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# When democracies kill: Reflections from the US, India, and Northern Ireland

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## Abstract

Existing research, social movements, nongovernmental organizations, and many national governments herald democracy as a, or perhaps *the*, resolution to state repression. Interestingly, very little attention has been given to the topic of when democracies kill their citizens for political reasons. Drawing upon insights derived from research in three countries (the United States, India, and Northern Ireland), I focus on three strategies that democratic governments use to facilitate their use of violent repressive behavior. These highlight not only areas for subsequent investigation as the world turns to political democracy as the dominant form of regime type but also have implications for those calling for democratic governments as well. Indeed, it may be useful to develop a new phrase as everyone's political dreams/aspirations come true: 'Caveat Civis' – citizens beware.

## Keywords

Repression, human rights violation, governance, political violence, democracy, democratic peace, political order

When do democracies kill their citizens for political reasons? This is something of a bizarre topic within our current historical context. In many respects, political theorists, policy makers, activists as well as social scientists view and have viewed democracy as a solution to the problem of state repression. As a consequence, not much effort has been made to understand when democratic governments resort to the ultimate form of coercive power.<sup>1</sup>

Such an effort is important for two reasons. First, the democratic record at reducing state repression is historically consistent (e.g. Carey, 2009; Davenport, 1995; Hibbs, 1973; Keith, 2002; Poe and Tate, 1994; Ziegenhagen, 1986;) but more recent work has suggested that such an effect is

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variable – especially within situations of political conflict (Davenport, 2007a; Conrad and Moore, 2010). This is crucial because democracy is generally heralded as the best solution to the problem of state repression and human rights violation. Second, there are now more democratic governments than ever historically as a percentage of all nation-states and potentially more on the way (measured by a variety of indicators). We are thus entering an age where democracy will represent the dominant political system type in the world, which has never before been the case. Given this situation, the issue merits attention.

When one thinks about an answer to the question of when democracies kill those under their charge, seven factors are identified. Four are drawn from previous cross-national examinations of the topic. For example, democracies appear to kill when (1) political threats are perceived by authorities as well as ordinary citizens, (2) when victims are not viewed as core members of the polity, (3) when some measure of legality is provided for the repressive process and (4) when the application of repression is viewed as being small-scale and non-systematic. Three factors emerge from detailed case observations of political conflict within the United States, India, and Northern Ireland that I have been undertaking for various periods of time over the last 15 years. In this work, democracies appear to kill because of their (5) highly decentralized structure, (6) the fact that they engage in the worst activity before the polity is politically ‘opened’ and (7) relevant behavior takes place within areas that were created to be isolated from the rest of society (both psychologically as well as physically).

Interestingly, all factors are linked to the idea of reducing the magnitude of backlash from the majority of citizens/constituents after government repressive action has taken place. To date, this issue of political accountability and responsiveness has been the dominant democratic mechanism accounting for state repression. As a result, the discussion within the literature has been largely focused on factors that assist authorities with providing justifications for relevant behavior. For example, governments would be less likely sanctioned by the population for repressive action when political threats such as terrorism exist, because the authority’s behavior would seem justified in this context. By contrast, the factors I discuss in the current research are less linked to the issue of providing justifications for repressive action in order to avoid political accountability than they are to obscuring political accountability altogether by removing reducing the likelihood of mass discovery/discussion.

Within the current article, I outline what we know about the relationship between democracy and repression as well as what has guided such inquiries in the past. Following this, I present a new conceptualization of the democracy-repression nexus informed by the lessons learned from my research on the United States, India, and Northern Ireland. The conclusion discusses how the insights could/should influence subsequent research on state repression and the effect on political democracy.

## **Understanding democracy and state repression**

A long-standing argument maintained within US and Western policymaking (e.g. the Community of Democracies, 2001), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as academic circles, is that democracies generally reduce state-sponsored coercion directed against its citizens – especially that of a highly violent nature. Recently this was referred to as the ‘domestic democratic peace’ (Davenport, 2007a). The reasons for this influence are numerous. First, it is argued that democracies have other mechanisms of socio-political control such as ‘channeling’ (directing claims-making efforts and participation of the aggrieved into processes controlled by existing political-economic actors), accommodation (giving the aggrieved symbolic representation within

the political system (Earl, 2003)), and cooptation (finding some way to bribe or otherwise control the leadership of the aggrieved, which moves them away from challenging the status quo (Gamson, 1975)). Second, it is believed that democratic political leaders fear the repercussions of repression as victims and/or other constituents might punish them afterward for their involvement in undesirable behavior. Here, political authorities stay away from repressive action because they fear the backlash for engaging in such activity.

These propositions have been examined (albeit in an indirect fashion) quite extensively – especially the second issue (e.g. Davenport, 1996, 1999, 2004; Hegre et al., 2001; Hibbs, 1973; Myers and Krain, 1997; Poe and Tate, 1994; Poe et al., 1999; Rummel, 1984, 1997; Zanger, 2000). The outcome of this research is impressive in its stability. In all investigations over the last 40 years democracy has decreased repression. The only controversy that exists within this work concerns exactly when along the spectrum of democratic governance this influence ‘kicks in’. Some argue that full authoritarian and full democracies are the most pacific (e.g. Fein, 1995). This leaves governments in the middle of the continuum as the most repressive. Some argue that it is only full democracies that reduce state repression; until this threshold has been passed, there is no impact. Competitively evaluating both propositions, Davenport and Armstrong (2004) found that it is the latter influence that holds; the other specification is simply incorrect.

