

Discord is Beauty; Silence is Beast: Dissent in Authoritarian Regimes

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Bio:

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Abstract:

This study examines the effect authoritarian regimes have on non-violent and violent dissent. In particular, it focuses on how regime structures play a role in the conscious decisions made by opposition forces to engage in peaceful or conflictual resistance. In contrast to other studies, this work disaggregates authoritarian regimes into three different categories: single-party, military, and personalist. Using a negative binomial regression model on a cross-sectional time series data set, with regime type variables from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2013), and control variables from Fearon and Laitin (2003), this study examines the global occurrence of dissent. Evidence reveals single party and personalist regimes have an inverse relationship with both forms of dissent. Additionally, military regimes have no impact on dissent type. This article interprets the negative relationship between single party and personalist regimes and proposes an explanation for the absence of a link between military regimes and dissent.

Introduction

How do dissatisfied citizens communicate discontent with their government? In a democracy, people appeal to representatives through phone calls, letters, meetings, and other similar means. In authoritarian regimes, this access is less available and citizens will seek alternative channels of communication. They may choose to express themselves in a peaceful or violent manner in order to achieve their goals. What is the spark that propels people to violently protest the leaders of their nation? Simultaneously, what is the force that compels men and women to stand peacefully even when their leaders choose to assault them? What prompted millions of Egyptians to take to the streets after thirty years of military reign? How did protests against the personalist dictator in Libya descend into civil war? Both populations were motivated by similar economic and political grievances (Copeland 2013), but chose two distinct approaches. Egyptians engaged in mostly peaceful protests while Libyans pursued outwardly violent means. Military and personalist regimes are not alone in experiencing dissent. One-party states, such as the Soviet Union, faced both non-violent and violent resistance in the late 1980s. This work seeks to comprehend this intriguing link by examining the effect autocratic regime type (single-party, military, and personalist) has on non-violent and violent dissident behavior.

In this study, I will quantitatively examine three authoritarian regime types and the influence each structure has on the choice of dissenters to undertake non-violent or violent channels of expression. First, I review previous work published on non-violent and violent dissent, highlighting the motivation behind both methods. Second, I propose a theory of authoritarian environment and how each type motivates dissenters to employ non-violent or

violent means. Next, I test this theory using a large-*N* analysis and a negative binomial regression model. Intuitively, I draw assumptions that single-party and military regimes will experience non-violent dissent and personalist regimes will be susceptible to violent dissent. Results indicate these assumptions were incorrect and an elaboration of the outcomes is in the analysis.

Non-Violent Dissent

People are likely to participate in non-provocative forms of dissent due to the lower personal risk involved (Hadjar 2003). If the regime is repressive, it raises the stakes of an individual's cost to participate in collective action (Lichbach 1995). From the rational choice perspective, an individual will engage in dissent that costs as little as possible and fulfills their intended goal (Hadjar 2003). Previous work asserts both regime and dissident leaders should choose tactics that minimize threats to their position (Shellman 2010).

Repression may also result in clandestine operations if the regime ignores political demands made through conventional channels of expression (Gurr 1970). Restrictive measures taken by a regime may not eliminate dissent, but it may deter the development of large protest groups (Stevens 1975). The initial catalyst of resistance may also play a role in the dissenter's conscious decision to employ a non-provocative method (Hadjar 2003). In the GDR, protest organized in response to the increased militarization of the region and the decision to maintain non-violence was reinforced by social norms and organization through the church (Hadjar 2003). The absence of an opportunity to use violence by dissidents may also result in the choice to use non-violent means (Hadjar 2003). The choice to engage in non-violent activities is a strategic way to gain sympathy from observers if the regime chooses to

retaliate with force, as happened with Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (McAdam 2011).

Violent Dissent

Not all activists draw distinctions between violent and non-violent actions taken in pursuit of a common cause (McAdam et al. 2000). Gurr's contribution (1970) claims protests always have the potential to escalate into violent confrontations. Opposition groups will choose non-violent methods of protest, but when they fail to influence government, it is typical for the opposition to threaten to use force (Sharp 1973). If the regime responds to non-violent expression with repression, including the severance of communication, hostility of dissidents will intensify and revolutionary transformation will be viewed as the only option (Stevens 1975 and Gurr 1970). According to Gurr, collective violence is attributable to psychological and social properties and the most fundamental human response to force is counterforce. Structures that allow elections, but limit the legislature's ability to challenge the executive, send a mixed message to authorities, leaders, and citizens about what is allowed and what is not (Davenport 2004). When the regime decides to use force against protestors, dissenters will feel threatened and angered and will resort to defense or retaliation. Previous work (Eckstein 1965; Gurr and Duvall 1973; Shellman 2010) supports the escalation hypothesis by claiming coercion breeds civil strife and loss of legitimacy, and may incite civil unrest.

