Repression*

Gerard Padró i Miquel† and Nancy Qian‡

February 3, 2025

Abstract

We provide a conceptual framework built around the notion of the political project of the state to embed a precise definition of political repression. We discuss selection bias introduced by measures of repression that rely on observed acts of physical coercion, and argue that the inverse of human rights is a good alternative measure. The data and proposed framework are used to document and interpret two known stylized facts: 1) repression is higher in autocracies; and 2) repression has declined since the 1990s. We then discuss under-researched aspects and limitations of some repressive tools, and the difficulties inherent in evaluating whether an episode of repression is successful or not.

1 Introduction

From the dawn of political order, repression has been a ubiquitous practice of rulers. History is full of examples of governments threatening or meting out different forms of physical coercion on their citizens for the purpose of maintaining political control.

*We thank Guilherme Neri for invaluable research assistance. All mistakes are our own.

†gerard.padroimiquel@yale.edu

‡nancy.qian@kellogg.northwestern.edu

Repression can be individually targeted such as with the assassination or incarceration of journalists or it can be targeted to groups such as in the persecution of ethnic or religious minorities. It can also be utterly indiscriminate. Repression can be reactive as when a demonstration is violently broken up, or it can be preemptive such as when a political party or organization is disbanded before it has engaged in any politically threatening activity.

The main goal of this chapter is to provide a framework to properly conceptualize repression. The framework links repression with its ultimate motivation and thus derives predictions regarding repression intensity. It also highlights a fundamental problem in measuring the intensity of repression and in determining whether a particular repressive episode is successful or not. We put the framework to use in explaining several empirical regularities present in the literature and suggest several avenues for further research.

Section 2 lays out the conceptual framework which encompasses our definition of repression. We introduce the notion of the *political project*, which is the set of outcomes that states pursue by implementing a suite of policies. Implicitly, the existing theoretical literature has assumed the political project of autocrats to be limited to political survival or rent seeking. However, most political projects go beyond these to also pursue a certain degree of *social transformation*. Indeed, driven by ideology, many political leaders in history have keenly attempted to reshape the social, political and economic structure of their countries in ways that go beyond maximizing political survival or increasing personal rents. For example, the communist revolutions of 20th century Russia and China aimed to change the mode of living and economic activity for all members of society. These extreme policies were not particularly lucrative for these revolutionaries and, if anything, increased the difficulty of political survival relative to a counterfactual of policies closer to the status quo and the preferences of the majority

of the population.

The implementation of a political project requires a degree of compliance from the population, which is acquired by exerting political control. *Repression* is one of the tools of political control, and complements others, such as censorship or indoctrination. Importantly, the more extreme is the political project, the more likely it is to impose high costs on the population. These costs motivate resistance against the state. More social resistance implies that more repression is necessary to maintain political control. This relationship between the political project of the state and the expected level of repression is the main output of the framework and we use it next to interpret several empirical patterns and historical episodes.

Section 3 discusses the empirical analysis of repression. First, we argue that measures of repression which are counts of coercive acts performed or observed will typically mismeasure the extent of repression, particularly where repression is effective. Due to the deterrent effect of physical coercion, the most repressive regimes may not be the ones deploying repression with the highest observed frequency. In addition, these regimes may also be the most apt at preventing information about expended repression from becoming public. Instead, we prefer to use the absence of human rights protection to measure repression. This takes into account the threat of coercion and information control by the regime. Using such a measure, we revisit two previously noted stylized facts. First, there is more repression in autocracies. Second, repression has declined precipitously since the 1990s. Interpreted through the lens of our framework, the first pattern reflects the constraint that the preferences of the majority place on democratic governments, which limit democratic political projects to those which are not exceedingly costly to the population. The second pattern coincides in time with the demise of the Soviet Union and the general abandonment of projects of radical social transformation. The subsequent aims of most autocrats have become more modest and moderate

and therefore generally less repression has been needed in their pursuit.

Section 4 discusses the less widely examined tools of repression and their limitations. The existing literature has focused on arrests and killings. However, to repress the population, states have often resorted to migration control. This control comes in two versions. First, migration control can prevent people's mobility. This limits the flow of information and undermines the coordination and spreading of social resistance. Second, forced migration has been deployed, as preemption or punishment, to dilute social resistance. We also consider the important issue of targeting repression and its relationship with backlash against repression. We discuss how targeting is often done on the basis of characteristics such as ethnicity or religion. This complements "divide and conquer" tactics, which was popular with European colonial powers, and can weaken the resistance to the state by widening societal divisions. We also discuss how indoctrination is a way of dealing with resistance that arises from within the state. As the literature has long recognized, this resistance is particularly problematic because state specialists in repression can turn against the leadership.