Although quantitative research has generally supported the democratic peace argument, this work is limited in many ways, hindering our ability to understand the wisdom of this research method to coercive pacification.<sup>2</sup> For example, measures of democracy employed within the literature are either highly aggregated, combining different elements (e.g. Davenport, 1995; Hibbs, 1973; Poe et al., 1999; Zanger, 2000), or they focus on only a few aspects of democracy: e.g. elections (Davenport, 1997; Richards, 1999), constitutional provisions (Davenport, 1996; Keith, 2002), executive constraints (Davenport, 2004), or political participation (e.g. Davenport and Armstrong, 2004; Poe and Tate, 1994). Both strategies limit our understanding of the relationship between democracy and repression for they are alternatively too vague or too specific; this does not provide much guidance for those who need to implement particular policies, with finite resources.

Additionally, to date, most investigations have been of direct effects. This is problematic because it might be more appropriate to evaluate the interactive effect of democracy on repression with different forms of political conflict – both intrastate as well as interstate (Iraq provides a recent and very pressing example of both). Such an examination would be important for it appears to be a common situation in the world: many societies are democratizing amidst some form of conflict and it is unclear exactly how democracy limits the excesses of government’s coercive power. Such an examination provides the strongest test of the domestic democratic peace proposition. Indeed, if democracy can reduce repressive behavior despite the presence of conflict, this says a great deal about how powerful the relationship is and how widely/strongly this should be supported as a strategy of pacification. If democracy cannot reduce repression in the face of conflict behavior, however, then this identifies an important limitation of the peace proposition and it compels those interested with reducing repressive behavior to seek out and adopt other strategies.

Toward the end of achieving better understanding of the democracy-repression-conflict nexus, in my book *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace* (2007a) I examined the impact of interactions of democracy with violent political dissent as well as civil and interstate war on state repression (a combination of civil liberties restrictions and violations of personal integrity);<sup>3</sup> this was done with 137 countries from 1976 to 1996. From this study, I discovered several things (Davenport, 2007a: 30–31).

First, in line with prior research, I find that, however conceived, democracy decreases the likelihood of repressive action. This said, not all characteristics are equally as powerful in their

influence across analyses (both independently as well as against one another). By far the largest influence is wielded by the degree of participation and competition within government (what I refer to as *Voice*). This is followed by general executive constraints (what I refer to as *Veto*).

Second, I find that democracy is generally better at decreasing violence than at decreasing political restrictions (Davenport, 2007a: 30–31). Third, and perhaps most important, I find that the influence of democracy on repression is influenced by the presence of violent dissent, civil war, and interstate war (Davenport, 2007a: 31–32). In particular, three findings stand out:

First, when conflict exists . . . democracy is better at pacifying (repression) when political authorities have previously employed moderate restrictions and violence as opposed to when they employed strategies that are more lethal.

Second, across types of conflict and repressive strategies, *Voice* (specifically Competition/Participation) is still the most powerful mechanism of pacification, outpacing the influence of *Veto* (specifically general Executive Constraints). This having been said, the simultaneous consideration of both *Voice* and *Veto* outweighs the pacifying influence wielded by either democratic characteristic viewed individually. . . .

Third, results disclose that the type of conflict alters the pacifying influence of democracy. For example, during violent dissent (riots and guerrilla warfare), *Competition/Participation* is more effective at reducing repression than *Executive Constraints*; in fact, the influence of the former is so powerful that there is very little explanatory power added when both aspects of democracy are considered together. By contrast, during civil war *Competition/Participation* and *Executive Constraints* are about equal in their ability to reduce repression when viewed individually but both democratic characteristics taken together have a much greater impact than either viewed individually.

While useful in improving our understanding of how democracy influences repression, my investigation was limited in part because of the large-*N* statistical approach that was adopted. For example, although democracies were generally less repressive than other political systems, I was not able to explore exactly how democracies could engage in such behavior. If democratic political authorities were to use repression, all literature presumed that political authorities did not attempt to do anything in order to prevent the mechanisms of the domestic democratic peace from working. As I engaged in diverse research efforts within the United States, India, and Northern Ireland over the last 15 years in an effort to explore the dynamics of protest, rebellion and state repression, however, I came to acknowledge that political authorities did not sit idly by to be sanctioned by either veto or voice. Rather, they developed some rather interesting ways to obscure mass dissatisfaction as well as political accountability. Before getting to these revelations however, it is useful to begin to explore the topic in somewhat greater detail.

## Probing domestic democratic lethality

While it is clear that domestic democratic state violence is intricately connected with political conflict (specifically behavioral challenges directed against existing politicians, policies and/or practices), it is not exactly clear how. An early observer of the problem, Charles Tilly (over a 30-year period (1978, 2000, 2005)) proves to be useful in grounding our thinking on the subject at hand.

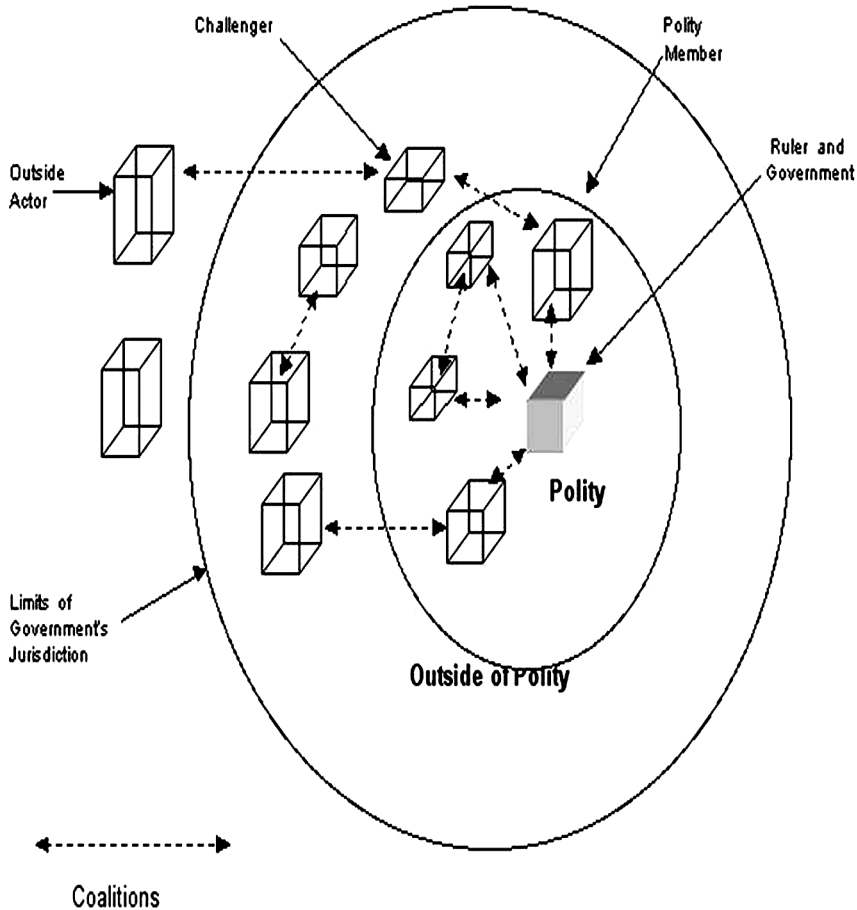
As conceived by Tilly, the government's response to behavioral challenges is generally determined by two factors: (1) *the acceptability of the action taken* (i.e. the number of challenges, their duration, the geographic scope involved, the size of the challenging organization and the

