The Strategic Use of State Repression and Political Violence

Jacqueline H. R. deMeritt, Department of Political Science, University of North Texas

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Summary

Repression is the act of subduing someone by institutional or physical force. Political violence is a particular form of repression involving the use of physical force to achieve political goals. Acts of repression and/or political violence often violate fundamental human rights, and are sometimes referred to as *human rights abuse*. Most systematic research into these forms of human rights abuse, particularly as perpetrated by governments, is built on assumptions of rationality: repression and political violence are strategic policies that governments employ in pursuit important political and/or military objectives. Since the defining concept of the state is its monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion, those objectives are generally related to quiescence and the quelling of popular dissent.

Empirical research has investigated the causes of repression and political violence, focusing generally on the conditions and incentives that make these strategies most likely. To a lesser extent, scholars have also investigated the consequences of human rights abuse. This work is intimately tied to extant work on causes, and highlights an important feedback loop between repressive governments and those who oppose them. Finally, researchers have investigated methods of limiting and/or preventing state repression and political violence. Some of these methods are primarily domestic in nature (e.g., regime type and institutional design) while others have a decidedly international bent (e.g., advocacy campaigns).

Keywords: repression, human rights, political violence, dissent, repression-dissent nexus, civilian victimization, one-sided violence, coercion, physical integrity abuse, quantitative methodology, empirical international relations theory

Subjects: Contentious Politics and Political Violence

Introduction

Repression is the threat to subdue or act of subduing someone by institutional or physical force. Political violence is a particular form of repression involving the threat to use or actual use of physical force to achieve political goals. Acts of repression and/or political violence often violate fundamental human rights, and are sometimes referred to as *human rights abuse*.[1]

Most systematic research into these forms of human rights abuse, particularly as perpetrated by governments, is built on assumptions of rationality: repression and political violence are strategic policies that governments employ in pursuit of important political and/or military objectives. The most fundamental of these objectives is the maintenance of control; leaders may have substantive preferences, but these cannot be implemented unless the leader survives in office (e.g., Ames, 1990). Correspondingly, the axiom underpinning existing work is that governments wish to remain in power.

The defining concept of the state is its monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion or physical force, including repression (Weber, 1919). By definition, then, all governments have coercive capacity. They have agents of repression, and those agents have assets available to them. This includes human and technical capital—size, strength, resources, and preparedness—in both the short and long terms (Davenport, 1996, pp. 382–383; see also Davenport, 1995a; Hanneman & Steinback, 1990; Huntington, 1964; Laswell, 1941; Randle, 1981; Walker & Lang, 1988).

Repressive agents may be military forces, militia, mercenaries, and so on, so long as they are seen as—and actually function as—legitimate extensions of the government. If the political opposition controls a repressive apparatus, it suggests that there is a tangible threat to the incumbent government's grasp on power. If the people perceive the opposition's repressive apparatus as legitimate, it suggests that the threat is authorized and has at least some popular support. Licit repression from an authority other than the government, then, indicates a real internal threat to the government's grasp on power. So, why do governments repress? We assume that they do it in pursuit of quiescence and the quelling of popular dissent.

This article begins by discussing how we have conceptualized repression, what it includes, and what it excludes. Then, it summarizes what we (think we) know about the conditions and incentives that encourage state repression. Two core findings emerge: states repress dissent, and the repression of dissent is conditioned by regime type. As suggested in the opening paragraphs above, the strategic use of repression is designed to counter internal threats. Therefore, this effort also engages research that investigates how human rights abuse affects dissent. Three major trends characterize current repression research: scholars are increasingly interested in tactics and repertoires of violence, increasingly focused on delegation and agency, and increasingly engaged with the observability and unobservability of repression and dissent. We are currently experiencing a revival in data collection, and many of these new datasets are disaggregated in promising and valuable ways. The article concludes by identifying some important yet largely untapped avenues for future work.

It is interesting to note the similarities between this holistic overview and an earlier one by Davenport (2007a). That effort identified the same two core findings; recent work buttresses rather than challenges these key insights. In some ways, we have progressed: Davenport's article suggested that one important future avenue for research was disaggregation; the current effort discusses work that disaggregates along several valuable dimensions including repressive tactics, actors, and operational measures. In other ways, progress eludes us: Davenport's work juxtaposed the facts that increasing dissent encourages repression, but that repression's effect on dissent remains unclear. There was a need to solve this "punishment puzzle" (Davenport, 2007a, p. 8) then, and that need remains today.