Section 5 builds on the concepts discussed in the earlier sections to consider what it means for repression to be successful. The literature has focused on political survival, but this is minimalistic. We argue that it should conceptually depend on the political project. Specifically, repression is successful to the extent that project implementation is not curtailed by societal resistance. For any discussion of "success" or "failure" of repression, it is also necessary to state the time horizon that is being considered. In the long-run, the social transformation aspect of the political project can adapt in response to resistance, and this can help the survival of the political leader or regime. In cases like this, evaluations of success will depend on the weights assigned to the social transformation versus political survival. It is important to note that success, the way that it is conceived in this chapter, is distinct from welfare. The evaluation of whether

repression is successful in our framework is distinct from asking whether it was optimal.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Political Project

The central concept we introduce in this conceptual framework is the *political project* of the state. Political projects consist of the social and political outcomes states pursue, and the suite of policies implemented to accomplish them. In a nutshell, political projects are what governments seek to do with their allotted power. Political projects are highly varied across time and space. Some are minimal and simply amount to ensuring political survival, that is, the persistence of the leader or regime. Indeed, political survival, often with the added objective of rent-seeking, are the political projects that the theoretical literature on autocratic politics has mostly focused on in the last three decades.

We argue that political projects almost always go beyond survival and rent-seeking. Instead, political projects often involve a degree of *social transformation*. The historical record is full of examples where powerful ideological objectives drive leaders to dramatically change the economy, the politics and the whole of society. The socialist revolutions of the early and mid-20th century provide stark examples. Fidel Castro in Cuba, Lenin in the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong in China, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and Pol Pot in Cambodia did not (only) want power and personal wealth. They pursued a program of wholesale reform of the social, ideological and economic mores of their respective societies. Similarly, at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum to the communist revolutions, 20th century fascist totalitarian dictatorships and reactionary right-wing autocracies also imposed new social norms and economic arrangements onto their societies.

Examples of social transformation projects are also often found in earlier in history. The European religious conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries had, at their core, the desire of governments to reshape society. The Protestant belief that divine communication can side-step the Catholic Church motivated states' efforts to undermine the Church and upend the belief system and the social and economic fabric that had been woven around it over the previous centuries. Political leaders who pursued Protestant transformations, such as England's Henry VIII (1491 and 1547), who separated the monarchy from the Catholic Church, and Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), who abolished the monarchy altogether, completely upended the political balance of power in England between the monarchy, the nobles, and the Church in the pursuit of a very different polity. Another example of an extreme political project is the French Revolution. In addition to transforming France from the *ancien regime* to a Republic, it imposed a new social and economic order onto the population. The revolutionaries wanted more than power and wealth. They wanted to fully reshape the French society and economy.

It is important to note that Democratic governments also pursue political projects besides seeking re-election. Through regulation, and their tax and redistribution capacity, democratic governments routinely seek policy objectives that reshape their societies. The European Welfare State, which emerged after World War II, is such an example. In stark contrast to the beginning of the 20th century, western and northern European states systematically and progressively intervened in the market in order to increase the bargaining power of workers, induce large scale redistribution and provide universal social insurance.

For the sake of succinctness, in this chapter we take the political project that states pursue as given and focus on the consequences it has for repression.

2.2 Political Control

To implement the political project, the state needs to establish and maintain *political control* (Hassan et al., 2022). A state has political control when it is assured that it commands broad compliance from society. Repression is a subset of the tools that states deploy to establish political control. Other tools include biasing or censoring the information citizens can access, co-opting pivotal groups or individuals with transfers (or threatening exclusion from the welfare transfer system), and deploying means of ideological persuasion or indoctrination.[1]

Political control encompasses the full set of tools that the state deploys *vis-a-vis* society, while its close cousin, state capacity, tends to focus on the inner workings of the state, though these two concepts can overlap according to some definitions (e.g., Besley and Persson, 2009 versus Migdal, 1988). When a state pursues any policy objective, such as taxation, it typically requires both a sufficient level of state capacity (e.g., a bureaucracy competent enough to track and pursue the tax base) and the political control necessary for ensuring compliance and quelling resistance.

2.3 Defining Repression

Having introduced these concepts we can now define and characterize repression.