Rival Explanations

Religion has in the past acted as a buffer between opposition and the regime. In particular, the Catholic Church has held a special position in many authoritarian societies.

Religious leaders such as priests or the Pope may serve as a channel for the regime and dissidents alike (Linz 2000). Another explanation is provided by Risa Brooks, who claims that different forms of political access lead militant opposition groups to violence (2009). She also suggests that ethnic diversity, coupled with a lack of institutional resources, leaves countries vulnerable to ideological leaders who want to organize rebellion (Ellingsen et al. 2001).

On Repression

Past literature on rebellion has intimately woven dissent with repression. Conrad and DeMerritt (2011) argue the structure of domestic political institutions leads to varied government repression. When coercive tactics are used, tension escalates and opposition intensifies, which may lead to violence (Gurr 1970; Francisco 2011; Shellman 2010).

Gurr (1970) claims political violence is motivated by Relative Deprivation (RD), which is the discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities. The intensity of RD may vary between the three main authoritarian regimes and affect the degree to which citizens express their dissatisfaction. The effect of repression on dissident behavior has been previously scrutinized. Typical findings posit that very high and extremely low levels of coercion do not incite violence from dissenters (Gurr 1970, Davenport 2004); instead, it is middle of the road regimes that suffer from the most violence (Fein 2013). Coercion varies between authoritarian regimes and may deter or escalate opposition hostility (Shellman 2008). The literature has focused on how coercive tactics impact dissident behavior, as well as how dissident actions affect government behavior (Shellman 2010). Regarding the role of regime structures in relation to non-violent and violent dissent, there is a deficiency in the literature. Scholars have yet to thoroughly explore the significance of regime type and dissent.

A thorough exploration of the elements that play a role in dissent is necessary in order to predict whether a movement will maintain peaceful resistance or veer toward more aggressive mediums. Previous studies have largely ignored the nuances within authoritarianism and have aggregated authoritarian regimes into a single, generic category (Geddes 1999, Huntington 1991). It is imperative to study how the framework of each authoritarian regime affects resistance movements. Scholars must first begin by identifying variation within the authoritarian sphere.

Little research has been undertaken regarding the key relationship between authoritarian regimes and dissent type. Furthermore, research on dissent has been quite uneven with non-violence at the forefront. This study incorporates the role of repression in resistance movements and seeks to interpret various authoritarian regimes on non-violent and violent dissent. An improved understanding of the mechanisms within non-democratic states may allow the United States, as well as authoritarian leaders, to form policy and provide recommendations that will lessen the impact of future violence.

Theory and Hypotheses

In this study, authoritarianism is minimally defined as a system of governance that does not select rulers through contested elections (Przeworski et al. 2000). The methods by which citizens may express political dissatisfaction are categorized as violent and non-violent action. It is assumed political leaders want to maintain their position, conventional channels of political expression are inaccessible, and dissenters seek reform prior to regime change.

At the core of this work, I examine the relationship between various authoritarian regimes and the type of dissent that emerges. The arrangement of power, whether it is

concentrated in one person or many, has an effect on the extent of influence exercised within political institutions. When power is narrowly focused, it becomes more difficult for citizens to participate in the political arena.

In single-party regimes, peaceful protest will emerge, as a single-party is more inclined to negotiate (Geddes 1999). The party monopolizes power, therefore access to the political arena depends on an individual's admission to the party (Huntington 1991). Access to the party is not, however, sufficient for political expression due to the interweaving of party ideology and the state. Opposition to the will of the party may amount to treason against the state (Huntington 1991) and deter citizens from mobilizing. The consequence of treason may also motivate citizens to engage in an aggressive method of expression or view the situation as “all or nothing.” Depending on the relative size of opposition forces to the government, confrontation will exacerbate tensions and result in escalated conflict (Gurr 1970).