What Repression Is and Is Not

Repression is a form of coercion, but not all coercion is repressive. States may use coercion, for example, to deter societal violence (rape, murder, etc.). Such behavior becomes repressive under three circumstances: when it violates what Americans would recognize as First Amendment rights, when it violates due process in the administration and arbitration of law, and when it threatens citizens' physical integrity or security (Goldstein, 1978, pp. xxx–xxxi).[2]

By virtue of being human, we possess certain freedoms. Most may be realized through government inaction, including freedoms of speech, assembly, and travel. We can also consider freedoms of association and belief, and the freedom to peacefully express our views even in opposition to government policies or practices. Finally, we can consider freedom of the press, regardless of the views communicated.

Similarly, we each have a right to physical integrity and security that is realized when the government refrains from violating it through extralegal killing, torture, disappearance, or imprisonment for our political views (e.g., Humana, 1992). Other freedoms are best realized when the government observes "generally accepted standards of police action and judicial and administrative behavior related to the political beliefs of the person involved" (Goldstein, 1978, p. xxxi).

When the government acts to deprive us of any of these rights, or violates any of these standards, we are repressed. As Davenport (2007a, p. 3) notes, repression can include "a wide variety of coercive efforts employed by political authorities to influence those within their territorial jurisdiction: overt and covert; violent and nonviolent; state, state-sponsored (e.g., militias), and state-affiliated (e.g., death squads); successful and unsuccessful."

Explaining State Repression

More than 40 years of systematic empirical research on the strategic use of political violence has revealed two regularities: (1) internal dissent incentivizes state repression; and (2) the state's repression of dissent varies with domestic institutions (i.e., regime type). Several new and nascent avenues of research both bolster these insights and begin to push the literature beyond them.

Core Finding 1: Dissent Incentivizes Repression

Internal dissent can spread. It can escalate to revolution and lead to the government being ousted, and therefore represents a very real and immediate threat to the status quo. If we are correct in our assumption that governments seek to perpetuate the status quo, they should respond when their grasp on power is threatened. In particular, they should respond in a way that reasserts that control. This can be done via accommodations, by altering the status quo; these may be procedural and low-level or substantive and high-level. Procedural accommodations include

efforts to negotiate with the opposition: the release of political prisoners, the granting of mass pardons or amnesties, the reshuffling of administrative personnel, and so on. Substantive accommodations are attempts to co-opt the opposition, bringing them into the current political system (Gamson, 1990; Rasler, 1996). Regardless of which type of accommodations the government pursues, this is a costly strategy that taxes the state's time and resources; governments should rarely offer concessions to protesters (Ginkel & Smith, 1999).[3]

Relative to accommodation, repression is cheap. The government has coercive power by definition, and it can simply deploy that power against the opposition. In this way, repression is an alternative to accommodation (e.g., della Porta, 1995; Pierskalla, 2010; Ritter, 2014). Because it accrues the same benefits at a lower cost, we can intuit that it may be a more appealing strategy. And this is precisely what the body of extant work suggests: some part of the population dissents, and the state responds with repression (e.g., Boudreau, 2005; Earl, Soule, & McCarthy, 2003; Francisco, 1995; Poe, 2004; Tilly, 1978).

Some empirical tests support the expectation that an increase in dissent yields an increase in repression unconditionally (e.g., Davenport, 1996; Gurr & Lichbach, 1986; Henderson, 1991; King, 1998; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Poe & Tate, 1994). Other efforts suggest that dissent increases repression conditional on characteristics of the interaction such as sequencing or institutions (e.g., Carey, 2006; Shellman, 2006). Davenport (1995b), for example, finds that the level of sanctions increase with the number of dissent activities, with the variety of forms of protest employed, and as dissent activities stray outside a country's norms of interaction. Gartner and Regan (1996) focus on the nonlinear relationship between dissident violence and state repression, and find that the government reacts with more constraint as dissident demands increase. The government overreacts and uses violent coercion in response to relatively low dissident demands. Moore (2000, p. 120) argues that "states tended to substitute accommodation for repression and repression for accommodation whenever either tactic was met with dissent." And Regan and Henderson (2002) find that repression increases as the government perceives an increasing level of threat from its opposition. Still other work finds that state repression becomes more likely as dissent becomes more violent, more multidimensional, more organized, or more threatening (e.g., Davenport, 1996, 2000; Poe, Tate, Camp Keith, & Lanier, 2000).

