

# Land Reforms and Revolutionary Groundwork in Iran and Russia: A Comparative Analysis Based on Skocpol's Structural Theory

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Although the modernization process in Iran and Russia occurred during different historical periods, it displays notable similarities and differences and has exerted significant impacts in various respects. Accordingly, the present study aims to analyze the impact of land reforms on the transformation of socio-economic structures and the creation of revolutionary foundations in the two countries by employing Skocpol's structural theory. The central question is as follows: Why and how did land reforms transform traditional socio-economic structures and lead to the mobilization of groups dissatisfied with the reforms? The findings indicate that while the context and process of land reforms in the two countries had fundamental differences, their consequences evoke certain similarities. Specifically, instead of consolidating the political system against difficult conditions and social and political pressures, land reforms created the conditions for political instability and the occurrence of revolution. The research method is a comparative-historical approach applying Skocpol's "structural" theory and is based on library sources and documents.

**Keywords:** Land Reforms, Islamic Revolution of Iran, Russian Revolution, Skocpol's Theory, Comparative Study.

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## 1. Introduction

The inclination toward development and modernization in Russia began in the late seventeenth century, characterized mainly by imitation of the West (Kalistov, 1982; Walter, 1984). Modernization in Tsarist Russia had two general features:

1. The reforms mainly strengthened the position of the triad of the Tsar, the Church, and landowners, while weakening the peasantry (Kalistov, 1982; Lenin, 1979).

2. These changes were generally imposed from above by the state, and therefore had no tangible impact on Russian society until the nineteenth century, when, to prevent a peasant revolution, the implementation of reforms by Tsarist emperors became necessary. The most important of these reforms was the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto issued by Alexander II (Shaninov, 1973; Sokolov, 1968). Through the 1861 land reforms, the Tsar sought to preserve Tsarist domination and prevent a peasant uprising; however, their incomplete implementation resulted in growing discontent



and laid the groundwork for revolution (Lenin, 1979; Skocpol, 2010).

Modernization in Iran, concurrent with the end of the wave of Tsarist reforms in Russia, was also based on a Western model and conducted from above (Avery, 1989; Azghandi, 2004). The most extensive reforms in Iran took place during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi under the title of the “White Revolution,” implemented under external pressures (Khorramshad & Musanezhad, 2017; Rahmanian, 2012). The core of the White Revolution was the 1962 land reform which, due to its exogenous nature, not only produced limited positive results but also created the conditions for revolution in Iran, much like in Russia (Alavi, 2014; Hooglund, 2002). Accordingly, the main question of this study is: How did land reforms in Iran and Russia lead to the creation of revolutionary foundations? In addition to the main question, several subsidiary questions can also be addressed:

1. What similarities and differences exist in the intellectual foundations, contexts, causes, and consequences of land reforms in the two societies of Iran and Russia?
2. What was the role of dissatisfied groups affected by land reforms (such as villagers and peasants) in creating revolutionary conditions in the two countries?

Numerous studies have examined the positive and negative effects of land reforms on the expansion of revolution in Iran and Russia (Foroughi et al., 2018; Ghorashi & Davoudi, 2018; Karmi & Karamatnia, 2019), but this study approaches land reforms from a new perspective — the inherent contradiction between the initial objectives and the actual outcomes in the decade following the reforms — using Skocpol’s structural theory (Keshavarz Shokri, 2002; Skocpol, 2010). Skocpol’s theory, which emphasizes structural factors in the occurrence of revolutions, focuses on three elements: state weakness, peasant uprisings, and the collapse of the ruling coalition. By analyzing how land reforms unintentionally increased the dissatisfaction of political groups and intensified revolutionary conditions, this approach provides a better understanding of the roots of economic and political reforms in both countries during this historical period. Furthermore, analyzing the similarities and differences of these reforms through a comparative lens in their dimensions and outcomes

helps to more precisely identify their impact on revolutionary trajectories.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Research Method

In the present study, Skocpol’s “structural” theory has been applied to examine how land reforms contributed to revolutionary groundwork and the mobilization of dissatisfied groups in Iran and Russia (Agha jari & Rahbarian, 2019; Skocpol, 2010). Theda Skocpol, an American political scientist and sociologist, using the comparative method in her book *States and Social Revolutions*, identifies a set of structural factors, particularly social, in the formation of revolutions, under which a backward country can be transformed into an industrial and advanced one (Skocpol, 2010). Skocpol argues that “revolutions that begin with social uprisings of the lower classes can bring about transformations in structure” (Skocpol, 2010, p. 21). Employing a historical-comparative approach, she addresses the causes and consequences of revolutions to provide a more precise analysis of pre- and post-revolutionary conditions (Keshavarz Shokri, 2002).