Repression is the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization that is

1. Used to stop activities and/or beliefs perceived to politically challenge the furtherance of the state's political project

2. Within the territorial jurisdiction of the state.[2]

[1] See Mares and Young (2019) and Cantoni et al. (2017) for recent studies of economic coercion and indoctrination, respectively.

[2] This definition borrows partly from Davenport (2007) which itself derives from Goldstein (1978).

It is important to examine what our definition includes and what it excludes. First, we follow the existing literature in circumscribing the definition to *physical coercion*, which can take the form of physical violence but also includes restrictions to free mobility such as imprisonment, deportation or forced migration. Strictly speaking, then, the censoring of information is conceptually distinct from repression. However, censorship can overlap with repression when it is enforced by threats of arrest or violence on journalists who flout the censors.

Second, repression includes not only realized coercion, but also the threat of sanctions. Realized physical sanctions are an equilibrium object which requires citizens to deviate from the state's prescribed behavior and then be repressed as a consequence. If the repressive apparatus is so efficient that citizens do not dare to deviate in the first place, sanctions need only be imposed infrequently along the equilibrium path. A regime may thus be intensively repressive and yet few instances of physical coercion meted out may be observed. This introduces an important empirical measurement problem which we will discuss below.

Third, we consider repression to take place within the territorial jurisdiction of the state. This clause is meant to exclude situations of open civil warfare where territorial jurisdiction is severely challenged in time or space. There is a large literature on civil war which has its own distinct logic.[3] This being said, repression and open conflict often coexist within the borders of a country in civil war, and the form of violence may mutate as a situation evolves. For example, what began as a classical instance of repression against anti-regime demonstrations in Syria in March, 2011, escalated into a civil war that led to the Bashar al-Assad-led state losing control of large swaths of the country and eventually falling in 2024. Backlash to repression is not uncommon and is a phenomenon which we discuss further in Section 4.

[3]See Blattman and Miguel (2010).

Fourth, repression is intimately linked with the political project of the state. As a government deploys policies and prescribes behavior, it needs to be able to punish those who do conform in order to motivate compliance. But not all punishment is repression. Crucially, repression occurs when physical coercion is exercised against a resistance that challenges the political project. In other words, the jailing of a petty thief is not an instance of repression.

To illustrate the distinction, consider tax enforcement. Taxation is a key source of revenue for any government and thus necessary for any political project. To motivate compliance, individuals who evade taxes must be identified and punished. Some instances of punishment are just part of the normal business of running a state, while others constitute repression. For example, consider Al Capone, who evaded taxes in pursuit of individual gain without designs for the rest of society or government. His subversion was not motivated by political resistance or to challenge the American political leadership. Nor was his imprisonment in 1933 motivated by U.S. President Herbert Hoover's or the Republican Party's need to repress political opposition. Therefore, according to our definition, Al Capone was not repressed when he was sentenced to eleven years of federal prison for tax evasion.

In contrast, consider the example of politically motivated tax resistance in the British Empire. In America, the Boston Tea Party (1773) was a political act, and the ensuing Coercive Acts (1774) implemented by the British where designed to keep political control of the colony and thus repressive. A similar example of politically motivated tax resistance took place in 1930 amidst India's fight for independence from the British Empire. Gandhi famously led tens of thousands in the *Salt Satyagraha*, a march to the Arabian Sea town of Dandi to defy the British Empire's salt tax by "illegally" harvesting salt. This inspired civil disobedience across India. The British repressed this political resistance by arresting over 60,000 individuals, including Gandhi. Note

that the imprisonment of such numbers required a large and functional police force, comprised of British-led Indian men, in addition to a military, as well as an effective bureaucracy. Thus, this example also illustrates the complementarity between state capacity and repression in achieving political control.

Nazi Germany (1933-45) provides an example of how violence may be simultaneously deployed for repressive and non-repressive purposes. The Nazi regime systematically repressed political opposition. Journalists, priests, civic leaders and others who opposed the state were killed, arrested, intimidated, beaten or detained in concentration camps. Many who would have politically resisted the regime were additionally repressed by the threat of such treatment. In addition, the Nazi regime also killed many people for other reasons. Most of the seventeen million people killed during the Holocaust, such as the six million Jews, 5.7 million Soviet Civilians, 375,000 Gypsies and 250,000 disabled people were not killed because they politically resisted the regime. They were killed because of Nazi ideology about who was "worthy" of life and racial supremacy. In other words, they were killed as part of the political project, not because they politically resisted it. Therefore, *genocide* and political repression are conceptually distinct, even though they may overlap in time and target population.

