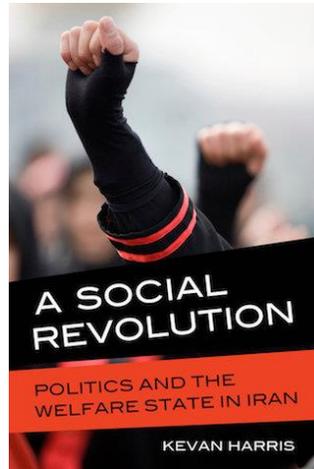


## **Roots of Iranian Rage: Protest and Power in the Islamic Republic**

*A book talk by Kevan Harris (UCLA)*



**Monday, February 12, 2018  
2 PM  
6275 Bunche Hall**

Explanations for social and political dynamics in Iran after the 1979 revolution tend to rely on the idea of a “rentier” state, in which the government buys off a portion of the population in exchange for allegiance or quiescence. More broadly, analyses of oil-producing states in the developing world stress how welfare policy is successfully used as a “bribe” to stabilize political systems from popular pressures. This argument would make sense if all states formed in similar ways and proceeded along similar paths of development. It would also make sense if the origins of welfare systems in wealthy democratic states were as uniform as the rentier-state paradigm portrays them to be. In reality, state formation has varied quite widely over time and place, including the formation of welfare states. Drawing from the recently published *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (2017, University of California Press) as well as a new, nationally representative social survey conducted in Iran in 2016, I argue for a reframing of state-society relations to more thoroughly account for post-revolutionary social change in Iran. In the Islamic Republic, elite competition and popular mobilization intertwined to expand social policy after the 1979 revolution, then again following the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. To do so, Iranian politicians created or expanded an array of corporatist organizations—often with social-welfare benefits at their center. Yet recurring intra-elite competition produced a dynamic whereby corporatist bodies became sites of bottom-up inclusionary claims from groups such as students, women, villagers, and professionals. As different elite segments reached out to newly mobilized social groups in order to trump or check their rivals, often by expanding access to parts of the social contract, new political opportunities arose. In this sense, the power of Iran’s civil society—celebrated by journalists, intellectuals, and academics, yet rarely theorized—represents an unruly outcome of revolutionary state-building.

**Kevan Harris** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at UCLA. He teaches courses on international development and the Middle East.

*Co-sponsored by UCLA’s Department of Sociology and the Center for Social Theory and Comparative History*

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