

Charles Kurzman

The Qum Protests and the Coming of the Iranian Revolution, 1975 and 1978

In June 1975 and January 1978, seminary students in the shrine city of Qum, Iran, staged public protests against the regime of Shah Muhammad Riza Pahlavi. In both instances security forces forcibly suppressed the protests. Yet the first incident generated almost no public outcry, while the second incident echoed throughout Iran and quickly became a rallying point for revolutionary mobilization. What was different about Iran in mid-1975 and early 1978 that might account for these different reactions? This article examines three widely credited explanations: economic downturn, widening political opportunity, and organizational mobilization of the opposition. The examination of economic and political explanations uncovered little evidence of significant differences between the two time periods; organizational explanations, by contrast, accounted for significant shifts in 1977 among the moderate and Islamist opposition, with the Islamist opposition in particular exhibiting a sense of optimism and efficacy in the weeks before January 1978. This changed self-perception appears to be the most likely explanation for the wave of protest that followed the suppression of the Qum protest of January 1978.

Qum Protest 1975

On the eve of 5 June 1975, the anniversary of violently repressed protests in 1963, seminary students gathered for commemorative services at the Fayziyah Seminary in Qum, Iran, and raised chants for *Ayatullah al-‘Uzma* (Great Sign of God) Ruhullah Khomeini.¹ This was a significant event, as public mention of Khomeini, the leader of the 1963 protests, had been banned since he was exiled in 1964. Anti-shah demonstrations, planned by the stu-

dents in advance, began in the seminary's central courtyard after evening prayers.² Security forces, apparently prepared for such an event, surrounded the seminary and prevented the students from taking their demonstration to the streets. Into the evening and throughout the next days, with crowds supportive of the protestors gathering around the seminary, security forces lobbed tear gas into the courtyard and alternately ordered the students out and forced them with a water cannon to stay in. On one occasion, the security forces tried to gain entrance to the seminary via neighboring rooftops but were beaten back by students throwing bricks and rocks.

On 7 June, the ranking officer in Qum telephoned a leading religious scholar, *Ayatullah* Kazim Shari'at-Madari, asking him to mediate. Shari'at-Madari did not respond (*Guzarish-i kamil* 1976: 6). As the day drew on and military reinforcements arrived in Qum, the students inside the Fayziyah Seminary also sought mediators. They telephoned the religious leaders of Qum but received little assistance, aside from food. One religious leader sent a representative to speak with the protestors but only to recommend that they make a deal with the authorities to avoid arrest.³ The leaders of the seminaries feared that protests would undermine "the protection of the religious circle's position," *Shaykh* Murtaza Ha'iri explained the next day.⁴ Protest was futile, as one (unnamed) religious leader told a delegation of students: the world is run by two powers, the West and the Communist East, and "we here are only a tool in their hands. They will not allow us to come to power. These boys [the seminary students] will only be sacrificed."⁵

At noon, the city of Qum shut down in a sympathy strike. In the afternoon, further military forces arrived, their presence announced by a military helicopter that flew in low over the seminary. The students continued their protests and hung out a large red banner, written in bad handwriting (intentionally, so the authors would not be identified) and praising Khomeini and the 1963 uprising. Red symbolized the blood of martyrs, they later explained, chagrined that the color was widely taken as sympathy for communism.⁶

In the afternoon of 7 June, security forces moved the crowd away from the seminary in preparation for an assault on the building. Through a loudspeaker, the chief of police issued a warning to the students, instructing them to stay in their rooms, and at dusk, several hundred commandos attacked via neighboring rooftops. Some students resisted with sticks and stones for half an hour. The authorities continued to beat students for another hour while at the same time breaking all the windows and doors in the seminary.

Secret police records indicate that there were more than 200 arrests.⁷ Students reported that they were beaten again while in custody at the police station (Shirkhani 1998a).

We can be reasonably certain, in hindsight, that there were no fatalities,⁸ but “rumors of deaths spread quickly” at the time. “Eight were said to have been killed directly, five others to have been hospitalized in critical condition” (Fischer 1980: 125). Commandos were said to have thrown several students off the roof to their deaths and then to have loaded the bodies into police and gendarmerie vehicles so that casualties could not be counted.⁹ Khomeini, discussing the incident from exile in a pronouncement of 11 July 1975, spoke of 45 dead.¹⁰ The shah considered the incident serious enough to make a public statement attributing this “ugly and filthy” event to “the unholy alliance of black reactionist[s] and stateless Reds” (*New York Times*, 11 June 1975, 10). Authorities shut the Fayziyah Seminary. It was still closed, a vivid reminder of state power, during the seminary student protests of January 1978.

Qum Protest 1978

On 7 January 1978, *Ittila‘at* [*The news*], an afternoon newspaper in Tehran, published an insulting profile of Khomeini by a pseudonymous author. “These days,” the article began, “thoughts turn once again to the colonialism of the black and the red, that is to say, to old and new colonialism.” The alliance of the black and the red went looking for a clerical mouthpiece two decades ago, the article continued, in order to dupe the devout. When the plot “proved unsuccessful with the country’s high-ranking scholars, despite special enticements,” there was only one man left for the job. “Ruhollah Khomeini was an appropriate agent for this purpose,” the article said, making a rare reference to Khomeini in the Iranian press since his exile in 1964.

Reaching Qum at dusk on the seventh, the newspaper article immediately caused a stir. That evening, seminary students gathered, passed around the article, and hand wrote copies to be posted about town—they could not afford to buy copies of the paper on their spare student stipends, and photocopying was not a safe activity for oppositionists in Qum. The students added the addendum: “Tomorrow morning, as a protest, meeting at the Khan Seminary.”¹¹ Independently, eight radical scholars gathered late in the evening to arrange a collective response to what they viewed as a slanderous article. “Something must be done,” a midranking scholar told his col-

leagues. “I believe the author of the article wanted to see what the people’s reaction would be, and if we don’t mobilize, it will mean the regime wins.”¹² A proposal to discuss the offending article in class was outvoted by those who wanted to cancel classes for a day in protest. But these radical teachers controlled only a handful of classes. Most seminaries were run by the half-dozen highest-ranking ayatullahs, and it was too late at night to ask for their support. Instead, the plotters divided up the task of visiting the ayatullahs the following morning.¹³

On 8 January, students learned of the decision to strike. “On the advice of their instructors,” one participant recalled, “the students said, ‘Let’s go and ask the religious authorities, the theology teachers of the religious circles, what their view is on this article.’”¹⁴ This was a time-honored method in the repertoire of protest in Qum, where any seeker had the right to approach a senior scholar and ask his opinion on a pressing issue of the day.¹⁵ But this day’s query was no neutral appeal to the expertise of seniority. The radical students knew the response they sought and were hoping to pressure the senior scholars into publicly denouncing the offending article and expressing sympathy with Khomeini. Several hundred strong, the students marched from house to house, clashing with police several times along the way, beating two men accused of being government agents, and breaking several bank windows. The police used a tractor and batons to try to disperse the crowd, but there were no serious casualties (“Guzarish-i sharh” 1978).¹⁶ After the protestors reached their respective destinations, they sat in the courtyard and waited for each ayatullah.

As in 1975, the senior scholars were hesitant to support open protest. When representatives of the radical teachers arrived at Ha’iri’s home early on 8 January, requesting participation in the strike, he immediately telephoned his senior colleagues. They agreed to strike, but only for one day.¹⁷ Later that same day, when the students came to see him, Ha’iri expressed his fear of open protest. “Of course I am very angry about the insult to the honorable *Ayatullah* Khomeini, and I condemn it in all respects. I know that steps must be taken, and I am taking them. But this sort of thing — my view is that it must be peaceful, not in such a way that they will do in the ‘Azam Mosque, too, like the Fayziyah Seminary” — which had been ransacked and closed following the student protests of 1975 (“Guzarish-i sharh” 1978: 17).¹⁸ Shari‘at-Madari was similarly cautious. After keeping the crowd waiting for more than an hour,¹⁹ he said he was doing all that he could, phoning and sending messages

to government officials. “I continue to work on this. I hope that they [regime officials] will refrain from this sort of insult, and ones like it, but I can do no more than this” (ibid.: 16).²⁰

Ayatullah Muhammad-Riza Gulpayigani, on the other hand, sympathized with the protestors: “Maintain your unity and solidarity and continue your peaceful demonstration. You will undoubtedly find success” (ibid.: 15).²¹ Some activists were disappointed, however, that Gulpayigani spoke also about marginal issues²² and that he considered himself unable to help. “I telegraphed members of parliament” several years ago on another matter, he explained, “but they didn’t pay any attention” (*Nabard-i tudah’ha* 1978: 2). Only *Ayatullah* Shihabuddin Najafi-Mar’ashi, so moved that he cried during his speech, was an unqualified success with the student activists.²³ He too said that he had written to Tehran in protest and, pleading old age and heart trouble, had asked to be excused from further efforts. But, according to a transcribed recording of his speech, he expressed his support for the demonstrators several times, in no uncertain terms.²⁴ If these ayatullahs assumed that their comments were being monitored by the shah’s secret police, they were correct. The Qum branch of SAVAK, the Organization for Information and National Security, sent summaries of the main points to Tehran that same day.²⁵

The one-day student strike was extended to a second day after activists in the Qum bazaar organized a shutdown for 9 January. Some shopkeepers had closed on the eighth, according to secret police reports.²⁶ One of the leaders of the activists approached Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, a leader of the radical seminarians, and asked, “How is it that we’re expressing our sympathy for the religious circle? If the religious circle returns to work tomorrow and we close the bazaar, this will create disharmony.” Musavi-Tabrizi later recalled that he was not sure the activists could pull off a closure of the bazaar, and it was too late in the evening to gather the radical instructors for a second meeting. So he told the bazaar activist to bring a crowd to his seminary class early the following morning—if enough bazaaris showed up, he would adjourn class and have his students lead the demonstration to the other seminaries. The next morning went just as planned, and the news of the bazaar strike shamed the high-ranking scholars into ending their classes abruptly.²⁷

The students continued to make their rounds to the houses of religious leaders. The protestors were joined by ever-larger crowds of local residents, numbering several thousand early in the day and climbing to more than

ten thousand by late afternoon, according to consistent estimates by protestors and police officials.²⁸ Unlike the previous day, the protestors apparently made an effort not to antagonize the security forces. Rather than chanting confrontational slogans, protestors marched silently to the houses of religious leaders, admonishing those who shouted to “observe the silence” (“Guzarish-i sharh” 1978: 18).