From Skocpol’s perspective, a social revolution and its resulting changes are meaningful only when the state is considered as a structure; in this view, a set of structural factors such as state weakness and loss of legitimacy, peasant uprisings, and the collapse of the ruling coalition play a key role in the occurrence of revolutions. Skocpol’s approach, in contrast to psychological and voluntarist theories, is particularly structuralist and focused on international structures (Skocpol, 2010). In other words, she rejects the idea that revolutions are the result of deliberate individual decisions, and instead asserts that three conditions are crucial: political crises in the state caused by international pressures, uprisings from below by the masses, and the collapse of the ruling coalition due to the marginalization of elites (Agha jari & Rahbarian, 2019).

This study applies Skocpol’s structural theory — focusing on its three main pillars of state weakness and loss of legitimacy, peasant and rural uprisings, and the collapse of the ruling coalition — to examine the impact of land reforms on revolutionary groundwork in the two societies of Iran and Russia. However, it also critiques the theory for neglecting the role of another significant factor: ideology (revolutionary discourse) in the

occurrence of revolutions in Iran and Russia (Mahdi, 2007; Rahbari, 2007).

To identify causal relationships and enrich the analysis, the study employs the comparative method, using dimensions of similarity and difference between the two societies (Ghafari, 2009). This method relies on predetermined concepts and principles to analyze two subjects (Mirzaei, 1993). Comparative studies can take different forms, but two main types are prevalent: variable-oriented quantitative comparisons and case-oriented qualitative comparisons. For studying phenomena such as revolutions — particularly of a political and social nature — as well as cultural styles, educational systems, and legal codes across two or more societies, the case-oriented qualitative comparative method is applied. In this method, the process begins with the selection of the topic or phenomenon and the identification of comparison criteria, followed by data collection from the societies under study, leading to analysis, comparison, and, ultimately, conclusions (Mirzaei, 1993).

### 3. Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on land reforms in Iran and Russia, each examining the subject from different angles. In the case of Iran, works such as Mostafa Azkia's *Sociology of Development and Rural Underdevelopment in Iran* analyze ownership patterns before and after the reforms and their effects on rural structures from a sociological perspective (Alavi, 2014; Hooglund, 2002). Ahmad Ashraf, in works such as *Peasants, Land, and Revolution*, combining historical and sociological methods, highlights the exogenous nature of these reforms and the external pressures on the state (Keddie, 1989). John Foran, in *Fragile Resistance*, analyzes land reforms within the framework of Iran's structural transformations using development theories (Abrahamian, 2012), while Nikki Keddie, in *Roots of the Iranian Revolution*, considers them one of the key factors leading to revolution (Keddie, 1989).

On the other hand, studies of Russian land reforms have mostly focused on the era of Alexander II and the 1861 reforms. James Strickler, in *Tsarist Russia* (Strickler, 2002), and historians from Saint Petersburg University, in *History of Russia* (Shaninov, 1973), examine the contexts and process of these reforms, as well as their consequences, including peasant unrest (Sokolov, 1968).

Scholars such as Brian Shanin Nouf and Kalistov have also analyzed these reforms within the broader framework of Tsarist Russia's modernization efforts (Kalistov, 1982). Jahangir Karimi and Roghieh Karamatinia, in *The Tragedy of Russia's Modernization*, critically examine Russia's emulation of Western models and its failure to achieve political-economic stability (Karmi & Karamatinia, 2019).

Despite the richness of existing research in both domains, there is a clear gap in systematic comparative studies of these two historical experiences. This article seeks to address this gap by comparatively analyzing the similarities and differences between these two major historical events in dimensions such as formative contexts, the role of external factors, implementation methods, socio-economic effects, political consequences, and the link between reform outcomes and revolutionary discourse. Such a comparison can lead to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of land reforms in transitional societies and their relationship to broader socio-political transformations.

### 4. Context and Objectives of Land Reforms in Iran and Russia

#### 4.1. The 1962 Land Reforms in Iran

The causes and roots of the land reforms in Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi can be divided into two categories: internal and external. Among the external causes were the pressures exerted by Western governments to expand capitalism and prevent the spread of communism (Hooglund, 2002), while the internal causes included the necessity of implementing reforms in various areas to transform the economy into a quasi-European system in which the country's independence and authority would be recognized, and to assert that the nation was in no way inferior to others (Azghandi, 2004). To accurately analyze this situation, one must examine Iran prior to the 1960s.