magnitude of violence), and (2) *the acceptability of the group involved* (i.e. its beliefs, objectives and members as well as their connections with the existing power structure). The placement of a specific challenger and its behavior on the two dimensions identified above determine how authorities will treat them. Generally, challengers that utilized unacceptable tactics and whose organization was not accepted by authorities would be the ones most likely repressed. It follows that the most unacceptable of tactics and most unacceptable of groups could be subject to violence and death. In contrast, those challengers that utilized acceptable tactics and were accepted by government leaders, however, would be the ones most likely facilitated. Those falling in between the two would most likely be tolerated.

Now, Tilly did not believe that all governments responded to the same challenges in comparable ways. Rather, he believed that different types of regimes responded in different ways. Behaviorally, he identified four ideal types. For example, *Repressive* governments view the largest number of groups and actions as unacceptable across both dimensions. Consequently, these governments repress the largest number of dissidents. Additionally, they tolerate a decent amount of challengers/challenges but facilitate very few. Again, I think it is reasonable to maintain that the farther one moves down the scale of acceptability, the more severe and violent the authority's behavior will be. *Totalitarian* governments also repress a large amount of challengers/challenges but less than repressive governments; they also tolerate a small number of challengers/challenges but facilitate a great number so that they may coopt and channel them. *Tolerant* governments, unsurprisingly, tolerate the widest range of challengers/challenges and they repress a smaller range of challengers/challenges – some actors and certain types of groups. Compared to repressive governments, these regimes facilitate a larger number of challengers/challenges. Compared to repressive governments, these regimes facilitate a larger number of challengers/challenges. In totalitarian governments, the number tolerated is far smaller. Finally, *Weak* governments focus their repression on the weakest groups with the most acceptable behavior, facilitate the smallest number of challengers/challenges, and tolerate the most. This is largely explained by the fact that they do not have the wherewithal to either repress or coopt.<sup>4</sup>

What is the influence of regime type on government repressiveness? Although Tilly's categorizations (e.g. 'repressive' and 'tolerant') were labeled behaviorally (i.e. as outcomes of previous state–dissident interactions), I believe that he would argue that the authority's approach given a specific behavioral challenge would roughly correspond to distinct types of government as measured by the way that citizens and authorities were related to one another. For example, 'tolerant' governments most likely would be associated with democracies, as tolerance is one of the defining characteristics of this regime type. 'Totalitarian' governments would be identified by the same name. Finally, 'repressive' governments would likely be categorized as authoritarian in nature and 'weak' governments would likely be those either being built (i.e. undergoing state formation) or collapsing (i.e. failing).<sup>5</sup>

A large part of the reason for the associations identified in the last paragraph concerns the position that challengers have within the society in question (i.e. what their membership status is). Again, according to Tilly, this is something that is specifically related to the type of political system. Essentially, there are five actors that are relevant to identify/track (seen in Figure 1 below): (1) 'agents of the government' (i.e. the police, military, court officials and politicians), (2) 'polity members' (i.e. recognized actors enjoying access to government and its resources), (3) 'challengers' (i.e. recognized actors lacking access to governments and its resources), (4) 'subjects' (i.e. those not currently recognized but part of the territorial unit) and (5) 'outside actors' (i.e. those outside the polity). As Tilly (2000: 4–5) states,



**Figure 1.** A static regime model

Source: Tilly (2000).

(r)egimes vary . . . in **breadth** (the proportion of all persons under the government's jurisdiction that belong to polity members), **equality** (the extent to which persons who do belong to polity members have similar access to governmental agents and resources), **consultation** (the degree to which polity members exercise binding collective control over government agents, resources and activities) and finally **protection** (shielding of polity members and their constituencies from arbitrary action by governmental agents).

In his thinking, these various elements are 'bundled' in such a way that combinations of many if not all items would yield political systems commonly thought of as 'democratic' in nature. Combinations with few items would yield a variety of different non-democratic governments. Within this framework, members are, by definition, acceptable to authorities and thus they are more likely facilitated or tolerated if they engage in challenges. Of course, it is possible that even a member could be repressed if that member engaged in highly unacceptable behavior;



there would be some care, however, taken over the ways in which these individuals were coerced. For example, their persecution would be limited and maintained within strict legal as well as behavioral guidelines so as not to threaten the bulk of the citizenry. Challengers outside of the polity and lacking connections to members are more likely to be repressed and severely so. Additionally, challengers who use unacceptable methods (i.e. those too destructive, controversial or different from the norm) are even more likely to be repressed as well. In contrast, challengers with connections to members, who are acceptable to authorities and who use strategies deemed legitimate, are more likely tolerated or facilitated, depending upon exactly who they are connected with and how well. If this group were to be repressed it would be with relatively covert methods.