In the late afternoon, security forces set up two trucks as a roadblock outside a police station. When the marchers reached the roadblock, a police commander ordered them to clear the sidewalks. The demonstrators were starting to comply when someone—police officials claimed it was protestors; protestors claimed it was provocateurs—threw stones through a nearby bank window, providing an excuse for security forces to attack the crowd with batons. At this point the crowd began to shout slogans, break store windows, and resist the security forces with branches and stones. The officers fired shots into the air, causing the protestors to scatter momentarily; then, as the crowd regrouped, the officers began to level their weapons at the protestors. Clashes continued until 9 P.M.²⁹

Five people died in the event, according to a prorevolutionary research institute that had every interest in inflating the number of casualties (Shirkhani 1998b: 283–91). This figure is even lower than the monarchy’s official toll of 9, as well as the estimates of U.S. diplomats, who first reported 20 to 30 dead, then 14.³⁰ The Iranian opposition did not accept these estimates. Rumors spread immediately of 100 or more killed,³¹ and opposition estimates ranged up to 300 (Davani 1998, 7:48; Khomeini 1982a: 285, 297, 299). According to a small survey taken in Tehran the following week, more people believed the opposition’s casualty figures than those of the government (Stempel 1981: 91). The opposition charged that the government took away large numbers of bodies by truck; in addition, a number of wounded and killed were said to have been kept from hospitals and morgues out of fear of being arrested or kidnapped (“Guzarish-i sharh” 1978: 18–21). Recently published documents from SAVAK files do not appear to corroborate these charges. And, as one former seminary student has reasoned, it seems implausible that the families of these martyrs would have kept silent about their loss after the rise of the Islamic Republic, which raised the massacre at Qum to the pedestal of iconic heroism.³²

Different Responses

Two protests erupted in the same religiously significant city, and each was forcibly suppressed. Yet Islamist writings before and after the revolution—which had a great interest in recognizing and honoring protests against the monarchy—report little public response to the first Qum protest, aside from press accounts of a single student demonstration at a university television station in Tehran (*Kayhan-i hava'i* [*The globe*, airmail edition], 14 June 1975; *New York Times*, 11 June 1975, 10) and government reports on two seminary student protests in Mashhad.³³ Public outrage was so absent, a seminary student in Qum later recalled, that residents raised no voice or hand to help him and his fellow protestors as they were being arrested and beaten and instead observed passively “as though they were gathered to watch a passion play.”³⁴ The second Qum protest, by contrast, was immediately taken up throughout Iran as an atrocity to be avenged. Within a week, according to U.S. diplomats in the capital, “major” demonstrations had erupted in at least eight cities, and general strikes had been launched, with partial success, in at least three.³⁵ Opposition accounts speak of far more widespread protests and typically identify the Qum protest as a precipitating event—a “heart-breaking tragedy,” according to the pronouncement of one group of strikers in Tehran—that served as an “example of the misdeeds of the oppressive regime.”³⁶ The following month, commemorative rallies for the martyrs of Qum were suppressed with further loss of life (Kurzman forthcoming).

How might we account for the differing responses to the two Qum protests? One approach might be to focus on distinctions between the two events: a siege versus a march; clashes inside a seminary, hidden from public view, versus clashes in the streets; the security forces’ use of firearms in 1978. One might also identify a threshold of outrage between rumors of 8 to 45 fatalities in 1975 and a death toll of 5 to 300 in 1978. We might consider the events cumulative in their effect, with the 1978 casualties as the proverbial last straw. If we follow this approach, our explanatory work is done. By contrast, emphasizing the similarity of the events, rather than the distinctions, opens up the fruitful research question: what changed in the meantime in Iran that might have generated such different responses?

An infinite complex of things changed in Iran between mid-1975 and early 1978. Time passed. People aged and died. Memories of 1975 grew into stories. All of these changes no doubt contributed to the different response

in 1978. But most of these changes escape the gaze of our research, the result of either theoretical or methodological myopia. While recognizing the wholeness of history, I wish to focus heuristically on three factors that have been identified in the literature on the Iranian Revolution as being theoretically relevant.

This approach adopts John Stuart Mill's "method of difference," which is common in social-scientific studies of a small number of cases (Mill 1949: 256–58; Smelser 1976: 142–43; King et al. 1994: 199–206). This method calls for comparison of cases that are identical in all characteristics except for a single precondition and a single outcome, allowing the attribution of causality to the varying precondition. Naturally, no two cases match precisely, and recent methodological reflections have emphasized the need to select cases that match or differ in ways that are theoretically important, that is, in ways that address the expectations of a particular explanatory approach. According to an economistic theory of revolution, for example, we would expect to see economic conditions differ in cases where revolutionary outcomes differ. If we do not find such a difference, the evidence may be said to disconfirm the theory (Emigh 1997: 649–84; Mahoney 2000: 392–93).

In a world of imperfect matches, we approach asymptotic perfection with the comparison of a single country at two points close in time, such as Iran in 1975 and 1978.³⁷ For this reason, other relevant comparisons—for example, the Iranian protests of 1963—are not included in this study, as such cases would multiply variation. This approach may appear to be ahistorical, in that it disregards virtually all of Iranian history prior to the 1970s. I would like to be clear, however, that this study examines only the timing of the revolution, not its underlying causes. In place of long-standing forces, this study focuses on marginal shifts in these forces. This approach, known in social science as a change model, seeks to understand whether marginal shifts in the hypothesized causes are correlated with marginal shifts in the phenomenon we wish to explain. The hypothesized causes, drawn from the literature on the Iranian Revolution, are

- economic changes, specifically the shattering of the high hopes generated by the oil boom of 1973–74 in the recession of 1977, generating unrest in 1978;
- political changes, specifically the opening of opportunities for protest in 1977 due to pressure, actual or anticipated, from President Jimmy Carter of the United States; and

- organizational change within the opposition, specifically the mobilization of oppositional activity, in 1977.

These factors are not held to be isolated from one another, and connections between them are noted below. However, these factors lend themselves to distinct forms of evidence, and the following sections of this essay adopt different empirical approaches: economic change is measured through national-level data on gross domestic product, consumption, and inflation as well as sectoral-level data on wages; political change is traced through the state's varying responses to incidents it perceived as challenges; organizational change is inferred from the activities, pronouncements, and retrospective accounts of the opposition. All have some evidence in their favor, but only the organizational-change argument gets stronger on close examination, especially with regard to the Islamist opposition.

Economic Change

A leading economic change explanation for the timing of the Iranian Revolution argues that the oil boom of 1973–74 generated tremendous expectations, overheated the economy, and made Iran vulnerable to the subsequent downturn in the oil market. The result may have been an increase in relative deprivation.³⁸ But was economic distress more severe in 1978 than in 1975?

By all indicators, the basic economic condition of Iran did not change between mid-1975 and early 1978. Iran continued to be a semi-industrialized state with massive oil exports that dwarfed and skewed all other economic activities in the country. The influx of oil revenue continued to generate infrastructure bottlenecks, land speculation, and large-scale corruption. Moreover, in both 1975 and 1978 the economy suffered mild recessions after the boom years of 1973 and 1976. The statistical evidence does not indicate that economic hardship was decisively worse in early 1978 than in mid-1975.