During the Qajar period, the structure of the modern world system was categorized into core, periphery, and semi-periphery states. The core states, headed by Britain, sought to absorb capital from peripheral and semi-peripheral countries without granting them a greater role, while the latter sought to increase their role in the global economic system (Esmaili Sangari, 2019). Qajar-era Iran was no exception, as it strove to elevate its

position from peripheral to semi-peripheral status, but met with resistance from powerful states, including Britain and later Tsarist Russia, both of which held hegemonic influence in Iran (Esmaili Sangari, 2019). By the end of the Qajar era, the need for Iran's integration into the capitalist system was felt, and with the rise of Reza Shah, modernization in its various forms was placed on the agenda. This period initially focused on rebuilding and modernizing Iran's troubled economy in the wake of the Constitutional Revolution and World War I by modeling Western economic transformation toward industrialization, while also implementing national economic policies. Consequently, Reza Shah's economic reforms aligned with this thinking, reflecting a continued dependency on the global system similar to the Qajar era (Rahmanian, 2012). Nikki Keddie assessed the economy of this era as follows: "Although in Reza Shah's period the agricultural sector did not witness fundamental transformation, and the economy relied more on oil and industrial development, Britain's exploitative relations and World War II dealt serious blows to Iran's industrial growth, resulting in economic underdevelopment by the late 1940s" (Keddie, 1989).

Politically, the most important event of this period was the Anglo-American coup of August 19, 1953, which overthrew the government of Mohammad Mossadegh and restored the Shah to power (Rahmanian, 2012). In this process, Britain presented the Soviet Union's influence as a major threat to the global economy, persuading the United States to cooperate in implementing the plan, which led to a shift in U.S. foreign policy under Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles. Eisenhower's rise to power signaled the intensification of U.S. foreign policy under the principles of McCarthyism — the anti-communist doctrines of Senator Joseph McCarthy during the Cold War — which held that whenever U.S. foreign policy encountered the issue of communism, intervention was necessary (Rahmanian, 2012).

From the internal perspective, the conclusion is that Iran's economic and political instability before the 1960s, combined with Western concerns — particularly those of the United States — about the spread of communism, led to land reforms as a means of promoting capitalism (Huntington, 1968).

Regarding external causes, the most important issue was the role of foreign pressure. Ahmad Ashraf wrote: "The

four main actors in implementing land reforms in Iran were President Kennedy of the United States, the Shah, Ali Amini, and Arsanjani. Under Kennedy's pressure, Amini's government implemented the White Revolution in Iran, whose most important component was the top-down land reforms" (Alavi, 2014). U.S. pressure, as the primary supporter of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's government, was undeniable. Iran's instability in the 1950s prompted John F. Kennedy to act, as this political and economic instability risked exacerbating poverty, disorder, and public dissatisfaction, potentially pushing Iran — a neighbor of the Soviet Union, the leader of the Eastern Bloc — closer to the anti-capitalist front and into enmity with the United States (Azghandi, 2011). As a result, the leaders of the new U.S. administration compelled Iran to adopt a new policy of implementing reforms to restore the popularity and authority of the Pahlavi regime (Rahmanian, 2012).

According to Rostow's "Stages of Growth" model, societies require a new economic and industrial structure to transition from the traditional stage to industrialization, which necessitates reforms and revolutions in non-industrial sectors, especially agriculture, as well as the presence of a strong central government (Shahbazi, 2009). In this process, the role of Western governments at the core of Wallerstein's world-system theory was crucial (Shahbazi, 2009). Lambton noted regarding the role of external factors: "Internally, Iran did not have favorable conditions at the time. Observing the weakness of the government, there was constant concern that Iran might gravitate toward the Soviet Union, as Soviet pressure and hostile propaganda were strongly felt. In such circumstances, the Shah ignored domestic public opinion, while within society there was a belief that if Western public opinion concluded that reforms were necessary, they would be carried out in Iran. Thus, after external pressure from the Kennedy administration, Ali Amini was appointed prime minister to implement U.S. demands and, in the future, secure financial assistance" (Lambton, 2015).

It seems that the primary motivation for land reforms was not merely the danger of communist influence in Iran, but rather advancing the goals of the capitalist system (Huntington, 1968). Through land reform, two unforeseen dangers were eliminated:

1. The occurrence of a peasant revolution in Iran. Huntington believed that fear of such a



revolution — similar to that in Cuba — and the need to establish the foundations of a capitalist structure prompted land reforms. To prevent revolution, the middle class had to be strengthened, which required land reforms and control over the countryside (Huntington, 1968).