Taking a slightly different approach, some scholars have focused on different types of dissent and the repression they produce. This conflict variety has been variably labeled a "repertoire" of dissident behavior (Tilly, 1978), "alternative channels of political participation" (Eckstein, 1980), "dominant" and "general" varieties (Ziegenhagen, 1986), "tactical choices" (Lichbach, 1987), and "multiple tactics" (Morris, 1993). Carey (2010) distinguishes between different dissident tactics—demonstrations, strikes, riots, guerrilla attacks, and revolutions—and finds that only guerrilla warfare increases the likelihood of state repression. This focus on repertoires of dissent is an area of research that could, if pushed further, reveal new patterns and yield new insight into how dissent incentivizes or otherwise affects political violence.

The general claim that governments repress in response to dissent is so fundamental to our understanding of repression that it has been referred to as the "Law of Coercive Responsiveness" (Davenport, 2007a, p. 7) and "Threat-Response Theory" (Earl et al., 2003). At times, it has even become part of how we define the concept. For example, Davenport (1996, p.

377) defines repression as "government regulatory action directed against those who challenge existing power relationships." Major advances in research on state repression have been made—and current trends have been rooted—using this fundamental insight as a point of departure and investigating its subtleties and nuances on multiple dimensions.

New Direction—Repressive Tactics

As discussed in the previous section, some scholars have focused on dissident tactics and the repression each produces. Until recently, though, there was very little work on repertoires of political violence itself. Thus one major development has been in the area of repressive tactics. Scholars have recognized that the decision to repress and the choice of how much to repress are distinct, rather than treating these as though they are influenced by and respond to the same factors in the same ways. While the determination to repress and the determination of how to repress are linked, they are distinct (Ritter, 2014). This raises new questions: "How is the choice to enter a dispute related to the way in which it is fought? How is the onset of repression connected to severity?" (Ritter, 2014, p. 144). Building on widely accepted assumptions, [4] Ritter demonstrates that the forces that make repression less likely to occur (e.g., executive stability) can also make it more widespread and severe when it does, in fact, occur.

We have also recognized that governments that decide to repress then choose from a repertoire of available methods of abuse.[5] The decision to repress and the choice of how to repress are not, in fact, interchangeable. Some have looked particularly at the abuse of First Amendment–type rights—freedoms of speech, assembly, expression, and so on (e.g., Davenport, 1995a; King 1998). Others have focused on the set of physical integrity violations (e.g., Poe & Tate, 1994; Zanger, 2000). Breaking it down further, some scholars focus on single tactics including torture (e.g., Conrad & Moore, 2010; Hathaway, 2002), one-sided killing (e.g., Kalyvas, 2006; Valentino, Huth, & Balch-Lindsay, 2004), and genocide/politicide (e.g., Harff, 2003; Krain, 1997, 2000a).

Of course, when governments choose from the repressive toolkit, they do not choose in a vacuum. One tactic, or some combination of tactics, is chosen above or instead of other available alternatives. Importantly,[6] some nascent work is beginning to engage this fact both theoretically (Conrad & DeMeritt, 2014; DeMeritt, Conrad, & Fariss, n.d.) and empirically (Fariss & Schnakenberg, 2014). Empirical regularities about how governments set the severity of repression and how they select from the set of available repressive tactics have not yet crystallized; this is one important avenue of current and future research.

New Direction—Repressive Agents

Throughout, this article has generally spoken of "governments repressing" as though a single actor makes the decision to employ political violence and then implements the abusive policy singlehandedly. This is, of course, untrue: leaders issue orders to repress, and repressive agents receive those orders and put them in motion (e.g., Mitchell, 2004; Poe, 2004; Rejali, 2007). This is a fact that repression scholars have begun to engage.

It was noted in the introduction that agents may be military forces, militia, mercenaries, and so on, and that they function as legitimate extensions of the government. In reality, those agents have some discretion. They can choose to commit abuses or engage in activities other than those they were explicitly ordered to undertake (Butler, Gluch, & Mitchell, 2007; Mueller, 2000). Because they are independent of those who order repression and political violence, agents may be independently deterred from committing that violence (DeMeritt, 2012, 2015). This focus on agency is another promising trend in emerging research.