Employing this logic to the topic at hand, it seems as if only breadth, equality, and protection are being considered within existing research. Consultation is also relevant – especially with regard to government attempts to avoid any negative repercussions from their activities. While useful, however, there are important limitations with the model developed above. In large part, this is because it is assumed that governments do not attempt to influence the contexts within which state–challenger interactions take place. Quite simply, government agency is ignored. What do governments and especially democratic governments do in order to engage in violence toward their citizens? This is explored below.

## **Beyond the conventional view**

Over the last 15 years, I have engaged in research concerning conflict-repression dynamics in the United States, India, and Northern Ireland, with decreasing amounts of attention being given across the three. As I did this research, I came to acknowledge that there were several limitations with prior research on the question above and that there were actually several ways that democracies ‘cleared a path’ for repressive violence. After briefly discussing these cases, I will discuss my three revelations.

The reasons for selecting the United States, India, and Northern Ireland were numerous: (1) each country was clearly identified as a democracy (albeit for different durations), (2) the quality of the democracy within the countries of interest varied across both space as well as time, (3) the countries had experienced a variety of political conflict as well as violence both preceding as well as following democratization and these activities have varied across both space as well as time, (4) in all three cases political challengers – citizens as well as authorities – were killed in the course of state–challenger contests, and (5) the activities of both governments as well as challengers were especially well documented. While it is typical to employ the logic of most similar or most different systems in order to justify case selection, I offer a modified version of this as I have disaggregated the individual ‘cases’ to be more in line with the sub-national and micro-foundational movements. Here, although one investigates a single country (a similar system in many respects as there are generally some characteristics of the relevant unit that are comparable to one another relative to some other country), researchers also explore as well as exploit the variation that exists within that country (a different system in certain respects as there are some characteristics that vary across the country itself). Thus, although I am studying the ‘United States’ I am actually examining state–dissident dyads within distinct parts of the United States by street-address days that occurred around the same period of time; while I am studying ‘India’ I am actually examining state as well as societal discriminatory practices and resistance to these efforts in 1589 villages within the state of Gujarat between 2005 and 2008; and, while I am studying ‘Northern Ireland’ I am actually examining state–dissident dyads throughout Northern Ireland and the UK by street address days.



Although similar in several ways, I admit that the combination of cases is somewhat non-traditional. While the United States is perhaps the most frequently studied democracy in the world, India is quite often neglected as a democracy because of the popular association with ethnic riots as well as a general lack of attention given to the region in the West. Similarly, Northern Ireland is quite often neglected as a democracy because of the association with the Troubles and the fact that most forget that it is included within the UK. These factors are not problematic for my purposes because in the case of the former, riots are actually not that frequent in India (relative to protest in the United States for example); these events are limited in scope relative to the size of the population and tend to be geographically concentrated within the country (e.g. Horowitz, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004). In the case of Northern Ireland, conflict was quite variable in intensity over time and again the activities were geographically concentrated (e.g. Deutsch and Magowan, 1975; McKittrick et al., 1999; Sutton, 1994). Given the size of the population in Northern Ireland, the scope of the conflict was significant but this is less so when one includes the population of the United Kingdom, under whose jurisdiction the country falls. Additionally, while the functioning nature of Northern Ireland's democratic practices was considered highly questionable (e.g. White and White, 1995), during the period of the 'Troubles' (1968 to 1998) the UK's democracy was generally believed to be functioning.

Each study was undertaken for somewhat different reasons and in slightly diverse ways. For example, the examination in the United States concerns the development of social movements associated with black power/nationalism and how authorities at the federal, state, and local levels treated them. Specifically, two groups and locales were examined: the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the Bay Area between 1967 and 1973 (Davenport, 2009) as well as the Republic of New Africa (RNA) in Detroit between 1968 and 1980 (Davenport, 2012). To conduct these studies, I relied upon different data sources. In the case of the BPP-US government interaction, I used an events catalog created by diverse newspapers (i.e. ethnic, white, black, radical, and mainstream). In the case of the RNA-US government interaction, I used an events catalog created by diverse newspapers, government records (i.e. surveillance, arrest and informant reports) as well as documents from the RNA itself. The investigation in India concerns the practice of untouchability within the state of Gujarat from 2005 to 2009 in 1589 villages (i.e. caste discrimination enacted by so-called upper castes and facilitated through government inaction). Specifically, I seek to understand what untouchability is composed of, how and why it varies across space as well as what influence anti-caste discrimination has on its practice). To conduct this study I rely upon an ambitious census of untouchability and anti-untouchability practices in 1589 villages throughout Gujarat (Navsarjan Trust et al., 2009). Finally, my examination of Northern Ireland concerns identifying all of the different forms of political conflict emerging from all sides of the conflict (i.e. mainland UK as well as Northern Ireland's Catholic-Republicans, Protestant-Loyalist and police), examining how they relate to one another across space and time. To conduct this study I rely upon an event catalog derived from mainland UK and Northern Irish newspapers from different communities, government as well as military records, human rights records from Northern Irish NGOs, and eyewitness testimony from the different communities (Davenport, Loyle and Sullivan, 2011). Again, these differences are less important for the current effort because across the cases I am able to discuss the general topic of democracy/democratization and state repressive violence. Additionally, many of the insights derived from the specific cases are less relevant to the current study than the general evaluations of government behavior that emerge from the historical analyses that accompanied each effort. This allows me to shed some new light on when democracies are likely to kill their citizens for political reasons.

## Decentralization

First, existing work largely ignores an important aspect of democracy – the highly decentralized nature of its structure. This is important because the model above neglects the fact that the relationship between agents, members, challengers and outsiders might vary across jurisdictions (see Figure 2 below for an illustration).