2. The danger of communism. External pressure was not limited to the United States; Soviet interest and the international context arising from the collapse of the landlord-peasant system and the global trend toward smallholding ownership also played a role (Rasoulipour, 1997).

To achieve these two objectives, land reforms in oil-rich countries were carried out under Kennedy's doctrine (Emberz, 1991). Kennedy, considering the political, economic, and social crises of Third World countries, proposed a new strategy called "flexible response," which predicted reducing military and financial aid in favor of economic and social reforms in oil-rich Third World countries, including Iran (Azghandi, 2011).

Although the most important part of the White Revolution — the land reforms — was carried out under external pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Americans did not directly intervene in its implementation. Instead, it was carried out in three stages over a decade, gradually and regionally, by Iranians within the Ministry of Agriculture, including figures such as Hossein Malek and Amir Parviz (Shahbazi & Norouzi, 2016). Before starting the program in each region, land reform organization notices were delivered to the village headmen, posted in public spaces, and explained to farmers in the presence of local councils and government village heads. Officials obtained signed receipts for the notices, and the program's provisions and laws were communicated to the farmers (Zahed, 2008).

Since farmers might assume that all of them would become landowners with the implementation of the reforms, they were potentially ready to be incited against landowners and cause disturbances. Therefore, to prevent such confrontations, efforts were made to calm public opinion by clearly explaining the laws in simple language in the villages (Zahed, 2008).

#### 4.2. *The 1861 Land Reforms in Russia*

In Tsarist Russia, two models of development were available to the emperors:

1. The preservation of serfdom, leading to the transformation of the landlord-based feudal economy into a bourgeois–Junker economy in which peasants were subjected to the most severe forms of exploitation and wage labor — a type of Prussian–American model.
2. The complete dissolution of landlordism (serfdom) through reforms or revolution. In the second model, large-scale landed estates would be dismantled through reforms, and with the abolition of serfdom, peasants would become the principal actors in agriculture (Lenin, 1979).

The Tsarist development model before the land reforms was based on the preservation of the serf system, but with the start of the nineteenth century, the idea of reforming serfdom began to attract attention in Russian society (McDaniel, 1991). The nineteenth-century Russian land reforms had roots in multiple causes stretching back centuries. After Moscow freed itself from Tatar rule, it gradually, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, consolidated its independence as the Grand Duchy of Moscow, expanded its power, and sought to reclaim Eastern European lands that had formerly belonged to Kievan Rus (Zadokhin, 2005). As a result, a new state emerged, increasingly engaged in strengthening its defenses on the western frontiers due to the threat posed by the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (Grigorievich Solodkin, 2016).

After consolidating power, Russia aimed to launch westward campaigns, citing reasons such as unpaid tribute and the signing of the anti-Russian Livonian Confederation treaty between the Lithuanian princes and the Polish king in 1557. The following year, the Livonian Wars began in Europe and lasted until 1584. Although these wars resulted in the loss of many territories and constituted a complete defeat for Russia, they also led to the destruction of the Livonian tribes. The most important consequence, however, was that the wars revealed Russia's backwardness compared to superior Western powers, prompting recognition of the need for structural transformation from traditional to modern forms and Western-style modernization (Karimi & Karamatinia, 2017). This realization marked the

beginning of Russia’s efforts to overcome backwardness, laying the groundwork for an orientation toward Western modernization — although, at this stage, the priority was technological adoption (Anderson, 2017). Peter the Great (1682–1725) is considered one of the founders of Western-style modernization in Russian history. Two main reasons stand out in his approach:

1. His attachment to the West from childhood.
2. The military defeats Russia had suffered since the reign of Ivan IV.
3. These factors compelled the emperor to emulate Western Europe in technology, prompting reforms such as publishing newspapers, hiring foreign technical experts, establishing new schools, changing the traditional calendar, granting government positions to non-noble and peasant families, introducing the title of emperor in place of tsar, and attempting to change Russian appearance and customs (Strickler, 2002).

Spector notes that “Peter’s modernization reforms, in some respects, created a system designed to prevent hereditary aristocracy in the future by establishing an official ranking list for the military, state, and royal court, and by granting government positions to ordinary families, even peasants. This dealt a major blow to the power of the boyar nobility in later centuries, but also imposed heavy costs on Russia’s modernization. A significant portion of these costs came from increased taxation, the main burden of which fell on the peasants, fueling future discontent” (Spector, 1965).