2.4 Repression and the Social Costs of the Political Project

In addition to providing conceptual clarity, this framework points to an important relationship between the political project and the expected level of repression. The reason is that political projects, by their very nature, are costly to society as they impose changes and restrictions in behavior, consumption and beliefs on the citizenry. These costs often beget political resistance which the state then represses.

The costs that political projects impose on society come in a wide variety of forms. Economic costs are the most obvious. To the extent that a project interferes with

market functions or involves intense rent-seeking (e.g., by introducing frictions in the labor or capital markets or simply by allowing widespread corruption), it often reduces average consumption in the population. But costs to citizens encompass more than just narrowly defined economic costs. A project of racial supremacy, for example, may forbid miscegenation or require segregation in schools and residential communities. A conservative religious project may impose restrictions such as dress codes or not allow women to attend school. Even a project of economic modernization, which may include elements such as the construction of canals or dams, imposes costs of forced displacement that go beyond usual economic cost accounting for some populations.

Some projects encompass broad and sweeping departures from the status quo which upend all dimensions of citizens' lives and thus impose widespread and intense costs to a large share of society. These "deeply transformative" projects tend to be bolstered by complete ideological frameworks.[4] Consider the early 20th century Communist revolutions that intended to fully upend the social and economic structure of society, remove individual property rights and banish certain belief systems. In the Soviet Union and China, for example, private wealth and land were confiscated, trade and markets were abolished and a substantial share of the population had to give up their way of life and former modes of economic production. For example, the Soviets forced Kazakhs and other traditional nomads, to live and farm in agricultural settlements. Besides the direct economic costs of these reforms, identities, ideology and centuries-old social mores were challenged, and many populations were forcibly displaced.

Note that even projects which in hindsight may be considered beneficial for a broad swath of the population may impose significant burdens in the short term. In the process of improving land use and productivity in England and Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries, land was drained and consolidated to allow the introduction of

[4]See Linz (2000) for a taxonomy of autocratic rule which is germane to this category.

crop rotation and other technological advances. However, this process also implied the enclosure of common land as well as the forcible clearance of thousands of people. This led to destitution for many former tenants and even contributed to the Great Highland Famine and large waves of economically driven migration. The gains in productivity and the subsequent capital accumulation helped to accelerate the industrial revolution and achieve modern economic growth. But this future success does not detract from costs endured by those affected in the short run.

Unsurprisingly, the costs that political projects impose on the population engender resistance. This resistance often becomes political: it organizes around the idea of effecting changes in the political project, frequently by forcing a replacement in the political leadership. It is the prevention or quelling of such resistance that motivates states to repress.

To conceptualize the link between the costs of the political project and political resistance, it is helpful, albeit somewhat reductionist, to think in terms of an individual calculus of costs and benefits. The benefit of resisting is the probability of effecting change on the current political project multiplied by the change in costs borne as the political project is replaced. For example, a political project may be kleptocratic, thus imposing costs in the form of lower consumption as well as the daily humiliations of dealing with official corruption. Replacing the ruler may bring about, in expectation, a less venal government which allows for a higher level of private consumption and cracks down on corruption. The difference in costs of living under one political project and the other are included in the benefits of resistance.[5] Joining resistance activities, however, increases the probability of being a target of repression and thus suffering the physical sanctions we have described. The balance of these benefits and costs, which are typically not uniformly distributed across the population, determine the strength

[5]For the sake of simplicity, in this discussion we abstract away from the important problem of collective action.

of the challenge to the political project.

Thus, it follows that features of the political project pursued by the state, and specifically, how costly it is for society, are causally related to the intensity of political control that the state needs to wield. All else equal, if a political project imposes larger costs to a larger share of the population, we would expect more citizens to engage in resistance as a large mass of people are tipped over the individual calculus just described. To meet this challenge, states which pursue costly political projects need a more efficient and intense repressive apparatus to deter active resistance or stop it when it happens.

Deeply transformative political projects such as Communism will typically require behavioral changes which impose high costs to a very large share of the population. Consequently, these projects are not viable if they are not backed by intense efforts in maintaining political control.

Alternatively, a political project which is aligned with the preferences of a majority of the population imposes only mild costs to most citizens. While a minority may bear disproportionate costs, resistance should be localized and hence should be easier to address. A government that follows such a project should thus face limited institution-threatening social resistance and hence does not need to deploy high levels of repression.