Before we examine the data, let us note that statistics for Iran may not be reliable. Unlike many other developing countries, Iran has suffered an overabundance of statistics. A British consul noted in 1848: "It seldom happens in Persia that two statistical accounts on one subject, even when derived from official sources, are found to correspond" (Issawi 1971: 20). A century later, a U.S. economic advisor discovered the same phenomenon: "There is no dearth of 'statistics.' Indeed, one can get statistical data on almost every conceivable item of economic interest. This data may be published or may be freely

Table 1 Percent annual change in real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, Iran, 1963–77

Year	Central Bank of Iran [Bank Markazi Iran] %	International Monetary Fund %	Penn World Table %
1963	5.9	6.6	-0.5
1964	8.5	4.6	5.4
1965	15.9	12.3	9.2
1966	9.9	10.0	4.7
1967	11.7	11.3	5.5
1968	13.3	12.5	9.3
1969	14.0	12.1	5.5
1970	12.5	12.7	12.0
1971	14.7	12.6	-0.6
1972	9.5	16.9	8.6
1973	12.0	11.7	11.6
1974	6.9	7.8	3.0
1975	2.5	2.9	-2.0
1976	12.1	10.7	11.4
1977	6.0	-2.1	-6.5

Sources: Jazayeri 1988: 171; International Monetary Fund 1980: 228–29; Penn World Table 1994.

offered verbally by a government department head. About the only certainty, however, is that figures on the same subject from different knowledgeable, even official, sources will be conflicting” (Benedick 1964: 256). The advent of computers did not change this situation. Various state agencies kept differing sets of figures, and some sources were not consistent from year to year, as categories shifted and earlier data were revised without explanation. Plus, there is cause for concern about political manipulation of economic and social statistics. As one report put it, authorities, “unwilling to reform the condition of life in Iran, kept reforming the data” (Parvin and Zamani 1979: 43). For these reasons, the following statistics should be treated with skepticism.

Table 1 lists annual changes in per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) of Iran, adjusted for inflation, for the decade and a half prior to the revolution, according to three sources: the Central Bank of Iran [Bank Markazi Iran], the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Penn World Table.³⁹ All three sources report strong economic growth from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s (the only exception being the Penn World Table’s

negative growth figure for 1971). All three sources show faltering growth rates in the years after the oil price hikes of 1973, with the exception of the unanimously strong figures for 1976. At first glance, then, there is statistical support for an economic explanation of the Iranian Revolution: a growing disjuncture between the oil boom's heightened expectations and Iran's subsequent macro-economic performance.

Yet there was a recession in 1975 too, and no revolution occurred. All three sources show a significant drop in growth from 1974 to 1975, and the recession was no secret at the time. Only a year after announcing his dreams for a "Great Civilization in Iran," to be funded by dramatically increased oil revenues, the shah began to speak of belt-tightening in May 1975. Ministries were instructed to cut spending and then to prioritize projects in anticipation of additional cuts (*New York Times*, 28 May 1975, 18, and 15 August 1975, 52). In July, a moratorium on new international contracts went into effect, and for the first time since the oil boom, Iran started to borrow on the world money market, as much as \$500 million by mid-August (*Business Week* [New York], 17 November 1975, 63; *New York Times*, 13 August 1975, 47, and 15 August 1975, 47, 52; Graham 1980: 93). Private investors began to ship their money abroad, \$2 billion in 1975 (Halliday 1979: 165). To combat inflation, the government scapegoated retailers, especially in the traditional bazaar sector, imposing strict price controls and accusing certain well-known merchants of profiteering. In July 1975, during the first weeks of price controls, 10,000 merchants were fined, more than 7,000 arrested, and 600 shut down (Graham 1980: 94; *The Times* [London], 4 August 1975, 5; *New York Times*, 21 August 1975, 51; Parsa 1989: 103).⁴⁰ Already in the spring of 1975, U.S. officials had noted economic "strains" in Iran, predicted lower growth rates, and were worried that a "significant economic, and potentially political, problem centers on the rising expectations that for many cannot be fulfilled."⁴¹

Was the recession of 1977 worse than that of 1975? The statistical evidence is contradictory and inconclusive.⁴² The Central Bank figures show positive growth rates for both years, with rates higher in 1977 than in 1975; the IMF reports a low positive rate for 1975 and a low negative rate for 1977; the Penn World Table gives negative rates for both years, with 1977 more negative than 1975. Even if we accept a majority vote and conclude that Iran's macro-economic condition was worse in 1977 than in 1975, by what mechanism might a faltering GDP have influenced reactions to the January 1978 Qum protests?

One potential mechanism might involve government spending; as the global recession following the 1973 oil price hikes reduced the government's oil revenues, less money would be available for the government to buy popular support. In keeping with this explanation, government spending as a percent of GDP grew 15% in 1975 and only 5% in 1977 (the annual data run from 21 March to 20 March) (Jazayeri 1988: 169, reporting statistics from the Central Bank of Iran). Yet government consumption continued to increase faster than the rate of population growth. Plus, the fall-off from 1974 to 1975 was steeper than from 1976 to 1977, suggesting that perceptions of relative deprivation might also have been expected in 1975. The opposite pattern appears with private consumption, a second possible mechanism (*ibid.*). Here the absolute rate of growth was higher in 1977 than in 1975, but the drop-off from the previous year's growth rate was steeper. Thus in terms of consumption, no clear pattern emerges to establish 1977 as economically worse than 1975.

Inflation is another potential mechanism of economic distress. Let us keep in mind that Iranian government statistics on inflation were widely considered to be seriously underestimated (Ikani 1987: 126; *Quarterly Economic Review: Iran* [London], 2d quarter 1975, 10). Quarterly data from the IMF consumer-price scale and the *Quarterly Economic Review's* cost-of-living scale both show large inflationary bursts in the first two quarters of 1975, leading up to the June Qum protests. The last two quarters of 1977, by contrast, witnessed relatively low inflation (though extremely high bursts had been registered in early 1977).⁴³ Responses to the Qum protests do not appear to correlate with quarterly shifts in inflation.

Annualized inflation figures present a somewhat different pattern. As shown in Table 2, Iran began running double-digit inflation in 1973, and the consumer price index leapt by 25.1% in 1977, according to the Central Bank of Iran. As indicated in the following columns of Table 2, which report Western calendar years, dramatic wage increases more than kept pace with inflation, but the differential eroded after 1975: in the manufacturing and construction sectors, workers' wages rose by 30% more than consumer prices in 1975, by 20% more in 1976, and only by 3 to 9% more in 1977. Daily calorie intake, as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (1980), continued to rise during this period, but it did not match the 8% increase of 1975. The deprivation suffered in 1977 was not absolute but was relative to the growing prosperity of previous years.

If the manufacturing or construction sectors felt deprivation, however,

Table 2 Percent annual change in consumer prices, wages, and daily calorie intake, Iran, 1971–77

Year	Consumer Price Index %	Wages %	Manufacturing wages %	Construction wages %	Calorie Intake %
1971	5.6	21.0	15.8	2.6	0.6
1972	6.3	20.8	23.9	17.5	2.5
1973	11.2	26.9	27.6	21.6	6.8
1974	15.5	31.0	32.6	28.9	2.7
1975	9.9	29.0	43.6	47.1	8.0
1976	16.6	39.5	36.7	39.4	2.0
1977	25.1	29.2	28.1	34.4	1.6

Sources: Consumer Price Index: Bank Markazi Iran [Central Bank of Iran] 1974: 166 (data for 1971–73), 1976: 74 (data for 1971–75), 1978: 158 (data for 1972–77). (Jazayeri 1988: 170 reports similar figures from an IMF source.) Wages: *International Financial Statistics*, April 1977, 186 (data for 1971–72), April 1979, 190 (data for 1972–77). Manufacturing and construction wages: Jazayeri 1988: 176 (reporting statistics from the Central Bank of Iran). Daily calorie intake: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations 1980: 467.

we do not observe widespread participation of workers from these fields in the aftermath of the January 1978 Qum protests. Industrial strike activity did not begin in earnest for another eight months, in September and October 1978 (Abrahamian 1982: 511; Bayat 1987: 77–89), after inflation had been reduced significantly (*Business Week*, 11 September 1978, 86; *Quarterly Economic Review: Iran*, 3d quarter 1979, 20). Rural migrants, who comprised the majority of workers in the construction industry, also were slow to join the revolutionary movement (Kazemi 1980a: 88–95, 1980b: 257–77; Bauer 1983: 157–60; Parsa 1989: 5) and constituted only 10% of the revolutionary casualties in Tehran (Amra'i 1982: 182). In one telling instance in the fall of 1978, construction workers laughed as protestors in Tehran, fleeing security forces, ran into a dead-end alley; the workers then refused to allow the protestors to take refuge on the construction site (Gulabdarah'i 1986: 41).