Between Peter’s reforms and the Crimean War, other events such as Catherine’s reforms occurred, but Russia’s main problem remained the vastness and

diversity of its territories, which autocracy sought to preserve (Akunin, 2019). However, the spread of freedoms stemming from the French Revolution made conditions more difficult. The final spark for modernization and the end of serfdom came after the Crimean War (1853–1856) between Britain, France, Sardinia, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia, which ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1856. The war not only resulted in Russia’s absolute defeat but also caused the loss of its prestige, territory, and faith in the European state system for resolving disputes diplomatically (Shahbazi, 2002).

The most important consequence of the war was the serious attention paid to another modernization effort, as there was a prevailing belief in Russia that overcoming industrial and technological backwardness required reforms to abolish serfdom. The perception emerged that ending the serf system could transform Russia into a power comparable to Britain in Europe. Consequently, in 1861, Emperor Alexander II issued the Emancipation Manifesto abolishing serfdom, marking the beginning of a new era in Russian history (Shahbazi, 2002).

The 1861 land reforms in Russia were implemented in a single stage and followed an indigenous model. Alexander formed secret committees to draft the regulations for implementing the reforms. The first secret committee, chaired by Count Orlov, was established in 1857 to review proposals from various provincial committees (Walter, 1984). Despite opposition from landlords in the commissions, the final laws were enacted, and on February 19, 1861, Alexander II signed the Emancipation Manifesto as the first step in a series of reforms, although final changes were made in favor of the landlords (Karimi & Karamatinia, 2010).

**Table 1**

*Comparison Table*

Comparative Elements	Iran	Russia
Main motivation and goal	Kennedy Doctrine (fear of communism)	Fear of peasant uprisings
Role of external factors	U.S. pressure	Influence of European liberation revolutions
Implementation model	Gradual, 3-stage, non-indigenous	Single-stage, indigenous

**5. Dimensions and Consequences**

In this article, the comparative method has been used because the land reforms in both countries represent a phenomenon with both shared and divergent aspects. To

identify these similarities and differences, land reforms in the two countries were first examined as the main focus and subject, and then, using predetermined concepts and principles in the categories of similarities and differences — such as methods, foundations and

roots, and consequences — a comparative analysis was conducted. In other words, the aim was to examine and analyze the components regarding the two cases (Ghafari, 2009). Based on this, the comparison of land reforms in Russia and Iran is presented in two categories: differences and similarities.

### 5.1. *Roots and Process*

In terms of the “roots and process” of implementation, the reform models of the two countries displayed similarities: in Iran, as in Russia, reforms were imposed from above and inspired by Western intellectual foundations (Akunin, 2019; Anderson, 2017). Furthermore, military defeats in both countries at the hands of Western powers led policymakers to consider the sources of their backwardness and thus to look to Western models of modernization. In both cases, military defeats were among the first signs prompting a turn toward modernization, and the feudal structures in both countries also differed from those of the advanced Western core states, contributing to their backwardness (Karimi & Karamatinia, 2017).

Despite these similarities, there were also differences. In Russia, internal demand was decisive, as the wave of liberalism following the French Revolution, coupled with the harsh conditions of the peasantry, convinced Tsar Alexander that without reforms by the monarchy and landlords, the empire would be engulfed in peasant uprisings. To avoid such a revolution, the Tsar, with landlord participation, undertook land reforms and abolished serfdom (Lenin, 1979; Shahbazi, 2002).

In Iran, by contrast, external pressure played the decisive role. Despite peasant demands for equitable land distribution and opposition from the Shah and landlords, the rise of the Kennedy administration and its doctrine of preventing communist influence and peasant revolutions ultimately led Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to agree to land reforms (Alavi, 2014; Hooglund, 2002). In reality, without the external pressure from Kennedy’s government, land reform in Iran would not have taken place.

In terms of implementation, Iran’s land reform differed from Russia’s: it was gradual, carried out in three stages, and although based on externally driven principles, the execution was not directly modeled on Western practice but was gradually implemented by Iranian experts (Shahbazi & Norouzi, 2016). By contrast, Russia’s land

reform was implemented in a single stage, incomplete but following an indigenous model (Walter, 1984).

### 5.2. *Dimensions and Consequences*

Regarding the “dimensions and consequences” of land reforms in the two countries, the expectation was that the greatest impact would be in agriculture. However, due to Western intellectual foundations, lack of endogenous origins, and top-down implementation, they also had significant political and social effects. The dimensions of the reforms can be viewed as an interconnected chain across political, economic, and social spheres.

In terms of “consequences,” the reforms in both countries produced relatively similar political results but diverged in their economic and social outcomes.