Core Finding 2: Regime Type Matters

The relationship between dissent and repression may be mediated by political conditions or context. In particular, it appears to depend on regime type. Repression in a democracy is more costly than in an otherwise-comparable anocracy or autocracy, because democracy provides alternative mechanisms by which the population may control the state: participation and contestation. These reduce the need for the population to dissent, since grievances against the state may be communicated via ballot. They also raise the government's cost of repression, since citizens who see the state's use of coercion as illegitimate—those who believe that they or their fellow citizens are being repression—can vote authorities out of office (e.g., Chong, 1991; Henderson, 1991).

There is some support for alternative conditioning effects of regime type. The "More Murder in the Middle" hypothesis suggests that repression peaks in states that are neither fully autocratic nor fully democratic (Fein, 1995; Pierskalla, 2010; Regan & Henderson, 2002). The argument is two-pronged: (1) autocracies do not need to repress, because citizens have a well-founded belief that protest will be met with swift and severe reprisal and therefore are deterred from dissenting in the first place; and (2) democracies cannot afford to repress, because (as mentioned in the previous paragraph) citizens will respond by removing them from power.

There is some evidence of a threshold above which states are "democratic enough" that human rights abuse is a prohibitively costly strategy for governments to consider (Bueno de Mesquita, Downs, Smith, & Cherif, 2005; Davenport & Armstrong, 2004). It may be that different characteristics of democracy have different effects on coercive behavior. Davenport (2007b) finds that static levels of democracy increase state respect for human rights while movement along a democratic continuum—democratization—leads to increased abuse. Or perhaps different democratic institutions matter differently. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005) examine different facets of democracy and find that accountability—including both executive constraints and party competition—is a necessary condition for democracy to lead to improved human rights.

The claim that regime type matters for state repression is well supported in existing work, but consistent answers to two important and closely related questions remain elusive. What functional form(s) does this relationship take? Does democracy have an independent effect on human rights abuse (e.g., Davenport, 2007b), and/or does it condition the relationship between dissent and repression (e.g., Carey, 2006, 2010; Conrad & DeMeritt, 2013; Gupta, Singh, & Sprague, 1993)?

Consequences of State Repression

It is difficult if not impossible to understand the strategic use of state repression without understanding dissent. Thus far, this article has alluded to dissent as opposition to the state from within its borders. With more precision, we can say that "dissent occurs when non-state actors within the state collectively threaten to or actually impose costs on the ruling entity to incentivize the government to change a status quo policy, treatment, power allocation, resource distribution, etc." (Ritter & Conrad, 2016, p. 5). It requires that individual citizens overcome collective action problems and engage in cohesive, coercive action against the status quo, and it requires such action to occur outside of state-organized avenues for expressing dissatisfaction (Lichbach, 1998).

The Repression-Dissent Nexus

How does repression impact dissent or, more dynamically, how do the state and dissidents interact? Existing work on the repression-dissent nexus displays a "near consensus that the government's use of force influences the extent of violence within their boundaries" (Snyder, 1976, p. 277). And yet the nature of that influence is unclear, since there is some evidence to support "almost every possible relationship between protest and repression" (Carey, 2006, p. 1).

Some scholars suggest that repression reduces dissent by discouraging would-be participants and making it more difficult to recruit new opposition members or raise an insurgency (e.g., Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Hibbs, 1973; Lichbach, 1998; Moore, 1995). Davenport (2015) suggests that organized dissent—that is, social movements—require challengers to recruit, motivate, calm, and prepare constituents (see also McPhail & McCarthy, 2005). States use coercion to raise barriers that make these processes more difficult; they repress to demobilize the opposition. Yet this direct effect can be nullified or even reversed. Governmental repression may actually increase opposition and protest (Dickson, 2007). Repression may reduce dissent under some conditions and increase it under others (e.g., Opp & Roehl, 1990; Siegel, 2011; White, 1989).

Time may matter in teasing out this relationship. Rasler (1996) finds that repression reduces dissent in the short term but that in the long term, it mobilizes individuals to mass demonstrations through micromobilization and spatial diffusion. Similarly, Francisco (1995) finds support for a "backlash hypothesis," where extreme repression temporarily dampens protests but increases dissident activity over time; this is particularly true when repression is applied indiscriminately (Mason & Krane, 1989).