By contrast, the economic sector that took up the protest movement most actively in January 1978—the bazaar, Iran's traditional system of manufacturing and commerce—was one that fared well in the 1970s and arguably better in early 1978 than in mid-1975. By many accounts, the bazaar had enjoyed an economic boom in the decade before the revolution. One traditional shopping area in Tehran, for instance, added 40 shopping alleys in the 1960s and 1970s

(Ghandchi-Tehrani 1982: 36). In the mid-1970s, the bazaar controlled two-thirds of domestic wholesale trade, one-third of imports, and one-fifth of the credit market (Graham 1980: 224; Abrahamian 1982: 433; *Euromoney* [London], June 1978, 117). In addition, bazaaris and their sons were increasingly crossing over into the “modern” sectors of the economy: numerous industrialists had their origins in the bazaar, and modern educators were opening new career paths for the younger generation (Ashraf 1988: 563, 569; Bashi-riyeh 1984: 40–41; Graham 1980: 47; Thaïss 1971: 196, 198). “I have no cause for complaint [in terms of economic performance],” a carpet merchant from the Tehran bazaar told an inquiring academic in November 1978.⁴⁴ “We had money,” one jewelry shop owner from the Tehran bazaar later recalled in explaining, proudly, how he was able to shut his shop for months in support of the revolutionary movement.⁴⁵

The bazaar, like other segments of society, had numerous grievances against the state. Bazaaris had little access to government credit, the interest ceiling for which was lower than inflation, thus generating billions of dollars in subsidies for companies with royal connections (Salehi-Isfahani 1989). The monarchy’s urban planning showed little respect for traditional markets—new avenues cut through the bazaar in several provincial capitals, destroying the bazaar in two cities (Ashraf 1988: 551). In addition, the bazaar was targeted in the government’s July 1975 price-control campaign, when thousands of meagerly trained inspectors were sent into the nation’s bazaars to root out “profiteering,” a campaign that one bazaari likened to the Cultural Revolution in China (*Der Spiegel* [*The mirror* {Hamburg}], 18 December 1978, 114). Yet despite their historic alliance with oppositional clerics, bazaaris made no move to protest the repression at Qum in 1975, while in early 1978 they mobilized quickly. “After years of silence, a fire has once again been found in the ashes of the bazaar,” one clerical revolutionary reported in mid-January 1978 (*Dar-barah-yi qiyam* 1978, 1:138).⁴⁶ On 11 January 1978, two days after the casualties in Qum, the Isfahan bazaar began to shut down in protest, as did bazaars in several other cities in the following days.⁴⁷

In sum, the different responses to the Qum protests of 1975 and 1978 cannot be clearly explained by changes in economic conditions. While the economy had, by some measures, deteriorated marginally in the interim, by other measures it had improved. Industrial and construction workers, who suffered greater relative deprivation in 1978 than in 1975, were slow to join

the revolutionary movement in 1978; while bazaaris, who were persecuted in 1975 and were relatively well off economically at both points in time, were among the first groups to protest in January 1978.

Political Change

The election of Jimmy Carter to the U.S. presidency in November 1976 is widely credited with having spurred the shah to liberalize his regime, generating political opportunities that may have encouraged a broad response to the Qum protest in early 1978.⁴⁸ We should note, though, that liberalization was quite limited. In early 1978 as in 1975, the monarchical government ruled through a combination of coercion and fear (exemplified by SAVAK) and corruption and co-optation (exemplified by the weak, fraudulently elected parliament). Moreover, both Qum protests took place not in the context of political liberalization, but of rescinded liberalization, following political crackdowns in March 1975 and November 1977.

The 1975 crackdown ended a brief political opening in which the loyal opposition party was allowed to contest and win a parliamentary by-election (Abrahamian 1989: 25). Unwilling to tolerate even this minimal level of political uncertainty—the electoral competition “did not look good,” a cabinet minister later recalled (Majidi 1998: 62–63)—the shah made an “abrupt volte-face,” as U.S. diplomats described it, and in March 1975 dissolved Iran’s two feeble legal political parties, replacing them with a single party.⁴⁹ Membership was not required, but in announcing the formation of the new party, the shah equated nonmembership with treason (*Kayhan International* [Tehran], 8 March 1975, 2). The shah’s autobiography was altered thereafter to omit the section equating one-party states with fascism and communism (Keddie 1981: 179). The opposition was outraged. Within the week, Khomeini denounced the new Resurgence Party:⁵⁰

In view of this party’s contravention of Islam and the interests of the Muslim nation of Iran, public participation in it is *haram* [religiously forbidden] and constitutes assistance to the oppression and destitution of the Muslims. [Collaboration] with it is one of the clearest forbidden instances of apostasy. . . . May the nation of Islam block these frightening plans with unprecedented resistance from all quarters, before the opportunity disappears.⁵¹

A second political opening occurred in 1977. In the spring and summer of that year, moderate oppositionists tested the waters with a series of open letters critical of the government's policies and were not arrested.⁵² As one oppositionist recalled:

Some people were saying, "Why haven't they seized and killed [the author of one of the open letters]?" . . . If he had written the letter five years earlier, they would have seized him and thrown him in prison. If they didn't kill him they would at least have thrown him in prison.⁵³

"If we had done this a year and a half ago," another liberal oppositionist said at the time, "we would have been in Evin [a notorious prison]."⁵⁴ Still another oppositionist noted that "the government wouldn't dare jail all of us in the present climate on human rights."⁵⁵

Even Khomeini seems to have taken heart momentarily, telling a group of students and well-wishers on 1 November 1977:

Today, in Iran, an opportunity has appeared. Make the most of this opportunity. . . . Now, [oppositional] party writers are stirring. They are making critiques. They are writing letters and signing them. You too should write letters. A hundred gentlemen of the clergy should sign them. . . . Inform the world. You can't reach the world from inside Iran; send [your letters] outside the country for them to be published, or send them here somehow, and we'll get them published. Write critiques, write about the troubles, and give it to [government officials] themselves, like the few people who we've seen stir and speak out at length and sign their names. No one's done anything to them. . . .

This is an opportunity that must not be lost, and I am afraid that this little man, the shah, is bringing his accounts into harmony with [the Americans]. Even now they are busy settling accounts. . . . God forbid that this should succeed and that [the shah] should consider his footing firm. This time is not like the previous times. This time will cause major damage to Islam.⁵⁶

Khomeini appeared to be optimistic about the limited opportunities generated by liberalization, and he encouraged the Islamist opposition to follow the moderate opposition's example, to write open letters to the government and to international organizations. For a brief interlude, if this speech is any indi-

cation, the Islamist opposition may have felt that international pressure could lead to a genuine liberalization. As *Ayatullah* Husayn Muntaziri, one of Khomeini's top followers, later recalled, "We didn't expect Carter to defend the shah, for he is a religious man who has raised the slogan of defending human rights. How can Carter, the devout Christian, defend the shah?" (quoted in Rubin 1981: 195).⁵⁷ However, Khomeini and his adherents inside Iran did not pursue the open-letter strategy.⁵⁸

In late summer 1977, opposition groups began to organize semipublic protest meetings that the security forces treated relatively leniently.⁵⁹ On ten consecutive nights in mid-October, sharply worded poetry readings drew audiences in the thousands to the Iran-Germany Association in Tehran, and the attendees were not harassed.⁶⁰ Large and politically tinged mourning ceremonies for Khomeini's eldest son, Mustafa, who died suddenly in Iraq, were held with relatively minor state disruption throughout the country in late October; only after the ceremonies spilled out into the streets and became demonstrations were they repressed (Kurzman 2003). In other ways, however, repression continued as before. In August 1977, *Ayatullah* Mahmud Taliqani, a senior religious leader, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for antiregime activities.⁶¹ Several other religious oppositionists were arrested or exiled internally in the fall of 1977.⁶²

But the regime's partial tolerance of oppositional activity disappeared in a renewed clampdown after the shah's meetings with Carter in November 1977.⁶³ The talks with Carter "had gone well," focusing on global issues in a cordial atmosphere, according to the shah's final autobiography (Pahlavi 1980: 152). Carter barely mentioned human rights (Public Papers of the Presidents 1978: 2028–29, 2033).⁶⁴ Perhaps the shah now felt more secure in U.S. support for his regime. In any case, peaceable oppositional meetings were no longer immune from state repression. A poetry reading at Aryamihir Technical University in Tehran on 15 November was banned as the hall filled; the students already inside occupied the hall and refused to leave until they were assured of a safe exit. It took all night, but the head of the university finally got assurances from the security forces. As the students left, they were attacked anyway.⁶⁵ On 19 November, the *Washington Post* (22 November 1977, A14) reported,

more than 350 riot police wearing U.S.-made helmets and armed with wooden truncheons invaded Tehran University and battered students

indiscriminately, according to witnesses. About 65 persons, including four professors, were injured and 100 students arrested. The attack came hours after the shah returned here from Paris, where he stopped after the U.S. visit.

The next week, a group of moderate oppositionists gathered in a private garden in Karaj, near Tehran. Busloads of “club-wielders” charged into the garden, breaking arms and fracturing crania. For good measure, they also smashed the cars parked outside.⁶⁶ The Iranian government “clamped down rather severely in late November,” the U.S. embassy reported. “Following the shah’s visit to Washington,” according to Mahdi Bazargan, a leading moderate opposition figure, “repression again seemed the order of the day.” “After returning from his visit to America,” an opposition group wrote in late 1977, the shah “threw himself into a new course intended to seek revenge against the insurgent people of Iran and freedom seekers.”⁶⁷

The Qum protests of June 1975 and January 1978, then, both took place soon after marginal shifts toward repression. In 1975, this involved the imposition of a single-party political system; in 1978, it meant reversion to an unstated ban on oppositional meetings after several months of relative tolerance. The Qum protests of 1975 and 1978 were both met with major displays of state power involving the arrival of troops from out of town, the brandishing of military weaponry, and armed attacks on unarmed groups of students. Yet the crackdown of 1975, though decried by opposition leaders, was accompanied by little protest activity; in late 1977 and early 1978, the crackdown was followed by increasingly bold protests. Shifts in political opportunity did not correlate with these different responses.

Organizational Change

A third potential change involves the organization of the opposition. According to this approach, the opposition’s commitment of organizational resources generated and sustained the protest movement.⁶⁸ Naturally, this commitment may be related to economic or political changes, and these are noted below where appropriate. The following sections consider three categories of oppositional activists: revolutionary leftists, moderates, and revolutionary clerics.