For example, individuals (i.e. outsiders and/or challengers) might be subject to violence if on a local level they are not considered part of the core community-polity (Actor E in Figure 3 or blacks in the US south prior to the mid-1960s or untouchables/Dalits in India throughout history). In contrast, Actors C and B in the figure would not likely be targeted or targeted severely because of their association with community-polity member D (e.g. whites in white councils in the south prior to the mid-1960s). If individuals were connected to others at a higher level (such as A in the figure who has a relationship to a state-level actor with connections to the polity), then it is also possible to avoid severe repressive action. Indeed, one would expect A to be further insulated because that actor is connected to national-level actors through the state. This tends to alter the model provided above, for it provides an alternative way that individuals could insulate themselves from repressive behavior. Indeed, this captures the essence of how the American Civil Rights Movement (CRM), with organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was able to reduce the amount of violence that they were subject to. Repeatedly, blacks in these challenges put themselves in harm's way in order to provoke local state/societal violence<sup>6</sup> and compel action occasionally from state authorities but more frequently from federal agents. It was also the connections between blacks in the South with African Americans but also whites in the North that proved effective at reducing government-related violence. Most notably it was the association of whites with the CRM and the violence directed against them that prompted the greatest federal efforts. This was not the case with the Black Power Movement of groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Republic of New Africa. In this context, there was little to no association with African Americans or whites that was viewed as being central to the American polity. With few reasons for reducing coercive action, US political authorities engaged in a wide variety of repressive activities including raids, arrests, and targeted assassination.

Now, it is of course not easy to cultivate relationships with political actors at higher levels – especially for economically poor and politically marginalized groups. If the connections could be made with little effort, then we would likely see much more of them. This is one of the major difficulties in the Indian case, for Dalits have little interaction with those outside of their communities and those with whom they do have some contact have legal and religious sanctions against interaction. For example, one of the most common forms of discrimination is in the area of marriage, as Dalits are discouraged from dating let alone marrying those outside of their group with punishment of death in certain areas.

If the connections can be made, however, it might be highly effective at protecting the relevant group from state violence but there is an issue of enforcement. In India, for example, there are several federal laws protecting Dalits from atrocities (i.e. violence directed against them for being untouchables); these are similar to hate crime laws that are observed in the United States. But such activities persist in large part because this behavior is frequently not even recorded let alone investigated and/or punished. Supporting this position, one recent study (Agrawal and Gonsalves, 2005: xi) noted that

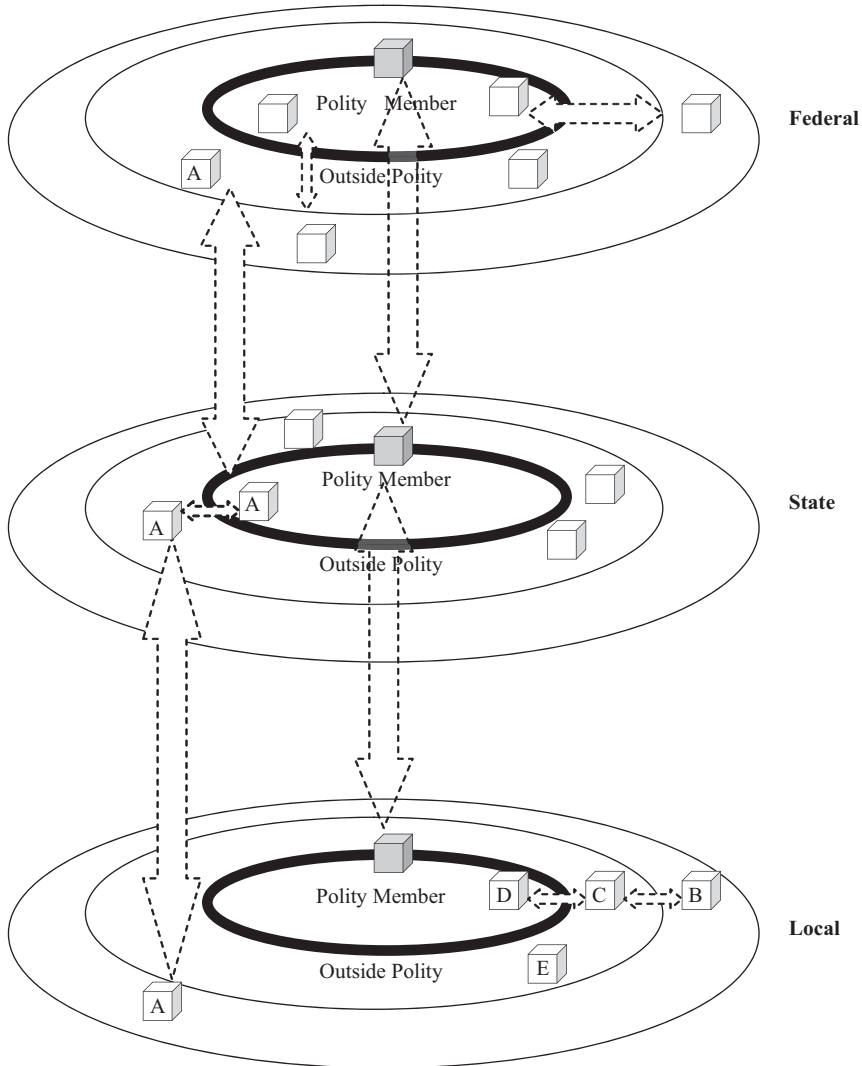


Figure 2. Modified regime model – Decentralization.

A number of anti-discrimination statutes and positive benefit provisions exist in Indian law for the protection and benefit of dalits, tribals and other backward classes of society, but the implementation and enforcement of these laws is poor. Dalit lawyers and activists face social, linguistic and systemic barriers that become virtually impossible to overcome in the face of an often hostile judiciary and civil administration. The entire system is designed to exclude and ostracize dalits.