In Iran, economically, the land reforms had multiple consequences: they ultimately increased state control over rural areas through agricultural cooperatives; encouraged rural–urban migration; and, through the establishment of factories and the import of agricultural products, weakened the rural economy in agriculture, thereby fostering the growth of a dependent capitalist economy (Azghandi, 2011; Rahmanian, 2012). Socially, rural migration to cities led to urban expansion, the growth of informal settlements, and the rise of an industrial working class — all of which played a central role in mobilizing dissatisfied peasants into political activism. Politically, the reforms generated discontent among political groups, including peasants, coalescing around an “empty signifier” that eventually contributed to the collapse of the Pahlavi regime (Abrahamian, 2012; Keddie, 1989).

In Russia, economically, the reforms increased Tsarist control over rural areas through the commune system and abolished serfdom. Subsequent counter-reforms in later periods paved the way for the development of a communist economy, marking a major difference from Iran’s path (Kalistov, 1982). Socially, as in Iran, the 1861 land reforms led to urbanization and the emergence of an industrial proletariat that played a critical role in mobilizing other groups to overthrow the Tsarist system. They also transformed two key concepts: loyalty to the Tsar and anti-clericalism among the Russian peasantry, causing them to turn away from the monarchy and join anti-Tsarist forces, contributing to the system’s downfall (Sokolov, 1968). Politically, as in Iran, the reforms set the

stage for revolution, with dissatisfied peasants — further alienated by later counter-reforms — joining the

opposition to overthrow the Tsarist regime (Skocpol, 2010).

**Table 2**

*Land Reform in Iran and Russia*

Comparative Element	Iran	Russia
Roots	Western intellectual foundations; top-down, exogenous development model; external pressure; fear of communism (Alavi, 2014; Hooglund, 2002)	Western intellectual foundations; top-down, endogenous development model; internal pressure; fear of peasant uprisings (Lenin, 1979; Shahbazi, 2002)
Implementation	Gradual (three-stage), non-indigenous (Shahbazi & Norouzi, 2016)	Single-stage, incomplete, indigenous (Walter, 1984)
Dimensions	Political: increased discontent; Economic: expansion of dependent capitalism; Social: rural migration and urban growth (Abrahamian, 2012)	Political: revolution; Economic: groundwork for communist economy; Social: transformation of the Russian peasant and formation of industrial proletariat (Sokolov, 1968)
Outcome	Collapse of the Pahlavi regime	Collapse of the Tsarist system

**6. Comparative Analysis of the Role of Land Reform in Political Crisis and Revolution in Iran and Russia**

According to Skocpol, a social revolution and the resulting changes are meaningful only when the state is viewed as a structure; from this perspective, a set of structural factors such as state weakness and loss of legitimacy, peasant uprisings, and the collapse of the ruling coalition play a key role in the occurrence of revolutions (Skocpol, 2010).

5.3. *State Weakness*

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s implementation of the 1962 land reforms pursued several objectives:

1. Establishing political and economic stability, particularly after the 1953 coup;
2. Increasing popularity and legitimacy during the 1960s;
3. Strengthening control and authority over rural areas and gaining the support of farmers;
4. Satisfying his greatest ally, the United States, by aligning with efforts to prevent communism (Khorramshad & Musanezhad, 2017).

Behind all these aims, signs of the Pahlavi regime’s lack of legitimacy and even weakness in controlling unrest were apparent, as dependence on the United States — especially after the 1953 coup — increasingly fueled public dissatisfaction and undermined legitimacy. In this context, Pahlavi agreed to Kennedy’s doctrine of reforms to strengthen the regime (Alavi, 2014). Although the land reforms abolished the landlord–peasant system and granted land to many farmers, their non-indigenous nature, reliance on oil rents, and the Shah’s personal

political aims meant that they failed to improve the regime’s legitimacy; instead, they helped pave the way for its collapse in the following decade (Hooglund, 2002). Tsarist Russia was a religious state based on Orthodox Christianity — power rested on the inseparable relationship between the state, the Orthodox Church, and religious sanctity (Strickler, 2002). A key feature of religion in Tsarist Russia was its compulsory nature among peasants (about 85% of the population). Before Alexander II’s land reforms, peasants were devout: they attended church, wore the cross constantly, abstained from work on religious holidays, and observed long fasts — evidence of their strong adherence to Orthodox Christianity. Being largely illiterate and unfamiliar with the Gospels, their faith was shaped by the Church’s oral culture and clergy, even though the bond had always been somewhat fragile (Strickler, 2002).

