdavi</i>	43
3. <i>Wilayat al-Faqih</i> and the Meaning of Islamic Government <i>Amr GE Sabet</i>	69
4. Ayatollah Khomeini’s Rule of the Guardian Jurist: From Theory to Practice <i>Ali Rahnema</i>	88
5. <i>Khatt-e Imam</i> : The Followers of Khomeini’s Line <i>L. A. Reda</i>	115
6. Khomeini and the West <i>Mehran Kamrava</i>	149

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
7.	Gendered Khomeini <i>Azadeh Kian</i>	170
8.	Hidden Khomeini: Mysticism and Poetry <i>Lloyd Ridgeon</i>	193
9.	The Divine, the People, and the <i>Faqih</i> : On Khomeini's Theory of Sovereignty <i>Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi</i>	211
10.	Khomeini's Legacy on Women's Rights and Roles in the Islamic Republic of Iran <i>Arzoo Osanloo</i>	239
11.	To Rule, or Not to Rule? An Alternative Look at the Political Life of Ayatollah Khomeini between 1960 and 1980 <i>Sadegh Zibakalam</i>	256
12.	Khomeini and the Decolonization of the Political <i>S. Sayyid</i>	275
13.	Contentious Legacies of the Ayatollah <i>Babak Rahimi</i>	291
	<i>Further Reading</i>	307
	<i>Index</i>	311

Map and Figures

Map

1. Map of Iran	<i>page xxv</i>
----------------	-----------------

Figures

1. Ayatollah Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini’s family tree	137
2. Khomeini in his early years	138
3. Khomeini in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq	138
4. Khomeini while exiled in France	139
5. Anti-Shah demonstrators march near a shopping district in Tehran on December 27, 1978	139
6. Mass demonstrations against the Shah’s regime	140
7. A man tends to the wounded after the Shah’s security forces open fire on protesters	140
8. Demonstrators stand off against the Shah’s security forces	141
9. A wounded man is carried	141
10. Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran after 14 years of exile on February 1, 1979. Among those accompanying him are Sadeq Tabataba’i, Hassan Lahouti Eshkevary, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, and Ahmad Khomeini	142
11. Khomeini heads immediately to Behesht Zahra cemetery upon arriving in Tehran on February 1, 1979, after his exile	142

viii	<i>Map and Figures</i>	
12.	Khomeini preparing to give a speech	143
13.	Khomeini gives a speech at Behesht Zahra cemetery on February 1, 1979	143
14.	Khomeini gives a speech at Behesht Zahra cemetery on February 1, 1979	144
15.	Khomeini greets a young child at the Refah School in Tehran, 1979	144
16.	Poster of Khomeini in Iraq	145
17.	Khomeini with his grandchildren	145
18.	Ali Khamenei, who would later become Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, with Khomeini	146
19.	(From right to left) Family members Ahmad Khomeini, Yaser Khomeini, and Hassan Khomeini sit with the Ayatollah in Paris, France	146
20.	Khomeini with Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani	147
21.	Khomeini pouring tea	147
22.	Khomeini casting vote	148
23.	Mourners surround the body of Khomeini at his funeral at Behesht Zahra cemetery on June 3, 1989	148

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-01267-7 - A Critical Introduction to Khomeini
Edited by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

About the Authors

Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is Reader in Comparative Politics and International Relations and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He is the author of *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (2006); *Iran in World Politics* (2008); *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and Them beyond Orientalism* (2011); *On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today* (2013); and more than a dozen peer-reviewed research articles. Educated at the universities of Hamburg and Cambridge, where he received his MPhil and PhD, and at American University (Washington, DC), he was the first Jarvis Doctorow Fellow in International Relations and Peace Studies at St. Edmund Hall and the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. Since 2007, Adib-Moghaddam has been based in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS.

Fakhreddin Azimi is Professor of History at the University of Connecticut. He has written widely in both English and Persian, and is the author of the following books: *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule* (2008; paperback 2010), which won the Mossadegh Prize from the Mossadegh Foundation and the Saidi-Sirjani Award from the International Society for Iranian Studies and was a finalist in the Non-Fiction Category for the Connecticut Book Award, Connecticut Center for the Book; *Iran: The Crisis of Democracy, 1941–53* (1989; revised edition 2009), translated into Persian as *Bohran-e Demokrasi dar Iran, 1320–1332* (revised, with a new introduction, 1994, 3rd edition, 2008); *National Sovereignty and Its Enemies: Probing the*

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Record of Mosaddeq's Opponents (Persian; 2004, 2010); and *Reflections on Mosaddeq's Political Thinking* (Persian, in press).