Revolutionary Leftists

Leftist revolutionaries responded very little to either Qum protest. The two primary leftist groups, the People's Strugglers of Iran (Mujahidin-i Khalq-i Iran) and the Iranian People's Sacrificing Guerrillas (Charik'ha-yi Fada'i-yi Khalq-i Iran), were both in crisis, having suffered severe state repression and ideological factionalization over the previous several years. The People's Strugglers organization was in the midst of an internal debate over whether to continue armed struggle (Behrooz 1999: 73; Kian-Thiébault 1998: 179; Abrahamian 1989: 171; Radjavi 1983: 160).⁶⁹ The People's Sacrificing Guerrillas, according to one of its leaders, "disintegrated and disappeared" in the mid-1970s, "set itself principally to protecting itself," and engaged only in "scattered actions" to show that it still existed.⁷⁰ Ideologically, the group decided that objective conditions for revolution did not exist (Behrooz 1999: 59, 68), and the organization claimed credit for only a handful of actions, including squatter protests in summer 1977 (*Guzarishati az mubarizat* 1977) and a response to the Qum protests one month after the fact, on 8 February 1978, when it planted bombs at a police station and a Resurgence Party building in Qum (Sazman-i Charik'ha 1978). A third leftist party, the communist Masses (Tudah) Party, had virtually no organized presence inside Iran at the time, according to its own accounts (*Zindah bad junbish* 1978; *Javidan bad khatirah* 1978; Posadas 1979: 24; Iktishafi 1998: 385–86), the testimony of a Soviet agent in Tehran (Kuzichkin 1990: 204), and the judgment of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.⁷¹ None of these groups claimed credit for the seminary student activism that followed the Qum protest of January 1978. In view of the leftists' limited activism in early 1978, and the bloody repression of leftist groups during the preceding several years, organizational mobilization on the radical left does not appear to explain the differing responses to the two Qum protests.

Moderate Oppositionists

As noted above, moderate oppositionists, by contrast to the revolutionary left, mobilized more in 1977 than in 1975. They were highly attuned to marginal shifts in political opportunities, and Carter's election spurred a number of them into oppositional activity, beginning with the publication of open letters in early 1977 and peaking with the poetry nights in October 1977.

With the crackdown of November 1977, however, the moderate opposition prudently retreated, participating in no more public protests until the next thaw, in the summer of 1978. Several new moderate oppositional groups were founded during this period (Karimi-Hakkak 1985: 212–13), but their activities were limited to a handful of relatively mild pronouncements (*Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah* [*Supplement to The newsletter* {Tehran}], 1 December 1977–June 1978; *Safahati az tarikh* 1984). In mid-January 1978, the National Front of Iran issued a single statement supporting a strike in the Tehran bazaar (*Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 31 January 1978, 7–8).⁷² The Iranian Committee for the Defense of Human Rights wrote to the prime minister, respectfully demanding a full accounting for the Qum tragedy, but did not call for public protest (*Safahati az tarikh* 1984 [2]:85–87). Even such limited oppositional activity as this, the committee's leader noted in a press conference on 11 January 1978, was "very likely to bring about difficulties and restrictions for us" (*ibid.*: 95). Moderate oppositionists blamed one another for fearing a "severe response on the part of the government" (Sanjabi 1989: 284) and for worrying so much that "they'll arrest us all" that after a particularly rancorous planning meeting in early 1978, "this political movement was halted."⁷³ In sum, the mobilization by moderate oppositionists in 1977 affected Iranian responses to the Qum protest of January 1978 at most indirectly, since these oppositionists were themselves restrained in their activities in early 1978.

Revolutionary Islamists

The radical Islamist opposition did not mobilize its forces in 1975 but did attempt to mobilize in late 1977. In mid-1975, leaders of the religious opposition did not believe that Iran was ready for revolution and hence did not commit significant resources toward protest; in the fall of 1977, by contrast, the religious revolutionaries decided that the country had "awakened." This difference in the Islamist opposition's sense of efficacy at the two time periods, I suggest, may well explain the different responses by Iranians to the two Qum protests.

Khomeini and his followers had long sought to overthrow the Iranian monarchy and to institute an Islamic republic, but even the most ardent revolutionaries did not think this would be feasible in the short or medium term. In the wake of the violently suppressed protests of 1962–64, Khomeini and

other religious radicals decided that the country was not yet ready for Islamic revolution. As Khomeini (1981: 132–33) suggested in his lectures on “Islamic Government” given in Najaf, Iraq, in 1970: “Ours is a goal that will take time to achieve. . . . We must persevere in our efforts even though they may not yield their result until the next generation.” For this reason, the Islamist opposition devoted particular attention to spreading its message among the youth.⁷⁴ At the same time, the Islamist opposition largely refrained from open protest (Kurzman forthcoming). Spreading the message was risky enough.⁷⁵ Devout youths interested in more direct action drifted into cells of radical groups⁷⁶ that Khomeini called “deviationists from the Shi’i religion . . . whom I consider treasonous to the country and Islam and religion.”⁷⁷ Moreover, Khomeini’s organization suffered a blow on 1 July 1975, just weeks after the repressed Qum protests, when a thousand of his students and supporters were expelled by the government of Iraq, which had recently reached an accord with the shah and no longer had a need for a resident Iranian opposition (Khomeini 1982b: 21).

Khomeini’s response to the Qum protests of 1975 may have been tempered by this slew of difficulties, though he appeared to maintain his confidence that the efforts of the previous decade would eventually bear fruit. “But with all these hardships, the awakening of the nation is the yeast of hope,” Khomeini commented on 11 July 1975, referring to the activism of university and seminary students (Khomeini 1982a: 232; Davani 1998, 6:464). “One clear point in these recent events that I find hopeful,” Khomeini wrote on 22 September 1975, “is this enlightenment and awakening of the younger generation and the movement of the intellectuals, which are developing quickly” (Khomeini 1982a: 237).

Two years later, Khomeini’s hopefulness seemed to have dissipated, despite the opportunities offered by the shah’s limited political liberalization. In a speech given on 28 September 1977, Khomeini noted that “a certain opportunity [for protest] has been found, and it is to be hoped, God willing, that good opportunities will arise.” However, Khomeini sounded almost despairing of the possibility of taking advantage of such opportunities. He began his speech with an apology for having repeated himself in an earlier lecture: “When humans get old and senility overtakes them, all of their faculties grow weak.” Khomeini appeared to recover his enthusiasm as his talk continued, but he hardly sounded like a man who expected to lead a revolution: “With all this prostitution [both literal and figurative], the good people

of Iran are not saying anything. I don't know why they're not saying anything. . . . When are they going to speak out and say something and protest?" (Khomeini 1977: 5, 15–16, 1982a: 251, 262–63).

Bolder elements within the opposition were in fact speaking out and protesting at this time, as noted above, and Khomeini became aware of this activity over the next month. On 1 November 1977, after several days of seclusion following the death of his son,⁷⁸ Khomeini gave a hopeful-sounding speech (quoted at length earlier). Less than two weeks later, however, on 12 November 1977, Khomeini sounded skeptical of the genuineness of this “opportunity”:

I am compelled to warn the people against a great danger in order to save the nation from the deception and tricks of foreigners and their functionaries. This recent inattentiveness of the regime that gave a chance to the writers to write and to the speakers to talk is a big trick to vindicate the shah and to pretend an acclaimed freedom, and to attribute the crimes to the administration, which is nothing but a stooge. Writers also cannot, in this repressive and intimidating atmosphere, introduce the center of the crimes, i.e., the shah himself. . . . [The shah wants to] secure his position by meaningless and limited freedom, and thereby prepare the atmosphere for continuation of his rulership, and once again begin his savage attack with much more atrocity and disaster. . . . Now, it is the duty of all Muslims, especially that of the great ‘*ulama*’ (religious scholars) and intellectuals . . . to take advantage of the opportunity to tell and write everything that should be said to the international authorities and other human societies. . . . I emphasize that worthy and responsible individuals who hold the initiative avoid making themselves known, and learn from past experience. (Khomeini 1978: 107, 109–10; original Persian in Davani 1998, 6:534–37; Khomeini 1982a: 268–71; *Shahidi digar* 1977: 148–54; *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 1 December 1977, 56, 4)

As before, Khomeini recommended writing to international authorities, though his followers continued to ignore this advice. Now, however, Khomeini called liberalization “a big trick” designed to divert criticism away from the monarchy. Indeed, this diversion may have been working. Oppositionists in Iran were less outspoken than dissidents in the Soviet Union, according to one knowledgeable observer, and prior to November 1977, they criticized only particular policies rather than the regime itself (Cottam 1977:

10; Pakdaman 1986: 63). Khomeini's final cautionary remark, urging "worthy and responsible individuals" to "avoid making themselves known," contradicts his earlier encouragement to write open letters and suggests that Khomeini did not consider his followers to be safe from repression. Perhaps he feared a crackdown scenario like the Hundred Flowers in China, which were allowed to bloom briefly before the thaw froze.⁷⁹ Khomeini reiterated this position, with all its internal tensions, four days later in a message to supporters outside Iran, referring to the "temporary opportunity that has appeared" in Iran but calling the writings of the opposition "limited and hypocritical" and urging his supporters to "take the initiative with complete caution and clear-sightedness" (Davani 1998, 6:537–40; Khomeini 1982a: 272–77; *Shahidi digar* 1977: 157–63; *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 1 December 1977, 2–3).