The effect of repression in dissent may depend on sequencing. Lichbach (1987, p. 266), for example, argues that "an increase in a government's repression of nonviolence will reduce the nonviolent activities of an opposition group but increase its violent activities."[7] Moore (1998) evaluates Lichbach's (1987) model empirically, focusing on specific sequences where violent or nonviolent protest led to state repression and analyzing what followed that repression. He finds that interactions in Sri Lanka, but not Peru, conform to Lichbach's expectations. More recently,

Sullivan, Loyle, and Davenport (2012) find that repression increases dissent when dissent has been decreasing in the recent past. But when dissent has recently increased, repression appears to subdue opposition challenges.

Lastly, we saw in the previous section that regime type conditions the effect of dissent on repression. There is also the possibility that dynamic patterns of interaction between the state and its opposition differ between democracies and other states. This is what Gupta et al. (1993) find: government sanctions increase protest demonstrations in democracies, while in other states they impose an unbearable cost that deters protesters and thus reduces observed dissent. Carey (2006) finds that democracies are more likely to accommodate the opposition and less likely to apply continuous repression. When faced with dissent, however, they were no less likely to respond with negative sanctions. Interestingly, those negative sanctions "were particularly unsuccessful to solicit dissident cooperation in democracies" (Carey, 2006, p. 1).

The Repression-Accommodation-Dissent Nexus?

Recall that repression and accommodation are alternative policies (e.g., Pierskalla, 2010; Ritter, 2014). Is there an accommodation-dissent nexus? What are the effects of government accommodation, not repression, on dissent? Looking at regime accommodation alone, it appears to signal to the opposition that dissent will achieve a collective good. It emboldens current opposition members and inspires new ones who believe that their collective efforts will succeed (e.g., Chong, 1991; Oberschall, 1994). This in turn leads to increased participation and higher opposition hostility levels (Finkel, Muller, & Opp, 1989; Klandermans, 1984; Krain, 2000b; Muller & Opp, 1986).[8] Rasler (1996) finds that concessions increase protest actions directly, as people who see that protests "work" have increased expectations of success and become more likely to participate. She also finds an indirect effect, where more and more people see others joining protests and become more likely to join; protests spread and grow as a result.

Yet if repression cannot or should not be assessed independent of accommodation, then the reverse must also be true. How do repression and accommodation—taken together—affect dissent? Some argue that repression either increases or decreases dissent depending upon the government's simultaneous use of accommodative policies (Lichbach, 1987; Moore, 1998; Rasler, 1996). In other words, the uniformity of the government's choices seems to matter. A coherent response sends a clear message, while the use of both repression and accommodation simultaneously can lead to confusion and a resultant increase in dissent. Extant work uses the language of (in)consistency: "Inconsistency occurs when a government increases its repression of an opposition group's tactic at the same time that it yields a concession" (Rasler, 1996, p. 144). Empirical tests that consider both options generally though not homogenously find that a consistent response (be it repressive or accommodative) reduces dissent; government inconsistency seems to increase dissent (Moore, 1998; Rasler, 1996).

New Direction—(Un)observability

A common thread—perhaps the only common thread—connecting all of the literature on how repression impacts dissent is the assumption that political violence is meant to put down *and deter* the opposition. Recent research supports this assumption and finds that repression is preemptive. Danneman and Ritter (2014), for example, note that civil war appears to spread through geographic neighborhoods. Governments repress, they find, in order to preempt domestic rebellion as a result of this civil war contagion. Nordås and Davenport (2013) observe that large youth cohorts are generally overrepresented in opposition movements. They find evidence to support the expectation that governments repress in order to preempt the challenge that these "youth bulges" pose to the status quo.