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi is Associate Professor of History and Sociology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Islam and Dissent in Postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform* (2008). He has written widely on Islamic movements and Muslim intellectuals. His manuscript entitled *Foucault, the Iranian Revolution, and Enlightenment* is under review for publication. His current project is on the conception of trauma and the memory of war among Iranian veterans of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988).

Mehran Kamrava is Professor at and Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies in Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He is the author of a number of books, most recently *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, 2nd ed. (2011) and *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (2008). His edited books include *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (2011) and *Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions* (2011) as well as *The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf* and *The Nuclear Question in the Middle East* (both 2012).

Azadeh Kian is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Gender and Feminist Studies and Research at the University of Paris-Diderot; Co-Director of the National Federation of Research on Gender in France (RING); Member of the Scientific Council of French Research Institutes in Turkey, Russia, Iran, and Central Asia; and Research Associate at Mondes iranien et indien, CNRS. Her research and publications focus on politics and society in Iran; Islam and gender; gender, ethnicity, and identity; the women's movement in Iran and the Middle East; and gender and postcolonial theories. She obtained her MA and PhD from UCLA. Her teachings include international relations, political sociology of the Middle East, gender theories, gender and citizenship in the Middle East, and gender and postcolonial theories. Her most recent publications include *L'Iran: un mouvement sans révolution? La vague verte face au pouvoir mercanto-militariste* (2011) and *Le Moyen-Orient en mouvement* (coedited with S. Dayan, 2012).

Mojtaba Mahdavi is Associate Professor of Political Science and Middle East Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada. His recent books include *Towards the Dignity of Difference? Neither End of History Nor Clash*

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-01267-7 - A Critical Introduction to Khomeini
 Edited by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

About the Authors

xi

of Civilizations (coedited, 2012) and *Under the Shadow of Khomeinism: Problems and Prospects for Democracy in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (forthcoming). He is currently working on two book projects: *Post-Islamism in Context: Neo-Shariati Discourse* and *Political Sociology of Post-Revolutionary Iran*. His contributions have appeared in several refereed journals and essays, edited volumes, and interviews in English, Farsi, and Turkish. Dr. Mahdavi's research interests lie in democratization in the Muslim world, secularism, Islamism and post-Islamism, modern Islamic political thought, social movements, and international politics of the Middle East.

Arzoo Osanloo is an Anthropologist and Associate Professor in the Law, Societies and Justice Program at the University of Washington. Formerly an immigration and asylum/refugee attorney, Professor Osanloo conducts research and teaches courses focusing on the intersection of law and culture, including human rights, refugee rights and identity, and women's rights in Muslim societies. Her geographical focus is on the Middle East, especially Iran. She has published in various journals including *American Ethnologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, and *Iranian Studies*. Her book, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*, was published in 2009. She is currently working on a new project that considers the Islamic mandate of forgiveness, compassion, and mercy in Iran's criminal sanctioning system, jurisprudential scholarship, and everyday acts among pious Muslims.

Babak Rahimi is Associate Professor of Communication, Culture and Religion in the Department of Literature, University of California, San Diego. He received a PhD from the European University Institute, Florence, Italy, in October 2004. Rahimi has been a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (2000–2001), Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute (2007–2008), and the Internet Institute at the University of Oxford (2010). He is the author of *Theater-State and Formation of the Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590–1641 C.E.*, which studies the relationship between ritual, social space, and state power in the early modern history of Iran.

Ali Rahnema is Professor of Economics and Director of the Master of Arts program in Middle East and Islamic Studies at the American University of Paris. His publications include *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics* (2011); *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (1998, 2000); *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (1994, 2006); *Islamic Economic*

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-01267-7 - A Critical Introduction to Khomeini
 Edited by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii

About the Authors

Systems (with Farhad Nomani, 1994); and *The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics and Economic Policy in Iran* (with Farhad Nomani, 1990).

L. A. Reda received her PhD in Politics from SOAS, University of London. Reda has previously worked as a teaching fellow in comparative politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS. Her research interests are critical theory, political philosophy, comparative politics, and politics and development of the Middle East and North Africa region and Latin America.