Peasant religiosity in Tsarist Russia rested on two principles:

1. The triad of the Tsar possessing divine sovereignty, the Church as the legitimizer of the Tsar, and the feudal landlords;
2. The Russian Idea — a religiously rooted intellectual current that emphasized the Tsar’s sacred leadership and his legitimacy derived from the Church (Karimi & Karamatinia, 2010).

However, after land reforms created widespread peasant dissatisfaction and laid the groundwork for revolution, Marxist atheism and secular thought spread, leading to the marginalization of Orthodox Christianity. This culminated in the constitutional separation of religion from the state and the absence of any official state



religion. The breaking of the Tsar–peasant bond and the neglect of peasant demands in the land reforms thus led to the collapse of concepts like obedience and religiosity, and ultimately to peasant disillusionment and their mobilization by intellectuals for the communist revolution (Skocpol, 2010).

#### 5.4. Peasant Uprisings

In both Iran and Russia, land reform was used as a tool to preserve greater state power, especially in rural areas, rather than as a genuine model for development. This led to growing dissatisfaction and the erosion of legitimacy for both the Pahlavi regime and the Tsarist system, as the living conditions of the majority of rural families deteriorated after the reforms (Karegar Esfandabadi et al., 2017).

Although the 1962 land reforms in Iran redistributed more land to farmers than before, many soon decided to migrate due to factors such as their inability to manage the land and the allure of urban life. This migration not only strained urban resources but also reshaped traditional family structures and introduced new challenges in the following decades (Azghandi, 2011). Rural–urban migration, factory construction, and agricultural imports weakened the rural economy, ultimately expanding the capitalist economy (Rahmanian, 2012).

In Russia, the land reforms also reduced agricultural output in rural areas. Peasants, seeking to escape unemployment, migrated to cities, where high living costs forced many into urban peripheries. While working in factories and engaging in discussions during their free time, they developed political awareness, and, as they became involved in political groups such as the Narodniks, their religious convictions diminished. This was because such groups promoted a new Marxist-influenced peasant lifestyle (Karimi & Karamatinia, 2010). The uprisings of factory workers and peasants, the social unrest accompanying industrialization, post-serf agricultural reforms, and the growing movements of educated elites all played a major role in the Russian Revolution of the early twentieth century (Skocpol, 2010).

In both countries, post-reform rural migration fueled urbanization, the growth of informal settlements, widening class divisions, and the emergence of an industrial working class — all of which were central in

channeling dissatisfied peasants into political action (Abrahamian, 2012).

#### 5.5. Collapse of the Ruling Coalition

Before the land reforms, one of the Shah's most important allies was the class of large landowners, whose political and economic influence and social connections in rural areas gave them significant power. They opposed the reforms, fearing the loss of their authority and influence in the countryside. After the reforms, the emergence of new political institutions diminished their power, and over time, in competition with these new institutions, they lost their credibility. This led to the breakdown of the alliance between the landowners and the regime (Karegar Esfandabadi et al., 2017).

Thus, by implementing land reforms, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi not only failed to gain greater legitimacy but also lost the support of his former coalition of landlords and elites. Furthermore, the reforms faced opposition from political parties — including the Mellian Party, leftist groups, and religious organizations — contributing to broader public discontent (Ghorashi & Davoudi, 2018).

In contrast, the 1861 Russian land reforms were initiated from above by the Tsar with the support of some landlords. Initially, they did not threaten the interests of the privileged classes — from the emperor to the aristocracy and landowners — as they included guarantees for landlords, financial compensation, and the preservation of their authority (Strickler, 2002; Zadokhin, 2005). However, in later decades, especially during Stolypin's reforms, conflicting interests among different groups and growing discontent undermined the economic power of the nobility, created divisions among the ruling elite, and reduced loyalty to the Tsar (Skocpol, 2010).

In sum, land reforms in both societies weakened and created crises of legitimacy, alienated peasants and rural communities, fractured ruling coalitions, and ultimately contributed to the collapse of both the Pahlavi regime and the Tsarist system.

#### 5.6. Revolutionary Discourse

After the establishment of the Pahlavi regime and the modernization process based on the Western model, the occurrence of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the

emergence of a new world order led to the spread of a new current in Iran known as the revolutionary discourse. This discourse sought an identity for the country separate from Western modernity and modernization. The foundation of the revolutionary discourse was opposition to Western imperialism, dependent capitalism, and imported Western modernity, and the creation of a new identity based on Sharia and Islamic values.