One interesting extension is that if preemptive repression is completely successful, then dissent is never actually observed. Ritter and Conrad (2016) take the claim that states repress to deter dissent as given, and point out that if governments repress *ex post* (i.e., responsively), both repression and dissent are observed. If they successfully repress *ex ante* (i.e., preemptively), then repression is observed but dissent is not. If dissidents expect their activities to draw coercive sanctions and wish to avoid them, they may be deterred even without repression. In this case, neither repression nor dissent is observed. Finally, groups that expect repression and choose to dissent nonetheless are systematically and consequentially different from groups that are successfully deterred by the threat or use of political violence. One implication of this line of reasoning is that repression is endogenously related to dissent. The nature of the endogeneity means that observed dissent will not meaningfully predict responsive repression. Instead, "the effect of dissent on repression is *strategic*—observed repression is not only caused by realized dissent but also by anticipated dissent" (Ritter & Conrad, 2016, p. 4). This is one persuasive explanation for the mixed set of empirical results that characterizes the status quo. It is also a strong endorsement for abandoning a decision-theoretic framework in favor of a dynamic focus on the strategic interaction of states and dissidents.[9]

To recap: dissent increases repression, but the effects of repression on dissent are mixed (e.g., Davis & Ward, 1990). This set of imbalanced findings, which Davenport (2007a, p. 8) calls "the punishment puzzle," is indeed perplexing. Teasing out the dynamics of this relationship is an important task with real-world significance and policy implications in places like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Emerging Trends and Paths Forward

Eckstein wrote in 1980 (p. 156) that "we need here both better data and better reasoning." While there is always room for growth, it seems that we have made and are making advances in both arenas. As our discussion thus far has shown, the body of research on the strategic use of state repression and political violence is considerable. Empirical regularities have emerged and we have some strong insights. Chief among these is our understanding of the facts that governments

wish to survive so that they can put substantive preferences into practice, and therefore they repress challenges to the status quo. Regime type, and particularly democracy, seems to moderate that repression.

Other areas of the literature are only beginning to develop. Considering state repression as a dependent variable, one new trend is a focus on tactics. We have for some time implicitly acknowledged that repression's occurrence is distinct from how widespread and severe the political violence becomes. Only recently, though, has this statement been made explicit. Having recognized that states make decisions about occurrence and severity separately, scholars have just begun to investigate these as potentially divergent outcomes. Relatedly, we have begun moving beyond binary and indexed conceptualizations of repression to investigate specific tactics independently and as a set of distinct but related policy options. We have also moved beyond our understanding of the state as a single entity. Seeing leaders and repressive agents as separate actors has opened new avenues for investigation. Insights have come from seeing agents as bureaucratic entities with clear preferences and which can choose their own actions, be incentivized to act, or be dissuaded from acting at all.

Scholars probing the consequences of state repression, and particularly the repression-dissent nexus, have also made recent advances. The insight that governments repress preemptively is not new, but theory has grown increasingly sophisticated and perceptive. If governments repress proactively, then some dissent is observed and some is not. As those who would challenge the status quo begin to anticipate repression, political violence becomes unnecessary and may itself be unobserved. These lines of research are still in their infancy; how they will impact the field, and what new norms will develop, remain to be seen. These exciting trends promise to push our understanding further.

A Data Renaissance

Because much (even most) empirical research on repression is quantitative, our cumulative knowledge is limited by the state of available data. Given that, the current resurgence in data collection efforts related to political violence is another critically important advancement. Previously, much data collection sorted repression into ordinal categories representing increasing levels of scope and/or severity (Cingranelli & Richards, 2010; Fariss, 2014; Gurr, 1993; Poe & Tate, 1994; Schnakenberg & Fariss, 2014; Wood & Gibney, 2010). This approach is useful because it allows us to test holistic hypotheses encompassing occurrence, scope, and severity all at once. It is limited, however, because it is largely unable to handle dynamic hypotheses about state-dissident interactions.

Many recent and ongoing data collection efforts take a different approach, collecting information on discrete events and recording the details of each event: who did what to whom, when, and where, and so on (see Ball, 1996).[10] These efforts are generating new valid, reliable datasets with much more disaggregated and finely grained data than we have had in the past, and this disaggregation is occurring along many different dimensions (see Schrodt, 2012). For example, the Archivo Historico de la Policia Nacional project (AHPN; Sullivan, 2015), the Ill-Treatment and

Torture data project (ITT; Conrad, Haglund, & Moore, 2013, 2014; Conrad & Moore, 2011), the Northern Ireland Research Initiative (NIRI; Loyle, Sullivan, & Davenport, 2014), and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP; Eck & Hultman, 2007; Sundberg, 2009) have systematically collected repression data about targets, agents, and non-state actors. Work by Fariss & Schnakenberg (2014) permits the testing of hypotheses about one repressive tactic while recognizing that all tactics are part of a single available repertoire of violence.