Lloyd Ridgeon is Reader in Islamic Studies at the University of Glasgow. His primary areas of research are Sufism and modern Iran. His publications include *Religion and Politics in Modern Iran* (2005); *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian Mystical Tradition* (2007); *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism* (2010); and *Jawanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour* (2011).

Amr GE Sabet (PhD, University of Calgary, Canada) is Associate Professor of Political Science at Dalarna University, Sweden. His areas of research include international relations, comparative politics, and Middle East and Islamic politics. His current work focuses on U.S.–Middle East geopolitics as well as media, framing, and war. In addition to Canada, Sabet has visited and taught in many European countries including Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, and the UK. Sabet is the author of *Islam and the Political: Theory, Governance and International Relations* (2008) and “Wickedness, Governance and Collective Sanctions: Can Corruption Be Tamed?” in Ari Salminen (ed.) *Ethical Government* (2010).

S. Sayyid is the inaugural director of the International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding at the University of South Australia. He is the author of *A Fundamental Fear* (1997), which upon publication was short-listed for the British Sociological Association’s Philip Abrams Memorial Prize. The same book was banned by the Malaysian government. Sayyid has recently coedited *A Postcolonial People* (2006) and *Thinking Through Islamophobia* (2011).

Sadeh Zibakalam is Professor of Political Science at Tehran University. He was awarded a PhD from the School of Peace Studies at Bradford University in 1990. He has published a number of books and articles on contemporary political issues in Iran.

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I have followed a simple and accessible transliteration approach that adheres to the most common versions of foreign terms as they are used in English.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Glossary

<i>Adl</i>	The quality of being just. Referred to conceptually as ‘ <i>Adalah</i> ’.
<i>Ahl al-Bayt</i>	The People of the Household. Refers to the Prophet Mohammad and his immediate family and direct descendants through the lineage of Hassan and Hussein: Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 AD), Fatima (d. 633 AD), Hassan ibn Ali (d. 669 AD), Hussein ibn Ali (d. 680 AD), Ali Zain al-‘Abideen (d. 712 AD), Mohammad al-Baqer (d. 733 AD), Ja’far al-Sadeq (d. 765 AD), Musa al-Kadhim (d. 799 AD), Ali al-Ridha (d. 818 AD), Mohammad al-Jawad (d. 835 AD), Ali al-Hadi (d. 868 AD), Hassan al-Askari (d. 874 AD), Mohammad al-Mahdi.
<i>Akhbari</i>	A legalistic designation found within Shi’ism that considers the use of reasoning (‘ <i>aql</i> ’) and <i>ijtihad</i> in discerning religious law from Quran and <i>Hadith</i> impermissible.
<i>Aql</i>	Reason.
<i>Ashura</i>	The tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, on which the Prophet’s grandson Hussein ibn Ali along with seventy-one companions, including his infant child Ali Asghar, young son Ali Akbar, and brother Abbas, were killed at the Battle of Karbala by the forces of the Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiyah in the year 680 AD. The month of Muharram is commemorated annually by Shi’i Muslims with sermons, poetry, and

	mourning, the day of Ashura considered the most important.
<i>Ayatollah</i>	Literally meaning “sign of Allah,” a title used to denote scholars that have reached the level of <i>mujtahid</i> , and having studied the Islamic sciences sufficiently are permitted to exercise <i>ijtihad</i> .
<i>Bazaar</i>	Marketplace.
<i>Caliphate</i>	(Arabic: <i>Khilafah</i>) The concept of Islamic succession to the Prophet in the areas of politics and leadership after his death, institutionalized in the governments of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (<i>Rashidun</i>) Abu Bakr (d. 634 AD), Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 AD), Uthman (d. 656 AD), and Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 AD), and existing in various dynastical forms until its dissolution in 1924 by Mostafa Kemal Atatürk. Considered a sacrosanct institution by many Sunnis, and illegitimate by the Shi’i. See Twelve Imams.
<i>Faqih</i> (Pl. <i>Fuqaha</i>)	A jurisprudent of Islamic law.
<i>Fatwa</i> (Pl. <i>Fatawa</i>)	A religious and legally binding edict or verdict produced by a <i>faqih</i> .
<i>Fedaiyan-e Islam</i>	Devotees of Islam, a clandestine Islamic organization group founded in Iran by Navab Safavi (d. 1955), dedicated to assassinating officials of the Shah’s regime and intellectuals accused of “corrupting” Muslim society.
<i>Fiqh</i>	Jurisprudence.
<i>Gharbzadegi</i>	A concept and term introduced by Jalal Al-e Ahmad (d. 1969) in 1962, translated as “Westoxification,” “Occidentosis,” or “Westruckenness.” Denotes the mimicry and models of Western culture by Iranians at the expense of their own.
<i>Ghayba</i>	(English: “Occultation”) The period of absence or “hiddenness” of the Twelfth Shi’i Imam, extending from his disappearance in 873 AD until the present day, within which there will remain no representatives (Farsi: <i>wakil</i> ; Arabic: <i>wakil</i>) in direct contact with him until his reappearance at the end of time. Usually used with reference to the Greater Occultation (<i>Ghaybat al-Kubra</i>), and not the Lesser