This speech reflects a suspicion of political liberalization, but it also suggests a greatly expanded optimism. Khomeini and his followers apparently took heart from the small mourning ceremonies that had followed the death of Khomeini's son Mustafa, viewing them as a sign that the decade and a half of evangelization by the Islamist opposition had borne fruit. Khomeini's message of 12 November (Khomeini 1978: 106–7, 108) inflated these small protests into events far more significant than the 20,000 Iranians, at most, who may have participated, out of a population of more than 30 million.⁸⁰

Such a great demonstration for this occasion was a verbal and active response to the many years of absurdities of this incompetent agent. . . . [It was] an indication of hate toward the tyrannical regime [of the shah] and an actual referendum and a vote of no confidence against the treacherous regime. . . . The nation—from clergy and academicians to the laborers and farmers, men and women—all are awakened.

Khomeini's associates and followers apparently agreed with this assessment. The younger generation targeted by the Islamist revolutionaries had come of age with "unexpected speed," a clerical Islamist wrote.⁸¹ According to a pro-Khomeini seminary student, "The Muslim nation of Iran has awakened and no longer swallows the deceit of these songbirds."⁸² Another clerical Islamist wrote in November 1977 that "the Muslim masses have become increasingly conscious of the truths of Islam and now understand that the Qur'an summons its followers to arm themselves, to be prepared militarily for an armed uprising" (Ruhani 1982, 1:932). In January 1978, a midranking Islamist cleric

in Qum commented similarly in a speech to activists: “Our awakened Muslim society, conscious society, [has turned] a hopeful eye to the path of the great leader, the esteemed source of imitation, our *imam* [leader], our *aqa* [master], his honor the crusading grand *ayatullah*, Khomeini.”⁸³

This perception of mass awakening was probably inaccurate. Most Iranians were not sufficiently “awakened” at the end of 1977 to join revolutionary protests: Until late summer 1978, such protests rarely attracted more than several thousand participants. Even within the religious establishment, there was less than full-hearted support for revolution: only a minority of seminary students favored Khomeini’s radicalism, and even fewer senior scholars wished to risk open protest, as evidenced by their cautiousness during both Qum protests (Kurzman 1994: 60–67). Yet the perception, accurate or not, was important. It suggests that Khomeini and his top followers believed a threshold had been achieved that made it plausible to throw themselves into a revolutionary movement against an entrenched ruler.

In keeping with this change in perception, the Islamist opposition stepped up its mobilization after the crackdown of mid-November 1977 just as the moderate opposition retreated. Not only did Islamist protests become more frequent, they became more confrontational, flouting the structure of political opportunities with street demonstrations. In Qum on 2 December, the 40th-day mourning ceremony for Mustafa Khomeini led to sharply anti-regime speeches and a 14-point political resolution, approved by acclaim. Afterward, outside the mosque, a crowd led by young clerics started to march toward the Fayziyah Seminary, which had been closed by state authorities after the June 1975 protests. Security forces beat the demonstrators and fired in the air, but the streets were so full that they were unable to disperse the crowd (*Shahidi digar* 1977: 250–55; *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, December 1977, 34–36, 20; Davani 1998, 6:528–30; *Asnad va tasaviri* 1978, 1[3]:14).⁸⁴ In the early evening, after more services, another demonstration ensued, again with provocative slogans. The security forces beat the protestors with sticks and clubs and arrested some; for their part, the demonstrators managed to smash eight bank windows and a police kiosk.⁸⁵ On 21 December, two cities transformed the annual religious ceremony of ‘Ashura into political demonstrations. In Tehran, thousands carrying banners marched out of the grand bazaar and were attacked and arrested by the authorities. In nearby Shahr-i Rey, the mosque area was surrounded by police, who watched as the ceremony proceeded. The demonstrators stuck to the traditional proceedings but

during refrains shook their fists at the police and city officials (*Javidan bad khatirah* 1978: 3–4).

These events, preceding the Qum protests of January 1978 by mere weeks, signal a mobilization of the Islamist opposition that differs considerably from the leftist and moderate opposition's less frequent activities in winter 1977–78. This distinction, I suggest, was the result of a perception on the part of the Islamist revolutionaries that victory was at hand. In December 1977, activists in Qum had gained an optimistic “spirit” and felt that “something could be done,” one of their leaders recalled.⁸⁶ According to a merchant activist, they asked one another: “What will be our next excuse to arouse the people against the regime?”⁸⁷ Khomeini, who called the Qum protests of June 1975 a “hopeful” development, responded to the Qum protests of January 1978 in an entirely different key: “To the noble nation of Iran, I bring tidings that the despotic regime of the shah is drawing its last breaths.”⁸⁸

I must thank the nation of Iran. The nation is awakened, the nation is conscious and resisting; at the very moment it sees all this oppression and gives all these people to be killed, it is resisting against oppression. It is standing up, and standing will achieve its goal. Once the nation has awakened, and even the women are protesting against the state and against the oppressors, it is not difficult for such a nation to become victorious.⁸⁹

We have only circumstantial evidence linking the Islamists' decision to mobilize their forces and the protest activity that followed the Qum event of early January 1978.⁹⁰ We know that Khomeini and his followers called for such activity in a way that they had not done in 1975, replacing generalized outrage with plans for specific protests.⁹¹ One group of “crusading Muslim university students,” for example, urged “all classes of people,” in particular bazaaris, to strike “in protest against this brutal crime of the shah's anti-Islamic regime” (*Dar-barah-yi qiyam* 1978, 1:126). We also know that many of the protestors who took up this call made direct reference to the activism of the Islamist leaders, as for example in a statement of Tehran bazaaris in solidarity with “the crusading clerics” (*ibid.*: 137).

However, the main point in documenting the shift in Islamist opposition in late 1977 is—in keeping with the comparative method—to present evidence of correlation between cause and outcome rather than evidence (not currently available) of the direct mechanism linking cause and outcome. The Islamist mobilization of late 1977 and early 1978, and the sense of efficacy

associated with this mobilization, appear to constitute the only major change between the Qum protests of 1975 and 1978 that can plausibly be associated with the emergence of widespread protest of January 1978, as contrasted with the lack of widespread protest in June 1975.

Concluding Remarks

Repression has long been viewed as a double-edged sword: it can either squelch protest or incite it. Two incidents of repression in Qum, Iran, in June 1975 and January 1978 exemplify this truism. In the first case, the security forces' assault on a seminary-student protest deterred further oppositional activities. In the second case, the security forces' assault on a seminary-student protest aroused a storm of further protests around the country. This article took this matched pair of events, 31 months apart, in order to explore a change model of causal explanation. The primary question is this: What changed in the meantime that might have generated such different public responses to these events? Three explanations of theoretical interest were examined: an economic change explanation that emphasizes the importance of a short-term downturn in the fortunes of the nation; a political change explanation that highlights the effects of President Carter's election in 1976; and an organizational change explanation that considers the pronouncements and activities of the primary opposition groups.

The available evidence points to significant change only in the self-understandings and activities of the Islamist opposition. Economic conditions were largely similar throughout the period, and the economic downturn of 1977—to which the timing of the Iranian Revolution is often attributed—appears to have been no deeper, by many measures, than the earlier downturn in 1974–75. Political conditions also were largely unchanged, and the partial liberalization of 1976–77—another commonly cited reason for the timing of the revolution—was followed by a crackdown in November 1977 that echoed the crackdown of March 1975. Among opposition groups, the revolutionary left and moderate opposition responded very little to either Qum protest, and the moderate opposition's mobilization of 1977—frequently referred to as the opening act of the revolution—went into hiatus with the shah's crackdown in the autumn of that year.

Of the causes identified in the literature on the Iranian Revolution, a significant shift is to be found only in the Islamist opposition. The statements of

Khomeini and his followers have a markedly different tone before and after early November 1977, in particular on the theme of the perceived “awakening” of the Iranian people and their readiness for revolution. This theme of the awakening of the Iranian people appears to have been reflected in the mobilization of the Islamist opposition in a handful of confrontational protests in the fall of 1977, even as the limited political opportunities associated with the Carter administration’s human rights campaign dissipated after the shah’s meeting with Carter in November 1977. The thematic shift cannot be conclusively linked with the acceleration of protest, however, due to the lack of evidence of the inner workings of the Islamist opposition, so the argument rests on a correlation. In keeping with the method of difference, the changed outcome is attributed to the changed precondition. This is not to say that longer-term causes were absent, only that such longer-term causes were not in themselves sufficient to trigger this reaction. Had they been sufficient, we would expect them to have triggered a similar outcome in mid-1975.

Notes

The author wishes to thank Hamid Algar, Said Amir Arjomand, Ahmad Ashraf, Shaul Bakhash, and Mahmoud Sadri for their assistance in the preparation of this essay.