This was one reason why we undertook our investigation into untouchability: only a handful of such examinations have been conducted in Indian history and none as in depth as that undertaken within our research.

The cross-jurisdictional connections can work in a different way as well. Federal authorities can identify and establish 'public threats' to political order, identifying some group and/or activity as worthy of repression, which transforms state–citizen interactions at lower levels. This can also be initiated at state levels with regard to their influence on local communities. In these contexts, even if there is a decent relationship between government and diverse parts of the citizenry, this could be dramatically changed as a function of mandates from other jurisdictions.

For example, at the founding of the Republic of New Africa in 1968, the United States was undergoing a transition of political orientation at the national level regarding the use of repression from an approach that was somewhat tolerant of dissent to one that was increasingly less so. The earlier approach, generally associated with the period of civil rights, the 'great society' and the 'war on poverty,' was characterized by a relative openness at the highest levels of government to allow dissent to take place and to work with those in the streets in order to resolve their problems. This fell under the presidencies of John F. Kennedy until his assassination and Lyndon Johnson – especially the first few years following Kennedy's death.

Despite the lower levels of repression, all were not well treated. For example, it is noted that those who were engaged in relatively moderate political challenges were the ones that the Kennedy administration treated well but those with communist and/or radical goals/rhetoric were treated much more harshly. While this relative tolerance of 'acceptable' groups and behavior applied to most dissidents, African Americans held a special place in this period. During the two presidencies, there was a degree of sympathy, access, accommodation, and action on behalf of the black cause, which represented a sea change from the period before it. Although it was under Johnson that important legislation was passed, which was conceived and enacted presumably to address the plight of blacks in America, Kennedy was held in high esteem because of his perceived activity in this regard. Most notably, during this period Johnson's 'war on poverty' was put forth in his January 1964 State of the Union speech. This was quickly followed by the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act which allocated both attention as well as resources to alleviate the plight of America's most needy – including blacks.

This said, reinforcing Tilly's point, it was only certain African American claims that the government was tolerant of and responsive to in a non-coercive manner. As long as the claims were for integration as well as civil rights and the method was non-violent as well as non-aggressive, then overt, state-sponsored repressive activity was limited. When African Americans turned toward aggression and violence like in the Black Power movement, they were repressed significantly.

All of this changed after Kennedy was assassinated and several years after Johnson assumed the presidency. Indeed, as Goldstein (2000: 429) well summarizes:

During the 1965–1975 period . . . the United States went through a period of political repression, which, at its height in 1967–1971, exceeded in intensity any other time in the twentieth century with the possible exceptions of the 1917–20 and 1947–50 periods. The social setting for this intense period of political repression was a background of political turbulence, dissent and violence unmatched in American history since the Civil War.

The 'background' being discussed included the Vietnam War and the resistance to this effort, the 'worst series of racial disorders in American history' (Goldstein, 2000: 429), enhanced black militancy, skyrocketing rates of violent crime, and the growth of a counter-cultural movement within the youth of America that transformed their language, behavior, and ways of

thinking for many years to come. In the face of these developments, the position and tactics of the national government shifted in important ways. At this time, under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, greater coercive power was given to the executive. In this context, red-baiting was increased again and the diverse agents of the state stepped in line to restrict diverse rights throughout the nation. For example, in April of 1968, Congress outlawed the communication of the idea of rioting across state lines as well as advocating the overthrowing of the US government. In same Act noted above, for the first time in US history, the government legalized the use of federal wiretapping and eavesdropping. Directly related to this, the activities of diverse agents not normally associated with US repression were increased (e.g. the CIA, the NSA, and the US Army). More traditionally associated with American repression, the reins were taken off the FBI and they were essentially allowed to engage in surveillance and the disruption of social movement organizations with impunity – most notably the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO).

Again, African Americans held a special place in the government's response to dissent. There were two sources of threat. First, the nature of black social movement organizations shifted from integrationist to separatist and accordingly became the focus of the government. The second source of threat concerning African Americans involved the urban riots of the mid to late 1960s, which had increased with each year leading up to 1968 (Myers and Krain, 1997: 99). The response to these activities was as diverse as it was significant. Immediately, there were extensive hearings involving the highest political bodies in the land (e.g. most notably the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders popularly known as the Kerner Commission). These were held to compile all of the information regarding what took place so as to punish the guilty and prevent such activity in the future. There was also an effort made to establish the radical roots of such behavior.

The founding of the RNA thus occurred in a national political context that would not only draw the attention of the federal government but would also prompt it to coercive action against them with little consideration of alternative strategies. At the birth of the RNA, the US government was concerned with and actively trying to undermine foreign and radical connections to social movements in America. The government was also trying to diminish the occurrence of racial disorder, anti-war activism, and all expressions of militancy. With the RNA's connections with individuals such as Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams – both of whom were connected with radicals and communists abroad, respectively – they would clearly be viewed as threatening to the US government. The RNA's desire for separatism and nationhood would identify them as a significant threat in most contexts, but in the siege-like mentality of the Johnson and Nixon administrations this would likely be increased significantly. In addition to this, through the Malcolm X Society's statement during the Detroit riot of 1967, membership overlap with the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), which advocated urban guerilla warfare as well as continued discussion of sabotaging and fomenting the destruction of American cities if their demands were not met, it is clear that the RNA would be targeted. Finally, although the anti-war part of the RNA's message was limited, they did take a position similar to that of the Black Panther Party that Africans in America should be exempt from being compelled to fight for a nation that did not respect or protect them as citizens. This would further antagonize the US government.

What is important about this national orientation is that it differed in important ways from state as well as local orientations of political authorities. It is the variation that deserves attention for it not only sets the context within which repression is applied but it also sets the context within which mobilization takes place as well as responses to the state-dissident interaction.