In a nutshell, we expect repression intensity, actual or threatened, to be positively associated with the costs that the political project imposes onto society, where the intervening variable is the actual or expected political resistance that the citizenry mounts.

3 Empirical Patterns

3.1 Measurement

Empirical studies of repression, which have mostly been in the political science literature, have measured repression by observing acts of physical coercion. For example, González et al. (2024) measures repression using data from the Truth and Justice Commission, which documents human rights violations under Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship in Paraguay, including detentions, torture, disappearances, and executions. Rozenas, Talibova, et al. (2024) measures repression using the Memorial database, which documents over two million arrests during Stalin's pre-war purges across Soviet Russia. Keremoğlu et al. (2022) uses the Mass Mobilization in Autocracies Database (MMAD) and measures repression using observed state response - presence of security forces without intervention, physical repression (e.g., crowd dispersals or arrests), and lethal repression.

These and other measures of coercive acts capture repression when it manifests as observable physical sanction. This implies two limitations caused by selection. First, they will not capture repression when it manifests as threats. As we discussed in the previous chapter, repression can be achieved when those who would resist are deterred by their fear of the threat of punishment. Direct measures of repressive acts can miss repression that is achieved with little violence, which is often the most successful repressions. North Korea is one of the most repressive regimes in the world, so much that the amount of political resistance is probably much more subdued than if it were slightly less repressive.

Second, repressive governments can obscure their coercive acts. As with repression without violence, the most repressive governments are likely to be the most successful in such obfuscation. Consider the Great Soviet Famine, where 5.7 to 10 million per-

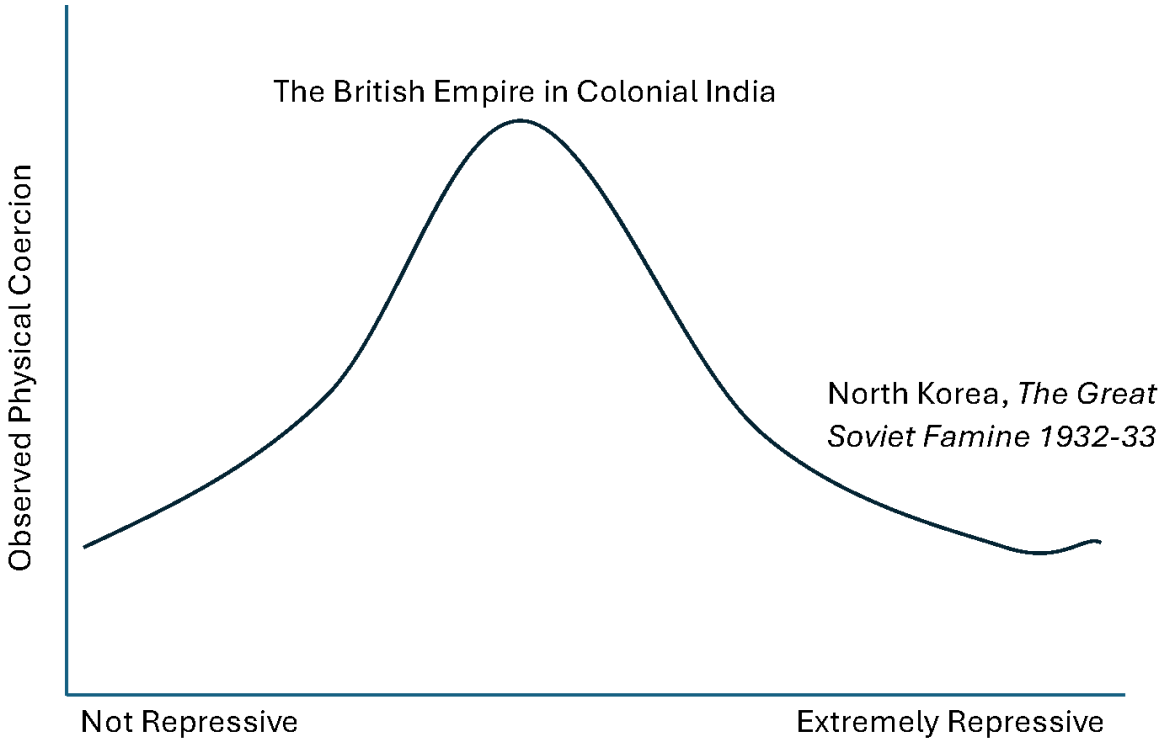
ished from starvation during 1932-33, around half of whom were in Ukraine, leading the Ukrainians to refer to the tragedy as *Holodomor* (death by starvation in Ukrainian) Markevich et al. (2024). The Soviet government denied the famine and insisted that Ukrainian population actually grew during this period, and punished mentions of the famine with imprisonment in the Gulags. The U.S. and British media and governments parroted the official Soviet version. The Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Walter Duranty, wrote in the *New York Times* in 1932 that "there is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation". To promote famine-denial propaganda, the Soviet government organized staged visits for invited foreign dignitaries in 1933. Based on such visits, the British Foreign Office stated that there was no famine in Ukraine and the French Prime Minister Eduard Herriot described that Ukraine was "like a garden in full bloom". They were supported by notable individuals such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. The observations of famine made by Welsh journalist, Gareth Jones, who left the official program and walked by himself through villages and collective farms, were widely ignored and criticized by Western media and politicians.[6]

