



Shi'i Authority within the Nation and the Ummah: National and Transnational Actions of Ayatollah Borujerdi during the Second Pahlavi Era

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Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received: 21 April 2025
Received in revised form: 28 May 2025
Accepted: 29 May 2025
Published online: 23 September 2025

Keywords:

Ayatollah Borujerdi; Qom Seminary; Nation-Building; Ummatism; Second Pahlavi Era.

ABSTRACT

During the Second Pahlavi era, the Qom Seminary faced unique challenges. Ayatollah Borujerdi assumed dual responsibilities: preserving and expanding the heritage of the newly established seminary, while also responding to the non-religious and anti-religious policies of the Pahlavi state and its allies. Applying the method of historical sociology, this study explores the approach of Shi'i authority in relation to state policies and the actions of other political and intellectual forces by analyzing Borujerdi's speeches and conduct within the broader context of socio-political developments. Findings indicate that Borujerdi adopted a dual strategy. Domestically, through a policy of "reminding and negotiating," he positioned himself as a representative of the religious institution vis-à-vis other forces. Transnationally, by advancing the strategy of Ummatism, he consolidated Shi'i authority within the broader Islamic community and reinforced his domestic influence through international connections. His national and transnational initiatives effectively countered the competing projects of "Iran without Islam" and "Iranian Islam," thereby contributing to the convergence of Iranians around Islam as a central pillar of national identity.

Cite this article: Amin. M. (2025). Shi'i Authority within the Nation and the Ummah: National and Transnational Actions of Ayatollah Borujerdi during the Second Pahlavi Era. *Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 15(3): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.393404.1783>



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Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.393404.1783>

Introduction

Ayatollah Borujerdi emerged as a pivotal figure in Iran's religious and political landscape during the mid-20th century, a period marked by profound upheaval and transformation. By integrating religious authority with political engagement, he positioned himself as a key actor in the struggle for national sovereignty and identity, particularly against colonial and authoritarian pressures. This paper examines Borujerdi's strategies, his unifying role among diverse factions, and the implications of his leadership for Iranian society and culture. The analysis applies a historical sociological framework to assess Borujerdi's political approach and its impact on Iran's socio-political environment.

Materials & Methodology

This study employs a historical sociological approach to examine Ayatollah Borujerdi's political strategies and their broader implications. The methodology involves the review of primary and secondary sources, including historical texts, scholarly articles, and archival accounts, with particular attention to Borujerdi's interactions with political leaders such as Mossadegh and Kashani. Special emphasis is placed on Borujerdi's coalition-building efforts across ideological divides, highlighting both the successes and challenges of these efforts. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how Borujerdi preserved religious authority while navigating complex and shifting political dynamics.

Discussion & Conclusion

Ayatollah Borujerdi's political strategies generated significant social and political outcomes during an era of intense ideological contestation. His unifying initiatives among the National Front, the Muslim People's Combatant Association, and the Fadaian-e Islam fostered a cooperative spirit critical to confronting the Pahlavi regime and resisting foreign imperialism. Key findings include:

1. **Preservation of Youth from Leftist Ideologies:** Borujerdi's leadership deterred Iranian youth from gravitating toward communism, instead reinforcing clerical authority as a guardian of national identity against Western influences.
2. **Cross-Factional Collaboration:** His promotion of collaboration across religious and political factions created a united front, particularly during crises such as the 1953 coup, where nationalist and religious sentiments intersected.
3. **Constraining Authoritarianism:** His strategies helped temper some repressive measures of the Pahlavi regime, preserving the role of Islamic culture in the face of aggressive modernization.
4. **Pathway to Independence:** Borujerdi's emphasis on Ummatism provided momentum for movements aimed at achieving cultural, economic, and political independence.

Despite these achievements, Borujerdi faced serious challenges, especially from the radicalism of groups like Fadaian-e Islam, which threatened coalition stability. His leadership illustrates Bendix's theories in historical sociology, underscoring the significance of social alliances in navigating political change. In conclusion, Borujerdi's legacy lies in his effort to unify disparate religious and political groups, shaping a foundational chapter in modern Iranian history and exemplifying the enduring interplay between religion and politics.

Author Contributions: The author solely conducted all aspects of the research and manuscript preparation.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Considerations: The author avoided data fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, and any form of misconduct.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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