Single party regimes have a wide range of coercion and co-optation strategies (Wilson et al. 2013) that may be used when the party or the state feels threatened by demonstrators. This regime type is likely to have the resources available to co-opt protestors due to the large winning coalition. In a single party regime, all citizens are a part of the winning coalition. Larger winning coalitions find it difficult to allocate private goods to the ruling class, so public services must be provided to maintain the loyalty of the people (Buono de Mesquita et al. 1999).

H1: Single party regimes have more co-optation capabilities and will experience more non-violent than violent dissent.

Military regimes will tend to negotiate with opposition groups due to the perception

that military rule is not permanent (Geddes 1999). The military as an institution will survive whether it is in politics or in the barracks, therefore military leaders are not as inclined to hold onto power as their one-party or personalist counterparts. The military may view itself as an arbitrator and will accept the existing status quo (Perlmutter 1999). By doing this, it acts as a protector of the constitution, focuses on settling disputes, and is without an independent political organization (Ezrow 2000). There is a capacity for political grievances to be expressed in a military regime, so this regime will also experience non-violent dissent.

H2: Assuming military regimes are more likely to negotiate, dissenters will stray from violence and choose to employ non-violent strategies against military rule.

Personalist regimes differ from both military and one-party dictatorships as access to office depends on the discretion of an individual leader (Geddes 1999). This regime type is relatively immune to internal division, but is especially vulnerable to regime failure due to the unexpected death of the leader (Geddes 1999; Huntington 1991). Personalist dictators will employ repressive means to maintain their grip on power for as long as possible. As a result, opposition groups will engage in aggressive tactics to implement change. Personalist regimes tend to end in coups or widespread violence (Geddes 1999) only to be replaced by an alternative authoritarian regime (Huntington 1991). Personalist regimes are extremely repressive in nature and are intolerant of opposition. The absence of conventional political outlets will result in the use of aggressive strategies to illustrate dissatisfaction. In this regime, political power hinges upon closeness to and support from the leader. Access to the ruler is narrow and dissenters will seek to eliminate the leader in order to achieve their objective. The leader is likely to use coercion to deter the mounting threat, the effect being an intensification

of opposition resistance (Gurr 1970).

H3: Due to the limitations on access to power, dissenters will choose violent methods, instead of non-violent, to achieve their objective.

Research Design

This study examines the relationship between authoritarian regimes and methods of dissent from 1976, when the Political Terror Scale begins, through 2005. The independent variables include one-party, military, and personalist regimes. The two dependent variables are outbreak of violent dissent and the occurrence of non-violent dissent. The unit of analysis is country-year.

The effect of different regimes on non-violent and violent dissent is tested using three datasets and a negative binomial regression model. Demographic controls are from Fearon and Laitin (2003); dissident behavior is observed using the Cross National Time-Series dataset; and regime types are from “New Data on Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions” (Geddes, Wright, Frantz 2013).

The domestic conflict event data was compiled using reports from *The New York Times* and definitions from Rummel's “*Dimensions of Conflict Behavior Within and Between Nations*” (2000) and the *General Systems Yearbook, VIII* (1963). For the purposes of this study, violent dissent is defined as assassinations, guerilla warfare, purges, riots, and revolutions. Non-violent actions are defined as general strikes, major government crises, and anti-government demonstrations.

Control variables include GDP, ethnic fractionalization, religious divisions, former repression, previous protest, population size, military personnel, and duration of the regime.

These variables may also play a role in dissent type, but are kept equal in order to achieve unbiased results. A history of repression may inspire non-violent protestors, who do not want to provoke the regime, or violent protests from citizens who feel threatened and want to retaliate. Previous protest may influence more protest in the future, especially if it was successful in the past. Nevertheless, past demonstrations are not an indication of whether future protests will take a non-violent or violent turn. Population is used as a control variable for the simple fact that more protests occur in areas that have more people to engage in them. Duration of the regime may play a role in initial motivation to protest, in that high turnover rate may result in higher numbers of protests since citizens have proved protest to be effective, but it doesn't determine whether or not demonstrations will be non-violent or violent.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 and Table 2 show personalist and single-party regimes seem to deter non-violent dissidence, such as strikes and anti-government protests. States with larger populations and a history of protest will likely experience a recurrence of demonstrations, especially if they had been viewed as successful in the past. Military dictatorships differ from other regimes, as it seems there is no impact on the choice of dissenters to engage in peaceful resistance. Other elements also had no effect on non-violent strategies. Previous attempts by the regime to repress citizens through the use of censorship, intimidation tactics, military force, or the economic climate and social divisions have no influence on dissent type.