	Occultation (<i>Ghaybat al-Sughra</i>) that occurred between the birth of the Twelfth Imam and the year 941 AD, wherein representatives of the Imam still maintained a direct link with the Shi'i community and relayed his guidance.
Grand Ayatollah	See <i>Marja-e Taqlid</i> .
<i>Hadith</i>	A narrated tradition detailing the sayings and practices of the Prophet and Twelve Imams.
(Pl. <i>Ahadith</i>)	
<i>Haram</i>	Impermissible.
<i>Hawza</i>	Seminary.
<i>Ijma'</i>	Consensus.
<i>Ijtihad</i>	Interpretation of classical sources of jurisprudence, using one's reason, in order to ascertain new rulings within a modern context.
<i>Ilm</i>	Knowledge pertaining to Islam and Islamic law.
<i>'Irfan</i>	Islamic mysticism/gnosis. Not to be confused with Sufism, which is the more systematic and organized practice of <i>'irfan</i> within a <i>tariqa</i> (Sufi order).
<i>Ithna 'Asheri</i>	Literally meaning "Twelver," the predominant school of thought within Shi'i Islam that takes its name from the belief in the legitimacy of Twelve successive Imams following the death of the Prophet.
<i>Ja'fari</i>	A school of <i>fiqh</i> developed by the sixth Shi'i Imam, Ja'far al-Sadeq. See also <i>Ithna 'Asheri</i> .
<i>Khatt-e Imam</i>	Line of the Imam. Refers to the fundamental principles of Ayatollah Khomeini's political platform.
<i>Khums</i>	A 20 percent taxation applied to surplus income and savings within the Usuli-Shi'i community paid to the chosen <i>marja-e taqlid</i> of a believer, which is subsequently redistributed among the Shi'i community on behalf of the Twelfth Imam.
<i>Madrassa</i>	School.
<i>Majlis</i>	Place of meeting. Within the context of political affairs, refers to a council or parliament.
<i>Marja-e Taqlid</i>	Literally "source of emulation," and sometimes referred to as Grand Ayatollah, the highest rank of scholar within Shi'i Islam, permitted to issue <i>fatawa</i> and solicit emulators. See <i>muqalid</i> .
<i>Marja'iyat</i>	See <i>Marja-e Taqlid</i> .

<i>Mazhab</i> (Pl. <i>Mazaheb</i>)	(Arabic: <i>Madhab</i>) School of <i>fiqh</i> , usually refers to four most orthodox Sunni schools (Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, Shaf'i) and two most orthodox Shi'i schools (Ja'fari, Zaydi), but also to a number of minority schools.
<i>Mojahedin-e Khalq</i> (MEK)	People's Mojahedin of Iran, a Marxist-Islamic terrorist organization established in 1965.
<i>Mostakberin</i>	(Arabic: <i>Mostakbaran</i>) Oppressor.
<i>Mostazafin</i>	(Arabic: <i>Mustaddafan</i>) Oppressed.
<i>Motlaqeh Vali-ye Faqih</i>	Absolute guardian jurist, with the absolute authority to rescind and introduce laws according to his interpretation of <i>fiqh</i> , and (if necessary) according to broader political objectives associated with safeguarding an Islamic state.
<i>Mujadid</i>	A personage found within Sunni theology said to appear every century in order to "renew" the Islamic faith.
<i>Mujtahid</i> (Pl. <i>Mujtahideen</i>)	An Islamic scholar that has either begun studying or completed studying the highest level of religious studies and is permitted to exercise <i>ijtihad</i> and thus no longer bound to being a <i>muqalid</i> of an Islamic authority other than themselves. See <i>Muqalid</i> .
<i>Muqalid</i> (Pl. <i>Muqalideen</i>)	A Muslim that, in lieu of being able to exercise <i>ijtihad</i> on his or her own, emulates and follows the religious rulings of a <i>marja-e taqleed</i> .
Occultation	See <i>Ghayba</i> .
<i>Resalah</i>	A book of <i>fatawa</i> that pertains to the everyday practice of Islamic faith, written and issued by different <i>marja-e taqleed</i> .
<i>Shariah</i>	Literally meaning "path" or "road," refers to Islamic law.
<i>Tajdid</i>	The act of renewing or reviving Islam. See <i>Mujadid</i> .
<i>Taqiya</i>	Religious dissimulation, employed by both Shi'i and Sunni under circumstances of religious persecution, where one's life would be threatened on the basis of being visibly Muslim.
<i>Tudeh</i>	Iran's communist party, established in 1941.
Twelve Imams	A succession of twelve rightful leaders of the Muslim community following the death of Prophet Mohammad, appointed and drawn from his family