- 1 Khomeini was at this time one of a half dozen senior religious scholars with the title *ayatullah al-‘uzma*.
- 2 Documentation for the 1975 event comes from three primary sources. First is a contemporaneous account, apparently written by an anonymous participant (*Guzarish-i kamil* 1976). Second, selected secret police documents have been published in Iran (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992). Third, a recently published book contains the oral histories of 19 students involved in the protest (Shirkhani 1998a).
- 3 Husayn Ghaffari, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998a: 115; SAVAK reports of 9 June and 23 September 1975 (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992: 328, 126).
- 4 SAVAK report of 9 June 1975 (ibid.: 329).
- 5 Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998a: 211.
- 6 Mujtaba Qa’id-Amini, interviewed in ibid.: 125.
- 7 SAVAK lists of arrestees, undated, in ibid.: 256–66; SAVAK reports of 9 June and 23 September 1975 (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992: 328, 126).
- 8 Shirkhani’s exhaustive study of the event failed to document any fatalities (Shirkhani 1998a: 19). Of four open letters written in the week after the incident by religious leaders of Qum, protesting the beatings and arrests, only one mentioned the possibility of fatalities (*Asnad-i inqilab* 1990–96, 1:392–93, 5:161–63; Dahnavi 1981: 254–58; *Guzarish-i kamil* 1976: 20–22; Shirkhani 1998a: 225–29). In addition, no fatalities are mentioned in a 1979 summary of the incident written by the Seminary Students

- of the Scholarly Circle of Qum, which was eager to demonstrate the heinousness of the Pahlavi regime (Davani 1998, 6:466–69).
- 9 *Guzarish-i kamil* 1976: 9; pronouncement of the Religious Circle of Qum, 31 May 1976 (*Asnad-i inqilab* 1990–96, 4:310).
 - 10 *Guzarish-i kamil* 1976: 19; also published in the major documentary collections of the Islamic movement: Dahnavi 1981: 252; Davani 1998, 6:464; Khomeini 1982a: 232, 1991, 1:360.
 - 11 Muhammad Shuja'i and Muhammad Hasan Zarifian-Yiganah, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 85, 226. This source includes oral histories of 17 participants in the 1978 Qum protest. On photocopying, see Baqir Sadr and Hasan Musavi-Tabrizi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998a: 71, 192; and Isma'il (Respondent 65), interviewed by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, 5 December 1989.
 - 12 Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 172.
 - 13 Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, Muhammad Mu'min, and Husayn Nuri, interviewed in *ibid.*: 173, 186, 191.
 - 14 Seminary student 'Ali (Respondent 7), interviewed by the author in Fort Lee, NJ, 14 October 1989.
 - 15 Ja'far Salahi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 115.
 - 16 This anonymous report, the most detailed contemporaneous account of the event, was reproduced in *Asnad va tasaviri* (1978, 1[3]: 26–32); *Dar-barah-yi qiyam* (1978, 1:39–58). See also interview with Shuja'i in Shirkhani 1998b: 86–91.
 - 17 Sayyid Hasan Tahiri Khurramabadi and Mu'min, interviewed in *ibid.*: 125, 186.
 - 18 In a six-month summary of religious opposition, dated 14 March 1978, SAVAK (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992: 207) reported a slightly different wording but with the same intent: "I am distressed and pained by the contents of the newspapers. My view is that steps must be taken in this matter, but the fear is that if such a matter is spoken here, they will shut this place down like the Fayziyah Seminary."
 - 19 Muhammad Mahdi Akbarzadah and Husayn Vafi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 38, 201–3.
 - 20 Consistent but distinct accounts were given by Shuja'i, Salahi, 'Abdulkarim 'Abidini, and Vafi, interviewed in *ibid.*: 88, 117, 143, 201–3.
 - 21 Similar statement reported by Akbarzadah, Shuja'i, and 'Abidini in *ibid.*: 37, 86, 143.
 - 22 Vafi, interviewed in *ibid.*: 200.
 - 23 Shuja'i, Riza Sadiqi, 'Abidini, Sayyid Zia Murtazavian, Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, and Vafi, interviewed in *ibid.*: 88, 110, 144, 152, 174, 204.
 - 24 *Ayatullah* Shihabuddin Najafi-Mar'ashi, speech of 8 January 1978 (*ibid.*: 242).
 - 25 Mu'ini, SAVAK chief in Qum, memoranda of 8–10 January 1978 (*Inqilab-i islami* 1997–99, 2:1–9).
 - 26 Mu'ini, memorandum of 8 January 1978 (*ibid.*: 2).
 - 27 Mu'ini, memorandum of 9 January 1978 (*ibid.*: 10); Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi and Mu'min, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 174–76, 186.
 - 28 "Guzarish-i sharh" 1978: 19; Mu'ini, memoranda of 9 January 1978 (*Inqilab-i islami* 1997–99, 2:11, 14).

- 29 “Guzarish-i sharh” 1978: 19–21; Shirkhani 1998b; SAVAK memorandum of 10 January 1978 (*Inqilab-i islami* 1997–99, 2:16).
- 30 U.S. embassy memoranda of 16 and 26 January 1978 (Hooglund 1990: docs. 1282, 1291). This source includes the relevant U.S. government documents captured in the U.S. embassy in Tehran and published in 77 volumes as *Asnad-i lanah-yi jasusi* (1980–91).
- 31 SAVAK memorandum of 10 January 1978 (*Inqilab-i islami* 1997–99, 2:17); seminary students Muhammad ‘Ali Dast-Afkan and Zarifian-Yiganah, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 74, 226.
- 32 Zarifian-Yiganah, interviewed in *ibid.*: 226.
- 33 SAVAK six-month summary of religious opposition, 23 September 1975 (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992: 128); SAVAK reports of June 1975 and interrogation of ‘Abdulkarim Hashimi-Nizhad, undated (*Yaran-i Imam* 1998–2001, 5:616–38).
- 34 ‘Abidini, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998a: 96.
- 35 U.S. embassy memoranda of 16, 18, and 26 January 1978 (Hooglund 1990: docs. 1282, 1284, 1291).
- 36 *Dar-barah-yi qiyam* (1978, 1:137); also published in Davani 1998, 7:40; and *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah* [*Supplement to The newsletter* {Tehran}], February–March 1978, 31.
- 37 Across-time comparison raises certain complications, such as the fact that people in the later time period could look back on the earlier period (see, for example, Ragin 1987: 38). In this study, however, such retrospective glances only strengthen the argument: for example, when Iranians referred in 1978 to the experience of 1975, they did so to emphasize the continuity of the political context, adding further evidence against the causal importance of political changes in the interim.
- 38 Authors making this argument—not necessarily to the exclusion of other explanations—include Shahrough Akhavi (1983: 207), Shaul Bakhash (1990: 13), Michael Fischer (1980: 189) John Foran (1993: 375–78), Norriss Hetherington (1982: 364), Nikki Keddie (1983: 589–91), Michael Liu (1988: 179, 190); Robert Looney (1982: 260, 265), Mohsen Milani (1994: 97–100); Nasser Momayezi (1986: 76), Amin Saikal (1980: 187), Gary Sick (1985: 159), and Sepher Zabih (1979: 49). Several of these authors cite the concept of “relative deprivation” from the work of James Davies (1969) and Ted Gurr (1970).
- 39 Data from the Central Bank of Iran and the International Monetary Fund run in annual increments, according to the Iranian solar calendar, of 21 March–20 March. The Penn World Table (1994) reports annual increments of 1 January–31 December.
- 40 This campaign had been planned for over a year, according to Alam 1991: 370.
- 41 U.S. Central Intelligence Agency memoranda of 17 April and 14 May 1975 (Hooglund 1990: docs. 948, 957).
- 42 The June 1975 Qum protests occurred midway through the Penn reporting cycle and one-quarter through the Iranian calendar used by the Central Bank and the IMF; the January 1978 Qum protests occurred days after the completion of the 1977 Western calendar and three quarters into the Iranian year.
- 43 IMF data for 1974–77 from *International Financial Statistics* [Washington], April