## Removal

Second, the approach above ignores the places where state violence can occur (e.g. prisons and other countries) but this neglect is also shared by constituents. These places are ignored because of their psychological and/or physical distance from the rest of the population. Accordingly, the individuals involved and what happens to them are removed from consideration and those within them seemingly fall under the realm of a different jurisdiction altogether – not subject to the same morality, legality, or consideration. This largely follows from the Foucaultian notion that political authorities in modern democracies seek to reduce/remove the unfavorable backlash of citizens that befalls governments which overtly, obviously, and severely abuse their citizens. Instead, these authorities pursue socio-political control through the removal of individuals from society to locales where attempts are made to modify/correct the minds of the persecuted. The reasons for the reduction of overt, state violence were clear. As discussed by Foucault (1977: 73), there were a variety of reasons for this.

Protests against the public execution proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century: among the philosophers and theoreticians of the law; among lawyers and parlementaires; in popular petitions and among the legislators of the assemblies. [Because of this another] form of punishment was needed: the physical confrontation between the sovereign and the condemned man must end; this hand-to-hand fight between the vengeance of the prince and the contained anger of the people, through the mediation of the victim and the executioner, must be concluded. Very soon the public execution became intolerable. On the side of power, where it betrayed tyranny, excess, the thirst for revenge, and ‘the cruel pleasure taken in punishing,’ it was revolting. On the side of the victim who, though reduced to despair, was still expected to bless ‘heaven and its judges who appeared to have abandoned him,’ it was shameful.

Accordingly, repressive violence needed to be removed from society’s gaze. This led to the removal of state coercion from the observation of ordinary citizens. Experiences across the cases vary.

In the United States, government persecution of African Americans (actually or potentially engaged in political challenges (Oliver, 2008)), led to the incarceration of nearly one-fourth of all adult African American males – an act of violence itself compounded by the violence encountered in the institution upon arrival. Additionally, it led to the development of the prison industry, which quickly became one of the growth industries over the period following the 1970s. All of this took place with little observation and discussion. In the Indian case, persecution of Dalits was and is facilitated by the fact that these groups are normally placed on the outskirts of all communities (i.e. at the furthest point from the center) – a form of internal banishment, as it were. Geographic isolation is compounded by a deeper isolation. Within Hinduism (the dominant religion in India), Dalits are designated as outcastes – they are beyond the four varnas<sup>7</sup> that essentially provide an identity as well as place for everyone in the society. In the Irish case, at one point during the conflict (e.g. after around 1972) activists associated with the IRA as well as individuals believed to be sympathetic or associated to the IRA were summarily removed from the population and placed in prisons. This allowed political authorities to engage in activities such as torture to punish individual challengers as well as figure out what they were engaged in. It was the objective of these activities to isolate and break the support for the IRA or, at least, this is what the authorities thought. Similar to the US case, the mass incarceration provided the government with the ability to remove those deemed worthy of sanctioning as well as the isolation needed to punish. This worked only as long as the connection with the outside was limited. Unlike the US case, after prisoners began to routinely receive visitors and increase engagement with the outside world, the isolation no longer worked and mobilization was provoked. Indeed, the



connection led to both internal morale for the struggle being waged in the prison (i.e. the 'blanketment' and hunger strikers) as well as external pressure to withdraw the prisoners and external activity against the government for persecuting those engaged in struggle (O'Hearn, 2009). The relationship between the internal and external struggles became so intense that the death of hunger strikers in the prison became one of the most important rallying cries for the broader Catholic-Republican movement, influencing rhetoric as well as tactical repertoires for quite some time.

### *Inclusion*

Third, and last, the approach above and existing research ignores the timing of membership incorporation. It seems clear though that individuals are brought into the polity only after they have accepted 'rules,' attitudes, and behaviors deemed acceptable to authorities. This provides a very different understanding of democratic state violence for it should be quite common to see such behavior before democratization or during democratic consolidation (e.g. before civil liberties protection and suffrage were extended to African Americans). Once the society was made safe for democracy, then violence would be reduced and an 'opening' could take place. In this context, the meaning of the opening and incorporation thus becomes something of a bittersweet victory. Individuals gain access and entry but at the cost of limiting the variation in aspirations, ideologies, and behavior. Some, like Weingast, have argued that this process is essential for influencing the possibility and shape of subsequent democratic development. He ignores the fact that the possibility is built on the back of prior bloodshed. The roots of democracy may be extremely violent.

This of course begs the question about how individuals go about obtaining membership in the relevant political system. As he discussed in 'Where Do Rights Come From?' (1998) as well as *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (2004) Tilly again brings us back to and shows the relevance of contentious politics. Within this work, he contends along with Barrington Moore that rights largely emerge from earlier social struggles as those with power grant/extend certain consultations and/or protections in exchange for the diminishment of behavioral challenges and the protection of particular political-economic relationships. The message here is fairly straightforward. To assess repression at any point in time, one must assess behavioral challenges and repressive action prior to the period in question to better comprehend the context, claims-making efforts, claimsmakers, protectors of the status quo, and the 'rules of the game' within which subsequent state-dissident battles would be fought.