Thus, sole reliance on observed physical coercion to measure repression likely causes researchers to miss the extent of repression in most highly repressive regimes. Figure 1 characterizes the relationship between the level of observed violence and the level of repression predicted by our framework. We expect to observe low levels of realized physical coercion in states that rely little on repression and the highest levels of coercion in "moderately" repressive states. In states that are extremely repressive, we observe less physical coercion than in moderate repression because the threat of coercion is sufficient for silencing political opposition and, or because the state effectively suppresses information about its coercive acts.

An alternative measure of repression that is less susceptible to selection problems

[6]Werth et al. (1999).

Figure 1: Repression and Observed Physical Coercion



is the inverse of human rights as in Frantz et al. (2020). Popular human rights indices such as the Political Terror Scores published by Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department account for people's rights to express their views without the fear of imprisonment, torture or death. Thus, its inverse accounts for extreme repression when the threats do not manifest into coercive actions because the population are so fearful that they do not resist. Recent definitions of human rights have broadened to take into account the freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of movement Fariss (2014).[7] The broader definition can account for cases such as the Soviet famine, when information and mobility were strictly controlled.

The main advantage of this measure is that it is less biased by selection and more likely to correctly capture the level of repression in extremely repressive states. It has two main disadvantages. The first is that it is an indirect measure of repression. Repression is inferred from the deprivation of freedoms and not directly observed. The second is that human rights indices are subjective, and therefore noisy, and can be biased by the political motivations of the reporting agencies.[8]

