

The Eight Books Ahmadinejad Doesn't Want You to Read

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Articles & Testimony

It is far too early to draw any hard conclusions about the ongoing uprising in Iran, but one thing seems clear enough: Once again, Iran has confounded the expectations and assumptions of many a Western Iran expert when it comes to what Iranians want, what they are prepared to do to get it, and how their leaders respond to unprecedented events. All the more reason then to encourage the study of Iran's politics, economy, society, history, and literature. Below, in no particular order, is a selection of books that will get you started in understanding the intriguing, elusive, and wondrous puzzle that is Iran:

1. Janet Afary, **[Sexual Politics in Modern Iran](http://www.amazon.com/Sexual-Politics-Modern-Janet-Afary/dp/0521727081/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939170&sr=8-1)** (http://www.amazon.com/Sexual-Politics-Modern-Janet-Afary/dp/0521727081/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939170&sr=8-1) (Cambridge University Press, 2009). Afary does a spectacular job explaining, as well as detailing, sexual attitudes and practices from the 19th to the 21st century. Her account gives an excellent feel for how Iranian society works and how that has changed under the impact of modern times. Plus, her detailed research makes the account much more credible than some of the highly readable stories from Iranian-Americans about personal life in modern Iran.
2. Arang Keshavarzian, **[Bazaar and State in Iran: The Politics of the Tehran Marketplace](http://www.amazon.com/Bazaar-State-Iran-Marketplace-Cambridge/dp/0521103304/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939344&sr=1-1)** (http://www.amazon.com/Bazaar-State-Iran-Marketplace-Cambridge/dp/0521103304/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939344&sr=1-1) (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Keshavarzian shows how the bazaar exercised its political and economic influence under the shah. He then lays out the paradox that the revolution in which the bazaar was so central brought in a government that has systematically weakened the bazaar to the point that the bazaar is no longer a significant political player. His style is at times a bit dense, but Keshavarzian is no obscurantist academic: He provides lots of colorful details.
3. Manucher Farmanfarmaian and Roxane Farmanfarmaian, **[Blood and Oil: Memoirs of a Persian Prince](http://www.amazon.com/Blood-Oil-Memoirs-Persian-Prince/dp/0679440550/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939369&sr=1-1)** (http://www.amazon.com/Blood-Oil-Memoirs-Persian-Prince/dp/0679440550/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939369&sr=1-1) (Random House, 1997). The Farmanfarmaians paint in rich detail how the Pahlavi dynasty changed Iran from a very traditional society into a complicated semimodern one. They use their family's story as a way to weave in the political and intellectual history of Iran from the 1940s through the 1970s.
4. Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, **[The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East](http://www.amazon.com/New-Iranian-Leadership-Ahmadinejad-Terrorism-Nuclear-Ambition-and-the-Middle-East/dp/0275996395/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939389&sr=1-1)** (http://www.amazon.com/New-Iranian-Leadership-Ahmadinejad-Terrorism/dp/0275996395/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939389&sr=1-1) (Praeger Security International, 2008). The prolific Alexander has edited some less-than-stellar books, but this volume is a first-rate reference manual for those wanting the dates, numbers, and other facts about Iran's nuclear, missile, chemical, and terrorist programs. No one in his right mind would read the book from page 1 to the end, but it's a great reference source.
5. Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, **[Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran](http://www.amazon.com/Staging-Revolution-Persuasion-Islamic-Republic/dp/0814715974/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939389&sr=1-1)** (http://www.amazon.com/Staging-Revolution-Persuasion-Islamic-Republic/dp/0814715974/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939389&sr=1-1) (Praeger Security International, 2008).

[ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939408&sr=1-1](#)) (New York University Press, 1999). Perhaps the best book to give a feel of the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, with hundreds of wonderful color reproductions of the propaganda -- from postage stamps to agitprop plays to the ubiquitous political posters. Great fun to flip through, and the text is well worth reading.

6. John Parker, [Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah](#)

[http://www.amazon.com/Persian-Dreams-Moscow-Tehran-Since/dp/1597972363/ref=sr_1_1?](http://www.amazon.com/Persian-Dreams-Moscow-Tehran-Since/dp/1597972363/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939429&sr=1-1)

[ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939429&sr=1-1](#)) (Potomac Books, 2009). Admittedly a bit specialized topic, but a superb analysis of how Iran looks from Moscow. It provides rich detail of how Russian domestic politics shapes Moscow's interest in and perception of the Islamic Republic. Parker brings out how different are Western and Russian narratives about Iran: They have entirely varying reads on what have been the significant turning points and what matters most in Iran's foreign policy.

7. Richard Tapper, editor, [The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity](#)

[http://www.amazon.com/New-Iranian-Cinema-Politics-Representation/dp/1860648045/ref=sr_1_1?](http://www.amazon.com/New-Iranian-Cinema-Politics-Representation/dp/1860648045/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939453&sr=1-1)

[ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939453&sr=1-1](#)) (I.B. Tauris, 2002). These fourteen essays situate the fascinating Iranian film industry in its cultural, social, and political settings. The essay authors provide enough reviews of individual films to bring their points to life, but their focus is very definitely on the sociopolitical rather than artistic aspects of Iranian film.

8. And of course, for anyone who loves literature, Azar Nafisi's [Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books](#)

[http://www.amazon.com/Reading-Lolita-Tehran-Memoir-Books/dp/0812979303/ref=sr_1_1?](http://www.amazon.com/Reading-Lolita-Tehran-Memoir-Books/dp/0812979303/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939477&sr=1-1)

[ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1245939477&sr=1-1](#)) (Random House, 2003) is a rewarding account of those who are so deeply committed to great books that they can overcome the tremendous obstacles to free intellectual life under the Islamic Republic. ❖

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[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

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Grant Rumley

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ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022



Anna Borshchevskaya

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BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

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Simon Henderson

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