One can see evidence for this within the Indian case. Prior to independence, a great battle rose between Gandhi (as a, and perhaps *the*, leader of the Hindu community) and Ambedkar (as a, and perhaps *the*, leader of the Dalit community) regarding the topic of Dalit suffrage. Discussed in the Poona pact, the British (in part convinced by the argument of Ambedkar) were initially negotiating for separate electorates to be administered to the Hindu and the Dalit. This was done because it was acknowledged that given the history of untouchability, the Dalits would not likely have any political representation whatsoever. Confronted with this situation, Gandhi threatened that if Dalits were given their own vote he would fast until death. Understanding that bringing about the demise of one of the most revered political leaders in history would invite a tremendous amount of hostility against the already persecuted Dalits, Ambedkar removed this proposal and thus the political isolation/weakness of the Dalits was assured. Disenfranchised before the development of the Indian democracy, the subsequent treatment of Dalits was institutionally rendered possible and with less investigatory as well as prosecutory powers. Quite logically, the opinion of untouchables regarding the ability of democracy to remedy their problems is mixed. In the Irish case, the openness to Sinn



Fein (the political wing of the IRA) was not assured until the organizational capacity as well as activity of the IRA was reduced in addition to the support that they received from the Catholic-Republican community. A similar argument could be made in the African American case. Black politicians as well as African American participation in the US electoral system were not enhanced until the political spectrum in the black community was essentially purged of its most radical members (e.g. the destruction of the Black Panther Party, the All African People's Revolutionary Party with Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael), the Republic of New Africa and other black nationalists interested in anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, socialism and black nationhood). Following this, participation as well as representation increased; interestingly, this occurs without much of an improvement in the basic conditions of African Americans and a marked increase in black arrests, sentencing, and incarceration as well as failure at parole.

## Conclusion

Within this article, I have attempted to shed some light on a somewhat bizarre question: under what conditions are democracies likely to kill their citizens for political reasons? The question is bizarre because democracies are historically viewed as the resolution to state-sponsored political violence; the so-called domestic democratic peace. It is clear, however, that governments commonly classified as democracies still engage in violent activity directed against those within their jurisdiction. It is also clear that as more governments become democratic and/or use the discourse of democracies as they carry out their duties, more attention needs to be paid to the way that these political systems engage in as well as legitimate violence toward their citizens.

Toward this end, I discussed several factors that emerge from existing literature. This included (1) easily identifiable 'political threats,' (2) marginal victims, (3) the cover of legality and (4) the portrayal of small-scale and non-systematic state violence. In addition to this, I introduced three other factors that emerged from my research of state-dissident interactions within the United States, India, and Northern Ireland, noting (5) the highly decentralized structure of democracy, (6) the existence of locales which are specifically created to obscure observation, and (7) the timing of violent activity as it relates to the founding or opening of the democratic polity.

The seven factors identified have important implications for subsequent scholarship. First, *they compel researchers to disaggregate analyses, steering away from national-level examinations*. It is expected that democratic governments will treat different citizens and claims-making efforts differently as this allows them to identify and utilize examples – teaching non-targeted citizens what could happen to them if they deviate from expectations. Second, *they compel researchers to pay more attention to context and state activities in 'creating' threats* as it is not simply what occurs behaviorally within the society but how actual and potential challenges are portrayed by authorities that has an influence. Third, *they compel researchers to pay more attention to historical legacies of violent repression*. Prior state-sponsored coercive activity before a nation state is created or before a particular group is incorporated can have important implications for not only what subsequent claims-making is done but also what later government behavior will look like. Such an awareness would allow us to discern between situations where state violence is not enacted because governments (1) do not want to engage in this activity because of potential backlash, (2) do not need to engage in violence because the citizenry is already well controlled, and (3) do not need to engage in relevant action because they have viable alternatives. These outcomes are very different and they tell us very different things about political leaders and the importance of democratic institutions in controlling what these actors do.

In the final analysis, it may be difficult to overcome some of the practices found within existing literature. The lure of the nation–year is a strong one. Data are consistently collected at this level and few individuals engage in lower level data collection. Related to this, existing theories are not yet sophisticated enough in many respects to accommodate sub-state variation. Related to one of the insights discussed above, conflict and repressive behavior are much easier to see and measure than state efforts at creating/constructing threats and perceptions of order. In this context, the latter will escape detailed scrutiny. Finally, the assessment of repressive legacies is extremely underdeveloped. In part, this relates to a lack of interest in and attention to state repression in general and state violence in particular – especially within the context of political democracy, within political science as well as activist and public policy circles. In part, this relates to researchers starting their analyses after regimes come into existence, bracketing off the trajectory from one system to another. In part, this relates to a somewhat narrow conception currently held by researchers of the role that violence has in ordinary life – both during its enactment as well as afterwards. These practices need to change.

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## Notes

- 1 This is not to say that there has been no attention to lesser repressive activities, for that has not at all been the case (e.g. Cunningham, 2004; Goldstein, 1978; Soule and Davenport, 2009); rather, it is to say that that the most lethal activities of democratic governments have been less thoroughly examined.
- 2 I await a review of the qualitative literature so that I can gauge the robustness of relevant examinations.
- 3 As discussed,

to construct my dependent variable, I overlay the political terror scale (PTS) developed by Gibney and the civil liberties measure from Freedom House. Specifically, I use the information provided by the two data projects in order to classify low, medium and high values. In the case of Freedom House, the categories include 1 and 2 for the lowest levels of restriction, 3, 4 and 5 for moderate/middle-range applications, and 6 and 7 for the highest levels. Across the same categories, the values for the PTS include 1 and 2 for the lowest levels of violation, 3 for the moderate application, and 4 and 5 for the highest levels. This yields nine types of repressive behavior (Davenport, 2007a: 80).

For more detailed discussion see my book.

- 4 In later work, Tilly (2005) steps away from the general covering laws articulated above, arguing instead that the influence of dissent on repression is likely to vary according to the presence/absence of diverse mechanisms.
- 5 These two would be grouped together because both have problems with governance and effectively wielding the mechanisms of socio-political control normally associated with governments.
- 6 These were enacted by local political authorities and/or were directly allowed by them.
- 7 In short,

the *varna* system divided the ancient Hindu society into initially four . . . distinct (castes), that are mutually exclusive, hereditary, endogamous and occupation specific: *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriya* (warriors and royalty), *Vaisya* (traders, merchants, moneylenders) and *Sudras* (those engaged in menial, lowly jobs) (Deshpande, 2000: 383–4).

To this, they add a category for ‘those doing the most despicable menial jobs’ (Deshpande, 2000: 383–4) – the *Ati Sudra* or untouchables, known as Dalits.

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