Glossary

xix

through the line of Fatima, consisting of: Ali ibn Abi Talib (Imam Ali), Hassan ibn Ali (Imam Hassan), Hussein ibn Ali (Imam Hussein), Ali Zain al-‘Abideen (Imam Zain al-‘Abideen), Mohammad al-Baqer (Imam al-Baqer), Imam Ja’far al-Sadeq, Imam Musa al-Kadhim, Ali al-Ridha (Imam Ridha), Imam Mohammad al-Jawad, Ali al-Hadi (Imam al-Hadi), Hassan al-Askari (Imam al-Askari), and Mohammad al-Mahdi (Imam Mahdi).

<i>Ulema</i> (Sgl. ‘ <i>Alim</i>)	Religious scholars.
<i>Umma</i>	The transnational Islamic community.
<i>Usuli</i>	A legalistic designation within Shi’ism that regards it as permissible and in many cases mandatory to discern contemporary religious laws from Quran and Hadith by use of reasoning (‘ <i>aql</i>) and <i>ijtihad</i> .
<i>Vali-ye Faqih</i>	(Arabic: <i>Wali al-Faqih</i>) The leading Islamic scholar within the system of <i>Velayat-e Faqih</i> . See <i>Velayat-e Faqih</i> .
<i>Velayat-e Faqih</i>	(Arabic: <i>Wilayat al-Faqih</i>) Guardianship of the Jurist. The official ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which holds that in the absence of the Twelfth Shi’i Imam, legitimate authority and leadership over the Islamic community should fall to an expert in <i>fiqh</i> drawn from the <i>ulema</i> , who will act as his delegate.
<i>Wilayah</i>	(Farsi: <i>Velayat</i>) Authority or guardianship.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Timeline: The Life of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989)

- On September 24, 1902, Khomeini is born in the town of Khomein. His family stems from a line of religious training, descending from the seventh Imam of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, Imam Musa al-Kadhim.
- In 1903 his mother, Hajieh Agha Khanum, raises him following the murder of his father, Mostafa Hindi.
- At the age of six, Khomeini begins his studies, focusing on the Quran and elementary Persian.
- In 1920, he moves to Arak to study theology under the tutelage of the famous Shaykh Abdul-Karim Ha'eri, a leading *marja-e taqlid*.
- In 1921, the seminary is moved to Qom and Khomeini follows his teacher, becoming part of the Fayzieh seminary and residing at the Dar-al Shafa School.
- In 1929, Khomeini forges a family by marrying Khadijeh Saqafi (also Batul, Ghods-e Iran Saqafi). The two have five children that survive infancy: Mostafa (d. 1977), Ahmad (d. 1995), Zahra, Farideh, and Sadiqeh.
- In 1937, Ha'eri dies. Ayatollah Borujerdi succeeds him as the leading religious authority in Qom and the rest of Iran.
- Khomeini develops an interest in philosophy and *'irfan*, influenced heavily by Plato, Mulla Sadra, Ibn Arabi, and his teacher at the time, Mirza Muhammad Ali Shahabadi. In Shahabadi's work he finds a synthesis of politics and *'irfan*.
- In the 1930s, Khomeini lectures at Fayzieh and has his work on hadiths, ethics, and mysticism published.
- In 1943, Khomeini publishes his first book, *Kashf-e Asrar (Secrets Unveiled)*.