Measures of challenges to the status quo are also improving by leaps and bounds. The Nonviolent and Violence Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset provides information on nonviolent and violent political campaigns (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013). The Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD) provides similarly disaggregated information for specific regions (Salehyan & Hendrix, 2012; Salehyan et al., 2012). Each of these datasets offers new and exciting opportunities to study the causes, consequences, and means of addressing repression and political violence, and permits the testing of increasingly detailed and nuanced causal theory.[11]

Underexplored, Unsolved, and Unverified

Some puzzles in the literature remain unsolved, and other questions are unasked or underexplored. Existing work is focused primarily though not exclusively on physical integrity violations, while political freedoms and First Amendment–type rights are less often engaged. And our focus on repertoires of dissent—on different types of opposition and the repression they produce—has largely lapsed. Particularly given the data now available, these topics seem ripe for engagement. While we (think we) know that regime type affects repression, the functional form of that relationship remains unclear. So, too, does the question of whether democracy's effect is independent, whether it conditions the relationship between dissent and repression, or both. Perhaps most notably, the punishment puzzle persists: Increasing dissent intensifies repression, but how does increasing repression impact dissent?

In my experience, repression scholars tend to be peace scientists. Ultimately, peace science "is about understanding violence so that we can pursue its absence" (Galtung, 1969, p. 186). From this perspective, the policy relevance of our work becomes critically important. The future work recommended in previous sections—exploring political freedoms, repertoires of dissent, and the link between democracy and repression—has some straightforward policy implications in addition to its academic value. So long as the punishment puzzle remains unsolved, for example, we cannot reliably explain when, where, how, or with what consequences the repression-dissent dynamic will unfold. And we cannot offer advice, were we asked, about how to reduce dissent.

None of us should be *required* to generate predictions. Nevertheless, it seems worth pointing out that "basing policy prescriptions on statistical summaries of probabilistic models (which *are* predictions) can lead to misleading policy prescriptions if out-of-sample predictive heuristics are ignored" (Ward, Greenhill, & Bakke, 2010, p. 364). For those who wish to produce policy-relevant work, then, there is value in cross-validation. This is a simple process of out-of-sample forecasting: one withholds a subsample of data from model estimation, and then uses the model

to predict values of the holdout data. Analyzing predictive power can shed light on the accuracy of our models. This can help us improve those models, refine the theories that suggest them, and—for those of us who are so inclined—maximize the value of our work for policy.

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Notes

1. This article uses the terms "repression," "political violence," and "human rights abuse" interchangeably.

2. This article focuses on first-generation rights, but one may also consider second-generation rights (i.e., economic, social, and cultural freedoms) as well as third-generation rights (i.e., peace and a clean environment).

3. For a discussion of the circumstances under which some leaders grant concessions, see for example Conrad (2011). Research probing the relative effects of accommodation and repression on dissent is discussed in a later section.

4. She assumes that (1) dissent and repression are causally interrelated so that each is dependent on the other; (2) states and groups are in conflict over something (policy, goods, allocation of power, etc.) which can potentially lead to conflict; and (3) the consequences of the conflict over policy affect the likelihood of the authorities' political survival (i.e., authorities repress to remain in office).

5. For an early discussion of this point, see Mitchell and McCormick (1988).

6. This reads with more superciliousness than intended; we pursue this work because we believe it is important, and not the other way around.

7. Lichbach (1987) also derives two other propositions from his rational actor model; these are discussed in the following section.

8. Alternatively, regime accommodation may signal to dissidents that the government is willing to move contentious issues to the bargaining table. If dissidents believe that a settlement is possible and are willing to negotiate, the government accommodation will actually reduce dissent (Krain, 2000b).

9. On this point, see also Pierskalla (2010).

10. For some earlier data collection efforts of this type, see Ball, Kobrak, and Spirer (1999) and Taylor and Jodice (1983).

11. A third approach is to gather data directly from former insurgent combatants or government agents (Davenport & Stam, 2003; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004, 2006; Kalyvas, 2006). This is an exciting and valuable practice, but its promise is limited by a variety of factors including (for example) the incredible amount of resources it requires and challenges associated with fact-checking and cross-referencing (Ball, 1996).

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