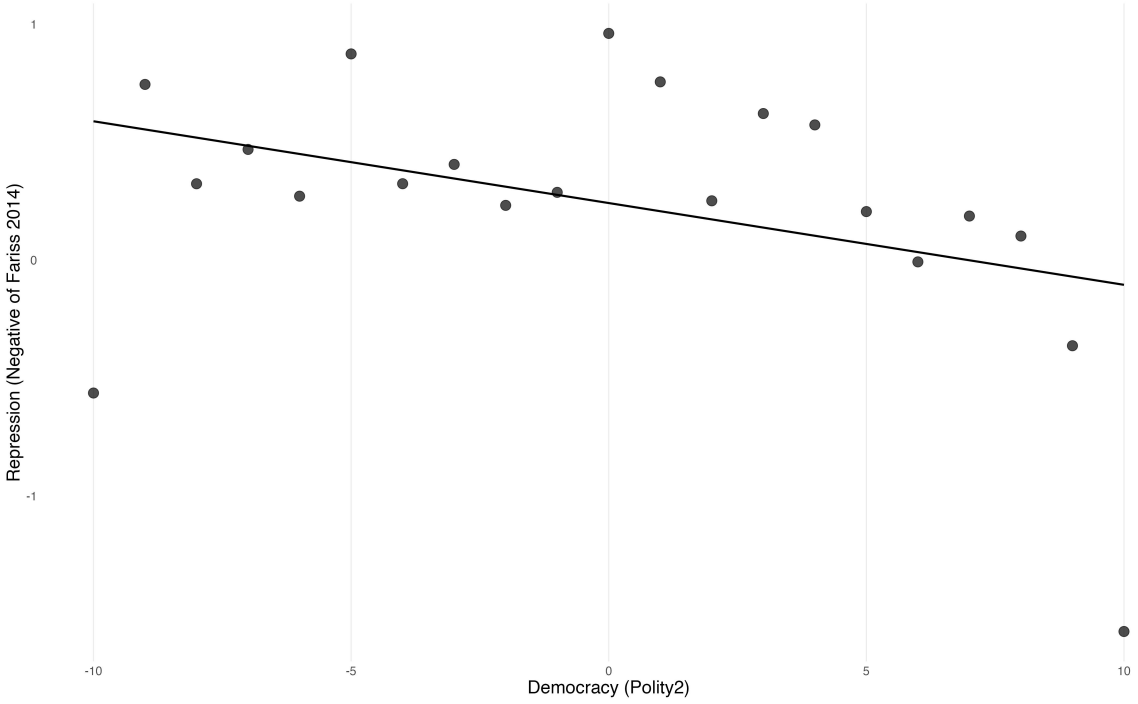
3.2 Empirical Patterns

We construct a measure of repression using the Fariss (2014) measure of Human Protection Score (HPS), a balanced panel of 201 countries over 74 years (1946-2019). The HPS ranges from -3.46 (Rwanda 1994) to 5.34 (Luxembourg 2012) in our sample. We convert it into a measure of repression by multiplying it by negative one, $repression = -1(HPS)$. Using this measure, we document two stylized facts that have been noted in existing studies and interpret them through the lens of our frame-

[7]These new measures also account for difference in the data generation process over time and across space. See Fariss et al. (2015) for a discussion of these data.

[8]Qian and Yanagizawa-Drott (2009, 2017) document that the U.S. State Department Political Terror Score was biased by U.S. strategic objectives during the 1980s.

Figure 2: Repression vs. Polity 2



work.

Fact 1: There is More Repression in Autocracies

Figure 2 is a bin scatter plot of repression against the extent of autocracy. We measure autocracy using the Polity2 variable for constraints on the executive from the Polity IV project, which ranges from -10 to 10, with lower scores reflecting a more autocratic state. For example, in our sample the United States has a constant score of 10 through the whole period of analysis. China has a max Polity 2 score of -5 in 1946-48 and a minimum Polity 2 score of -9 in 1966-68. Both repression and Polity 2 are available at the country and year level. We calculate the average level of repression for each Polity 2 score and then plot average repression against the Polity 2 index. The figure shows that there is more repression in autocracies less in democracies.

Viewed through the lens of our framework, this stylized fact is explained by the fact

that democracies and autocracies to systematically differ in the political projects they pursue. More specifically, we should expect democracies to be less likely to implement political projects that inflict large costs on the population. By definition, political projects in democracies must enjoy broad social consent. A political project that is very costly to a majority of the population has little chances of being the outcome of a properly democratic electoral process. This broad support in turn means that the share of citizens with the motivation to resist the political process should be small and hence there is no need for intense repression.

This does not preclude Democracies from repressing subsets of the population. Indeed, to the extent that a democracy is underpinned by majoritarian institutions, policies that impose substantial costs on minorities can be an electoral equilibrium. Consider, for example, pre-1965 United states. The political project at the time included the assertion of white racial supremacy. Substantial costs were imposed on non-white racial minorities, and in particular, the Black population. Black voters were effectively disenfranchised, labor market discrimination lowered Black wages, segregation excluded Blacks from public goods, and discrimination subjected Black men and women to significant violence that were state sanctioned (e.g., the police) or from non-state entities (e.g., the Ku Kux Klan). Since Jim Crow laws were a reaction to the surge in Black political participation during the post-Civil War Republican Era, they constitute an example of political repression.

While democracies may be repressive against a minority, the consent from a majority that is needed for equilibrium policies puts an upper bound to the overall costs to society, and hence the associated repression, in a democracy. No such presumption exists for autocracies. The fact that political projects in autocracies do not require broad social approval means that states may pursue agendas that are very costly to a large share of the population. "Transformative" ideologies such as Communism or Fascism

were implementable despite the enormous social costs that were imposed precisely because they did not need ongoing approval from society at large. More modest dictators can introduce large economic inefficiencies to pursue rent-seeking because they do not need the support of a majority to remain in power. Political projects in autocracies can thus be more costly to societies than in democracies. Consequently, the framework predicts repression to be more intense in the former than in the latter.

One of the greatest puzzles in modern history has been why the ideas of Marx and Engels's *Communist Manisfesto*, which was motivated by the experiences of countries with industrialized economies and quasi-democratic institutions such as the Great Britain, were most rigorously implemented by countries with agrarian economies and totalitarian rulers such as the Bolsheviks in Russia. Our framework suggests that it is only the latter that can implement political projects that impose such wide-ranging costs on the population.