Personalist and single-party regimes also discourage violent forms of dissent, such as assassinations and rioting. Past repression plays a role in the choice of dissenters to participate

in violent resistance. As noted by Gurr (1970), repression will incite a feeling of fear or the need to retaliate in people. Population is also significant in that a larger pool of people will have more protests. Military regimes, as well as economic performance and social divisions in society, continue to have no impact on the type of dissent.

These results are inconsistent with the proposed hypotheses; nevertheless, interpretation of the information presented has provided interesting alternatives for dissident behavior in authoritarian regimes.

I hypothesized that the structure of single-party and military regimes would result in non-violent dissent while personalist regimes would experience violent resistance. Unpredictably, single party and personalist regimes decrease *both* violent and non-violent dissent. If anything, these regimes deter protest from initially occurring because of the highly repressive nature. As a case in point, China's extensive security apparatus allows citizens to express themselves politically while also repressing efforts to mobilize. Chinese microblogging platforms, known as "Weibos," have provided outlets for citizens to voice political concerns. While key words such as "human rights" and "protest" are censored, citizens have come up with euphemisms as a loophole. The government prevents the development of dialogue by prohibiting comments, thus deterring mobilization (Wines and LaFraniere 2011).

Personalist regimes are highly repressive and are likely to fully deter dissent and restrict all forms of expression. The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked North Korea as the most censored country in the world. Kim Jung-Il banned cell phones in 2006 and kept the state *incommunicado*. The dictator relies heavily on a carefully crafted worldview to maintain

power and any disclosure from outside the state could be devastating to his position (Zeller 2008).

The relationship of military regime to dissent type was statistically insignificant, but not completely inconsequential. Typically, the military has the capacity to use force to quell demonstrations or riots. It is probable, however, that the ideology of the military affects how it may react to dissident behavior. If the regime views itself as temporary, the military is likely to exit the political scene and return later. For example, the Egyptian military has repeatedly exited and returned to the political scene since the Free Officers Movement in 1952. The survival of the armed forces is not contingent upon its political involvement (Copeland 2013). This allows the institution to choose to return to the barracks when threatened by either non-violent or violent dissent.

Conclusion

The recent upsurge of both non-violent and violent dissent in authoritarian regimes has been front page news over the last few years. Some states, such as Libya and Syria, have experienced civil war as a result of escalated tensions between government and opposition forces. Understanding the link between authoritarian regimes and dissent type will lead to more accurate predictions. This study examined regime structures through the lens of power distribution and political access by citizens. Though the results were unexpected, they are a first step toward better comprehending this relationship. The results could change, however, if this study regarded regime and dissent type as less static and more evolving. A military regime could easily transition into a personalist dictatorship. Non-violent protests have the potential to progressively become more violent. Furthermore, the disaggregation of

authoritarian regimes needs further consideration as three categories do not reflect the variation within *each* type. North Korea under Kim Jung-Il was not the same as Libya under the rule of Qaddafi. Future research may examine dissent through an evolutionary lens and yield different results.

Table 1: Non-violent Dissent

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Z-Score</u>
Protest	.292	8.50*
Repression	.083	1.31
Gross Domestic Product	-.033	-1.26
Ethnic Fractionalization	-.082	-.028
Religious Fractionalization	-.571	-1.82
Military Personnel	-.000	-1.95
Population	.432	5.86*
Single Party	-.520	-2.92*
Military	-.126	-.070
Personalist	-.664	-3.66*

*indicates significance at $Z < +/- 2.00$

Table 2: Violent Dissent

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Z-Score</u>
Protest	.223	6.46*
Repression	.367	5.44*
Gross Domestic Product	-.049	-1.69
Ethnic Fractionalization	-.240	-0.64
Religious Fractionalization	-.434	-0.97
Military Personnel	-.000	-1.78
Population	.454	4.89*
Single Party	-.431	-2.14*
Military	-.153	.056
Personalist	-.436	-2.16*

*indicates significance at $Z < +/- 2.00$

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