- 1978, 182–83. *Quarterly Economic Review: Iran* data for 1973–74: 1st quarter 1975, 16; for 1975: 4th quarter 1976, 18; for 1976–77: 1st quarter 1978, 19; for 1977: 3d quarter 1979, 20.
- 44 Quoted by Shaul Bakhash during an interview with the author in Fairfax, VA, 5 October 1989.
- 45 Respondent 31, interviewed by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, 8 November 1989.
- 46 On the noneconomic roots of bazaari discontent, see Denoeux (1993: 147); for a contrasting view, see Parsa (1989: 101–3).
- 47 *Dar-barah-yi qiyam* 1978, 1:136–39; Davani 1998, 7:38–41; *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 31 January 1978, 9–10, and February–March 1978, 28–32; and Hooglund 1990: docs. 1282, 1284, 1291.
- 48 Authors making this argument include Ervand Abrahamian (1982: 500–1, 505), Jahangir Amuzegar (1991: 242–5), Said Arjomand (1988: 108–9), Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi (1985: 19–20), Hossein Bashiriyeh (1984: 104–7), Richard Cottam (1979: 351), Michael Fischer (1980: 192), Robert Graham (1980: 210–11), Mehran Kamrava (1990: 31–32), Moshen Milani (1994: 106–12), Misagh Parsa (1989: 171, 206), Anthony Parsons (1984: 60, 144), and Gary Sick (1985: 24). Surprisingly, the literature on Iran has paid little notice to the concept of “political opportunities,” popularized in the work of Doug McAdam (1982: 40–43). On the relation of Alexis de Tocqueville’s explanatory framework to the Iranian Revolution, see Kurzman 1996.
- 49 U.S. embassy memorandum of 10 July 1975 (Hooglund 1990: doc. 975); Mohammedi-Nejad 1977: 103–16.
- 50 Other religious leaders refrained from criticizing the party, telling activists that it had not yet done anything wrong. See interview with Hasan Musavi-Tabrizi in Shirkhani 1998a: 191.
- 51 Pronouncement of 12 March 1975 (Davani 1998, 6:457; Khomeini 1991, 1:354).
- 52 See Hajj-Sayyid-Javadi 1977; open letter of June 1977 signed by three oppositionists (Graham 1980: 259–61); open letters by writers, lawyers, and judges in July–September 1977 (*Index on Censorship* [London], January–February 1978, 18–24).
- 53 ‘Abdul-Karim Lahidji, interviewed by Maryam Shamlu in Paris, 4 and 26 January 1985 (Foundation for Iranian Studies Program of Oral History, Bethesda, MD, transcript, 57).
- 54 Shapur Bakhtiyar, interviewed on 3 July 1977 (Graham 1980: 241).
- 55 Quoted in U.S. embassy memorandum of 25 July 1977 (Hooglund 1990: doc. 1201).
- 56 Speech of 1 November 1977 (*Shahidi digar* 1977: 56–57), translated with the help of Ashraf and Banuazizi 1985: 27. See also the slightly different version in *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 8 January 1978, 23; reprinted in Khomeini 1982b: 39–40. Other sources—Bazargan 1984: 26 (cited in Milani 1994: 110); and Khomeini 1991, 1:255 (cited in Parsa 1989: 209)—give different dates for this speech. However, 1 November 1977 is most plausible because of references in the speech to recently received condolences for the death of his eldest son, Mustafa.
- 57 Other revolutionaries later denied any such expectations, including *Hujjat al-Islam*

- Muhammad Javad Bahunar, interviewed in Iran in February 1980 by Christos P. Ioannides (1984: 33): “Nothing good for us could come from America. We never had any hopes or expectations that something positive could come from America.”
- 58 One letter was planned in late 1977, in preparation for a visit to Iran by the secretary-general of the United Nations, but it was not sent. Khurramabadi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 122–23. *Ayatullah* Sadiq Khalkhali wrote to Amnesty International in December 1978; Hamid Algar reported to the author that Khalkhali gave him the letter in Paris and asked him to translate and forward it.
- 59 U.S. embassy memorandum of 12 December 1977 (Hooglund 1990: doc. 1253); Bashiriyeh 1984: 112; Milani 1994: 111; Bazargan 1984: 26; Pakdaman 1986: 66; *Khabar-namah* [*The newsletter* {Tehran}], November–December 1977, 1–7.
- 60 Poet and Writers Association organizer Ghulam-Husayn Sa’idi, interviewed by Zia Sedghi in Paris, 5 April 1984 (Harvard Iranian Oral History Collection, transcript of tape 2, 17–19). See also the description in an anonymous letter from Iran in the United Communists of Iran publication *Zamimah-yi Haqiqat* [*Supplement to Reality*], January 1978, 1–2.
- 61 U.S. embassy memorandum of 1 February 1978 (Hooglund 1990: doc. 1296); and the open letter of Taliqani’s lawyers, 23 August 1977, published in *Khabar-namah*, November–December 1977, 1, 3.
- 62 U.S. embassy memoranda of 26 January and 1 February 1978 (Hooglund 1990: docs. 1291, 1296); SAVAK six-month summaries of religious opposition, 12 September 1977 and 14 March 1978 (*SAVAK va ruhaniyat* 1992: 190, 256).
- 63 Relatively few works on Iran identify the crackdown of November 1977 as an important event; among those that do, see Foran 1993: 378–79; Graham 1980: 212; Parsa 1989: 179.
- 64 In the open portion of the meetings, Carter did not mention human rights at all, according to a White House summary dated 16 November 1977, uncataloged in the files of the National Security Archive, Washington, DC. In the private portion of the meeting, Carter warned the shah about “serious problems in your country” (Carter 1989: 219). The White House then released a statement indicating that the two men had reviewed the positive steps that Iran was taking on the matter of human rights (*New York Times*, 17 November 1977, 3).
- 65 A student who was inside the hall (Respondent 3), interviewed by the author in Berkeley, CA, 13 September 1989; Lafue-Veron 1978: 9–10; *Iran: Vagues d’offensive* 1978: 6–7; *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 1 December 1977, 12.
- 66 Abol Ghassem Lebaschi, an organizer of the event, interviewed by Habib Ladjevardi in Paris, 28 February 1983 (Harvard Oral History Collection, transcript of tape 2, 20–21); Lafue-Veron 1978: 17–18; Richards 1978: 97–99; U.S. embassy memorandum of 12 December 1977 (Hooglund 1990: doc. 1253); *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, 1 December 1977, 9–11.
- 67 U.S. embassy memoranda of 1 February and 25 May 1978 (Hooglund 1990: docs. 1296, 1399); *Safahati az tarikh* 1984, [1]:58).

- 68 See, for example, Burke and Lubeck 1987: 647, 650; Green 1982: 82–83; Kazemi 1980a: 88; Liu 1988: 198; Moshiri 1985: 111–12; Parsa 1989: 22–23, 88; Salehi 1988: 139; Snow and Marshall 1984: 138.
- 69 In a memorandum dated 16 January 1978, the U.S. embassy alleged Mujahidin involvement in a recent guerrilla attack (Hooglund 1990: doc. 1282).
- 70 Alireza Mahfoozi, interviewed by Zia Sedghi in Paris, 7 April 1984 (Harvard Oral History Collection, transcript of tape 1, 8, 16).
- 71 U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Soviet Involvement in the Iranian Crisis,” 12 February 1979: 8–10, *Declassified Documents Reference System* 1986: doc. 2499.
- 72 A Khomeini supporter in the Tehran bazaar called the National Front’s statement a “laughable” and “inconsequential” attempt to associate itself with ongoing plans for a strike (*Dar-barah-yi qiyam* 1978, 1:139).
- 73 Lahidji, Foundation for Iranian Studies Program of Oral History, transcript, 64; ‘Abdul-Karim Lahidji, interviewed by Zia Sedghi in Paris, 5 March 1984 (Harvard Oral History Collection, transcript of tape 5, 2–4).
- 74 Khomeini 1981: 129, 149; *Ayatullah* Muhammad Huseini Bihishti, discussing his activities abroad (*Pishtazan-i shahadat* 1981: 15); several writings of *Ayatullah* Murtaza Mutahhari (quoted in Akhavi 1980: 123–24, 144); a former university student and religious activist (Respondent 15), interviewed by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, 31 October 1989.
- 75 For a partial listing of state repression of the religious opposition in the 1970s, see Kurzman 1994: 67–74.
- 76 On the religious background of guerrillas and their disillusionment with the clerical Islamists, see Abrahamian 1989: 149–52 and *passim*.
- 77 Statement of October 1976 (Khomeini 1982a: 249).
- 78 Haj Ebrahim Dardashti, interviewed in Tehran in 1978 by Amir Taheri (1986: 182, 307).
- 79 Khomeini never specifically referred to the Chinese experience, as far as I know.
- 80 The number of participants is estimated from the Islamist opposition’s own reports in *Shahidi digar* (1977).
- 81 *Ayatullah* Mahmud Saduqi, letter to *Hujjat al-Islam* Abulfazl Musavi, 7 September 1978 (Saduqi 1983: 87).
- 82 Anonymous student in Qum, December 1977 (*Shahidi digar* 1977: 256).
- 83 Speech of Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, 8 or 9 January 1978 (Shirkhani 1998b: 268).
- 84 Pakdaman 1986: 63 quotes a resolution in which two points are different from the version cited here. The resolution is dated 9 January 1978 in ‘Abbasi 1980: 724; Abrahamian 1978: 6; and Fischer 1980: 194.
- 85 *Shahidi digar* (1977: 252); *Zamimah-yi Khabar-namah*, November–December 1977, 35; SAVAK memoranda of early December 1977 (*Inqilab-i islami* 1997–99, 1:211–12).
- 86 Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi, interviewed in Shirkhani 1998b: 170.
- 87 Sadiqi, interviewed in *ibid.*: 109.
- 88 Speech of 22 January 1978 (Davani 1998, 7:48; Khomeini 1982a: 299).
- 89 Speech of 21 January 1978 (*Dar-barah-yi qiyam* 1978, 1:23; Khomeini 1982a: 285).

- Khomeini 1991, 2:1–2 dates the speech implausibly on 9 January 1978, the same day as the casualties in Qum.
- 90 Several authors suggest that there is a smoking gun document from 1976 or 1977 in which Khomeini instructed his followers in Iran to mobilize against the shah (Badamchiyan 1995: 144; Moin 1999: 180–81; Taheri 1986: 171, 180–81). However, I have not been able to locate such a document.
- 91 This argument relies on the assumption that if Khomeini and his followers had decided to mobilize in 1975, they would have received the same amount of public support as in early 1978. There is no way to test this counter-factual scenario, but I know of no evidence suggesting that Islamists were more popular in January 1978 than in June 1975.

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