- On May 4, 1944, Khomeini makes his first public political statement. In it, he beckons Muslims to struggle against foreign domination.
- Khomeini continues lecturing and publishing throughout the 1950s in Qom.
- In 1961, Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi dies, and Khomeini positions himself as a major Ayatollah in Qom.
- In 1962, Khomeini pressures the clergy into a sustained dissent to repeal a law that requires all individuals elected into local and provincial councils to be sworn into office on an unspecified holy book.
- In January 1962, the Shah launches his White Revolution, seeking a referendum for popular approval. Khomeini pleads with the clergy to boycott the referendum in 1963. The turnout is weak on voting day.
- On March 21, 1963, Khomeini calls for the Noruz festivities to be canceled as a sign of defiance toward the government's policies. The response from the government was unequivocally violent.
- On April 3, 1963, Khomeini declares that the government is intent on doing away with Islam, and takes its instructions from the United States and Israel.
- On Ashura, June 3, 1963, Khomeini delivers a speech drawing a comparison between the Shah and Umayyad Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiyah. This lands Khomeini in prison and sparks the Khordad movement, or June uprising.
- In 1964, Khomeini denounces the Shah for extending diplomatic immunity to American military advisers. The Shah exiles Khomeini to Turkey, and a year later, to Najaf, Iraq.
- Khomeini spends the next thirteen years in exile in Najaf, during which he teaches religious jurisprudence at the Shaykh Murtaza Ansari *madrasa*.
- Khomeini lectures and writes letters that make their way into Iran via pilgrims who visit Najaf and the holy shrine of the first Shi'i Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib.
- On April 16, 1967, Khomeini sends a letter to Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda, accusing the regime of thievery and terror.
- During the Six Day War of 1967, Khomeini forbids relations with Israel and the purchase of its products.
- In 1967 he issues a *fatwa* concerning the Family Protection Law of 1967, claiming it to be in defiance of Islam.
- In the first months of 1970, he gives lectures on what would be the defining theory of governance for the Iranian Revolution, *velayat-e*

faqih. The premise of this theory is a claim that qualified *ulema* were capable of running the political and juridical functions of the state.

- In October 1971, Khomeini comments on the celebrations marking 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy.
- Khomeini prohibits membership of the Hizb-i Rastakhiz, in defiance of the Shah's move to forge a one-party political system.
- On the 1975 anniversary of the Khordad uprisings, students from Fayziya hold demonstrations for three days and are met with an entourage of ground troops and military helicopters.
- From 1977–1979, the revolution unfolds in waves of demonstrations at schools, mosques, and seminaries and through strikes by unions and workers.
- Khomeini demands the Shah's departure before his return from exile. On February 1, 1979, millions fill the streets to hail his return.
- He deems the government of Shapour Bakhtiar illegitimate and appoints his own Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan.
- On March 30 and 31, 1979, 98 percent of those voting in a referendum opt to abolish the monarchy and establish an Islamic government.
- In December, the new constitution was passed through national referendum. Khomeini becomes *vali-ye faqih*, and in February 1980, Abolhasan Bani Sadr became the first elected president of the Islamic Republic.
- On November 4, 1979, a group of students calling themselves Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's line take control of the US Embassy in Tehran.
- In 1980, Khomeini is named Man of the Year by the US news magazine *TIME*. The magazine describes him as the “virtual face of Islam in Western culture ... the mystic who lit the fires of hatred.” During the hostage crisis and amid the state of revolutionary turmoil, Saddam Hussein sees an opportunity to launch an offensive war. The Iran-Iraq war would last eight years, beginning in September 1980.
- Due to mounting economic problems, neighboring Gulf and Arab states' support of Iraq, and Western aid and support of Iraq, Khomeini decides in July 1988 to accept a truce – as he put it, to “drink the poisoned chalice.”
- During the mid-1980s, the Iranian government becomes complicit in the Iran-Contra scandal.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

- In February 1989, Khomeini comes under international scrutiny for issuing a *fatwa* condemning the writer Salman Rushdie to death for his “blasphemous” novel *The Satanic Verses*.
- Khomeini dies on June 4, 1989, after spending eleven days in hospital. Millions of mourners swarm the streets and attend his funeral.
- Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is elected as the Islamic Republic’s second *vali-ye faqih* by the Assembly of Experts (*Shoray-e khebregan*).



i. Map of Iran