In Russia, political opposition forces, including the peasantry, in the early twentieth century led to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which carried with it a new ideology centered on secularization. The Bolsheviks, due to their humanistic beliefs, argued that religion (Orthodox Christianity) hindered societal progress. They aligned themselves with the peasants' original demand for freedom, promoting the slogan "Religion is the opium of the masses and an obstacle to peasant freedom." Overall, economic, political, and social transformations had a profound effect on the religious beliefs of the Russian peasantry, to the extent that the Bolsheviks

maximized their use of the peasant base and their alliance with industrial workers to spread communism. According to Skocpol's structural theory, for a revolution — especially a social revolution — to occur, structural factors such as state weakness, peasant uprisings (from below), and the collapse of the ruling coalition must be present. The findings of this study show that after the land reforms, both Iran and Russia faced a weakened central state, popular uprisings, and the breakdown of the ruling coalition. The significance of the present study lies in showing that, beyond the factors in Skocpol's theory, ideology also played a role in both land reform experiences. In both cases, revolutionary discourse succeeded in mobilizing discontented peasants and rural populations: in Russia, the leftist Bolshevik discourse emerged as the alternative, while in Iran, it was the Islamic-revolutionary discourse. Thus, the failure of land reform in both cases not only failed to resolve social crises but also, by creating widespread discontent, laid the groundwork for the collapse of the political systems — an aspect not explicitly addressed in Skocpol's structural theory.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of Revolutionary Discourse*

Iran	Russia
Weakening of legitimacy	Reduced rural support for the Shah after reforms
Peasant participation in revolution	Joining urban workers and political-religious opposition to the Pahlavi regime
Collapse of the ruling coalition	Loss of support from landlords and clergy
Link to revolutionary discourse	Islamic and anti-dependent capitalist discourse

**6. Conclusion**

To answer the main research question, the comparative method was applied. Following the stages of comparative analysis, the study first described the main subject — land reform — in terms of its roots, dimensions, and consequences in both Iran and Russia. It then identified and categorized the components to determine the similarities and differences of the two cases, leading to the final stage of analysis.

The study found that while the intellectual foundations of reform in both countries were similar, the drafting of laws and implementation processes differed: in Russia, the laws were formulated from above by the landlords; in Iran, the drafting was externally influenced, but the implementation gradually became indigenized. The

dimensions of land reform in both countries were broadly similar, encompassing economic, political, and social domains.

In terms of consequences, both countries experienced similar political outcomes: dissatisfaction arising from incomplete and externally driven reforms provided the groundwork for revolution, with this discontent later channeled by revolutionary discourse into political upheaval. Economic consequences diverged: in Russia, they created conditions for a communist economy, as discontented peasants, transformed by incomplete reforms, withdrew their loyalty from the Tsar and were drawn by Bolshevik revolutionary discourse toward the communist revolution and the fall of the Tsarist regime. In Iran, they facilitated the expansion of a capitalist

system and greater state control over rural areas, while also increasing agricultural imports.

Socially, the consequences were relatively similar: the erosion of the socio-economic status of rural communities, population growth in urban areas due to rural migration, and the activation of these groups as political actors alongside the rise of the industrial working class in both countries.

From Skocpol's perspective, land reform can be either a stabilizing factor or a trigger for revolution and instability, depending on factors such as state weakness, uprisings from below, and the collapse of the ruling coalition. This study's findings show that land reform in both Iran and Russia not only failed to stabilize but also contributed to popular discontent and the alignment of diverse opposition groups. In Russia, incomplete Tsarist reforms led to peasant dissatisfaction and the erosion of two core values — loyalty to the Tsar and religious faith — which, combined with opposition movements such as Narodism and the industrial working class, resulted in the peasants joining anti-Tsarist forces and the 1917 revolution. In Iran, although the reforms initially reduced the power of landlords and redistributed land, the lack of state support in the following decade, coupled with mass rural migration to cities, worsened peasant conditions and drew them toward opposition groups.

In both societies, land reform weakened the economic and political position of the regimes' key allies — the landlords and aristocracy — creating rifts and collapsing the ruling coalition. The most important finding is the significance of linking Skocpol's structural factors with revolutionary discourse: incomplete and failed land reforms are a necessary condition for revolution, but in the cases of Iran's 1979 revolution and Russia's 1917 revolution, they were not sufficient. Only when combined with revolutionary discourse — Islamic in Iran and Bolshevik in Russia — did they lead to the downfall of the Pahlavi monarchy and the Tsarist regime. In essence, land reform in both Iran and Russia laid the groundwork for revolutionary conditions, and revolutionary discourse transformed this discontent into the revolutions of 1979 and 1917. The experience of land reform in the two countries demonstrates that economic change without political and ideological backing can turn into its opposite.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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