



How Islam Rules in Iran

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the evolution of Islam as a ruling framework in postrevolutionary Iran up to the present day. Beginning with the position and structure of Iran's clerical establishment under the Islamic Republic, Kamrava delves into the jurisprudential debates that have shaped the country's political institutions and state policies. Kamrava draws on extensive fieldwork to examine various religious narratives that inform the basis of contemporary Iranian politics, also revealing the political salience of common practices and beliefs, such as religious guardianship and guidance, Islam as a source of social protection, the relationship between Islam and democracy, the sources of divine and popular legitimacy, and the theoretical justifications for religious authoritarianism. Providing access to many Persian-language sources for the first time, Kamrava shows how religious intellectual production in Iran has impacted the ongoing transformation of Iranian Shi'ism and ultimately underwritten the fate of the Islamic Republic.

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Theology and Theocracy in the
Islamic Republic

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Preface

There is no shortage of books on Iran, and topics related to Islamist politics in Iran have been expertly examined by a number of gifted scholars. Among this expansive literature, many scholarly contributions are available that have advanced our general knowledge of Iran and its maddeningly complex politics. For about three decades, however, little or none of this literature deals with the intricacies of state–religion relations in the Islamic Republic. More specifically, while the politics of the Islamic Republic continue to be extensively studied, the ideological foundations of the Iranian state, and especially the jurisprudential underpinnings of the country’s theocracy, remain highly understudied. This book is designed to address this gaping hole in our understanding of Iran.

Shia theology and jurisprudence in Iran have changed drastically over the past fifty years or so, going, in broad strokes, from sources of political protest and mobilization in the 1970s to theocratic authoritarian consolidation in the 1980s, religious reformism in the 1990s, and conservative traditionalism since then. None of these political–intellectual trends have completely dissipated with the emergence of newer interpretations, with successive layers building on existing ones, at times appearing simultaneously as, and complementing or competing with, other currents. Each of these currents, meanwhile, has impacted the social and political lives of Iranians in quite tangible ways.

In the pages to come, I examine the theoretical arguments and practical contributions to Iranian Shia thought as produced by clerics and lay thinkers, both those who are relatively famous and those who are unknown or are lesser known. My goal here is to present the compound social and political effects that these arguments have generated in the public sphere. More specifically, I analyze the ways in which current religious intellectual production in Iran has shaped evolving political–religious discourses in the country, impacted the ongoing

transformation of Iranian Shi'ism, and has ultimately underwritten the political survival and fate of the Islamic Republic.

In wading through these concepts and theories, I have relied on the extant literature produced inside and outside Iran. Inside Iran, the literature on the social and religious sciences witnessed something of a renaissance in the years immediately following Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami's election to the presidency in 1997. In the short-lived "reform movement" that ensued, hundreds of books and thousands of articles were published that explored and critiqued, often in great detail and with piercing insight, some of the very foundational notions on which the Islamic Republic is based. While some of this literature is by now more than two decades old, many of the themes it explores are still salient today. Iran's book publishing frenzy of the early 2000s has now subsided under the increasing weight of censorship. But trickles of it continue to this day. Fortunately, there has also been an inverse rise in recent years in the publication of methodologically rigorous, refereed journal articles, giving us a window into the robust debates and discussions occurring in Iran over matters of theology and jurisprudence.

I have relied extensively on the literature that is produced in Iran. All translations from Persian are my own. In recent years, it has become common practice in Iran to also include English translations of some book or article titles and author names in the publication. Unless I considered these original translations far too inaccurate, I have retained them here. I have also kept some of the transliterations of author names if they appear in English in books or articles even if my own transliteration would have been different. In all other cases, I have used a simplified version of the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* that avoids the use of diacritical marks for vowels. Whenever possible, I have avoided use of jargon to make the book's arguments accessible to nonspecialist readers. For greater clarity and convenience, a brief Glossary of some of the religious terms used in the book appears at the end.

A Word of Thanks

Several generous faculty research grants from my home institution, Georgetown University in Qatar, enabled me to conduct fieldwork in Iran and to collect many of the sources cited here. The Arab Center for

Preface

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