

**Post-Revolutionary Iran: A Handbook**, Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosch Rahimkhani, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018, ISBN 978-0-8156-3574-1 (hbk), 896 pp., 22 illus.

Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosch Rahimkhani have done those interested in deciphering Iran's post-revolutionary makeup a great service by painstakingly and meticulously culling and gathering detailed information. Beyond detailed graphics of the Islamic Republic's institutional setup and relationships of various institutions to each other, the most revealing section of the handbook to me is the list of coercive, distributive, and administrative organs formed after the revolution, laying bare the Iranian post-revolutionary state's almost manic proclivity for overlapping bureaucratic enlargement without necessarily always increasing state capacity. The handbook also brings together and, more importantly, makes more reliable dispersed information regarding varying provincial electoral turnouts, candidate registration numbers, vetting percentages, and incumbency rates for various elective institutions which can be of great use to students of post-revolution Iran given the high number of elections the IRI has held so far and the role they play in its claim to legitimacy and popularity.

But the handbook's most exhaustive novel contribution is identification and description of political elites in order to "shed light" on their "recruitment, composition, and circulation." Relying on a paradigm developed by several scholars regarding the way elite makeup and competition contribute to sociopolitical change, Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani define elites as "individuals who by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, are able to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially." The further emphasis on "politically relevant elites" is intended to explain the focus on the political arena and exclusion of economic and cultural elites that would have understandably made the enterprise unwieldy.

Elite theories have, I think justifiably, been challenged for positing the fundamental explanations for global patterns of stability and emergence of preconditions for democracy as political rather than socio-structural. But beyond the question of whether a "political" handbook can offer sufficient information regarding the Islamic Republic's nature or character and sources of its persistence and/or transformations, Boroujerdi and Karimkhani's choice to include the entirety of individuals that have held positions in major institutions of the Islamic Republic also challenges the notion of politically relevant elites upon which they rely.

Should all those included be considered as significant or substantial elites? For instance, should many of the deputies who have served in the parliament be considered politically relevant in the sense of affecting national political outcomes regularly and substantially? I don't think so. But does the data gathered offer others an opportunity to cull the politically relevant? Perhaps, but not without different criteria for choosing the politically relevant while acknowledging that the selection may go beyond the strictures of the handbook. To their credit, Boroujerdi and Rahim-

khani implicitly acknowledge the limitations of the data by pointing to the type of research they hope the handbook could aid, which essentially focus on the institutional and/or provincial background of the elites chosen, their circulation, and discernible career patterns rather than the extent of their ideological or consensual unity or disunity, which has generally been the instigation for elite theory accounts of relationships between types of national elites, elite transformations, and political (in)stability. In short, there is plenty to chew on here even if the broader questions regarding sociopolitical transformations wrought by the persistence of the Islamic Republic may require a look beyond political institutions and individuals who have occupied them.

Farideh Farhi

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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## **A Political Prosopography of the Islamic Republic**

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What does the state look like in post-revolutionary Iran, and who is occupying state offices? No publication has ever come close to providing as detailed a picture as Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani's *Post-Revolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook*. The handbook is invaluable in the breadth and depth of the data it offers, from the complex history of the many conventional and non-conventional political institutions of the Islamic Republic to the socioeconomic backgrounds of the people who populated those institutions, and still to the degrees of electoral support garnered by different branches of government. The fact that different layers of information such as the membership structure of key institutions, election data, cabinet votes of confidence, political groups' membership data, and individuals' background are presented all in one place provides scholars of Iran with an unprecedented opportunity to both qualitatively and quantitatively analyze hitherto obscure aspects of Iranian statesmanship. Most important to capture, in my opinion, is the intricate parallelism that characterizes post-revolutionary state structures—the conventional government institutions such as the presidency, parliament, ministerial departments, and other bureaucratic agencies on the one hand, and the office of the supreme leader and its myriad satellite institutions, on the other. The extensive list of officials directly appointed by the supreme leader (pp. 46–9), breaking down the membership categories of Expediency Discernment Assembly (p. 60), and the history of the development of different min-