Another reason to expect less repression in democracies is that it is easier for the population to influence policy through institutionalized channels. This lessens the need for resistance, and, in turn, reduces motivation for repression. Democracies are characterized by providing institutionalized avenues for change in the political project that is being pursued. Without having to entirely replace the regime, citizens can express their disapproval with particular aspects of the political project by voting for a platform that promises a different course of policy action. This has two additional effects on the expected level of repression. First, disapproval can be expressed within the system and does not need to be organized in the form of a challenge to the existing political order. Typically, opposition parties will absorb the complaints and present an alternative political project which citizens can approve. This puts an institutional limit to the costs the political project of the incumbent can inflict. Second, the ability to institutionally modify the political project allows for learning. Should a policy or element of the politi-

cal project prove too costly to too large a majority, the political dynamics of democracy react to accommodate change within the system. Hence, both statically (in the types of political projects that typically win elections) and dynamically (if there are changes in the environment which increase the costs of existing political projects) democracies tend to the path of least societal resistance.

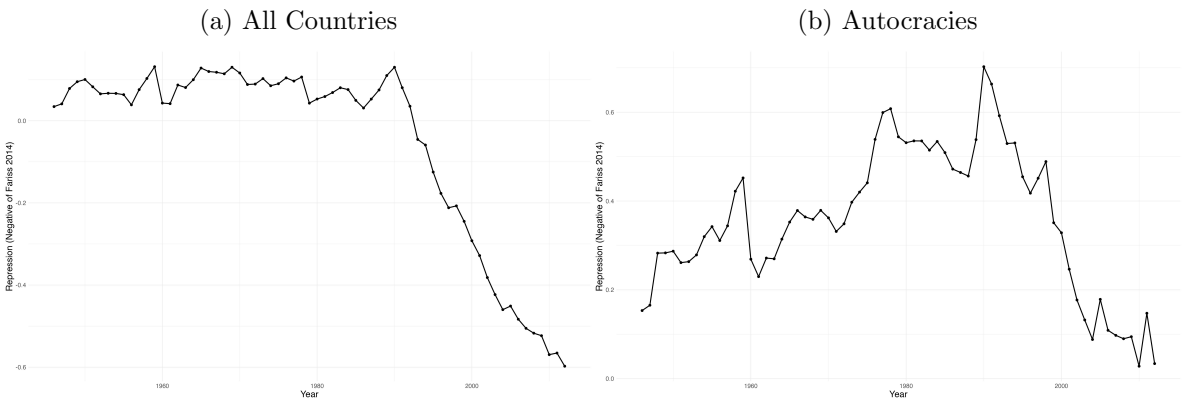
The struggle for Civil Rights in the United States provides such an example of dynamic adjustment. While the costs were widely believed to be circumscribed to racial minorities, the racist aspect of the political project endured. But at critical moments, such as during World War II, the cost of racial discrimination spilled over to white Americans as it undermined the motivation of Black men to join the war effort (Qian and Tabellini, 2021). Recognizing the value of motivated Black participation, the military desegregated in 1948. It still took nearly another twenty years before the Civil Rights Act passed Congress in 1965. Arguably, this was the time it took for a significant enough share of the majority to recognize the broader costs of the policies associated with maintaining racial discrimination.

In summary, political projects which inflict large costs on society are more likely to be pursued by autocracies than by democracies. Other things equal, it follows that we expect more repression in autocracies as compared to democracies, just as the empirical pattern shows.

Fact 2: Repression Started to Decline in the 1990s

Figure 3a documents average repression across countries over time. Repression was roughly constant from 1946 until 1990, after which there is a clear monotonic decline. Figure 3b restricts the sample to autocracies, defined as regimes with Polity2<0. We find that after the 1990s, repression declines steeply in autocracies. Note that we allow Polity2 to vary over time for each country. Thus, the patterns are not driven by

Figure 3: Repression over Time



selection of countries out of or into the autocracy sample. Rather, they are driven by repression declining in both types of regimes. This pattern is consistent with Guriev and Treisman (2019, 2022), which documents a similar pattern of decline using other measures of observed repression, such as political assassinations and imprisonment.

From the point of view of our framework, this pattern can be readily explained by a change in the nature of the political projects that autocracies try to implement. The ideologies that fueled deeply transformative projects in the 20th century are on the wane.[9] This is particularly the case for Communism. The fall and dismemberment of the Soviet Union reduced the appeal of a centrally planned economy in two ways. On the one hand, the obvious public failure of this political project meant state leaders had to update on the actual outcomes that this political project could achieve. On the other hand, since the Soviet Union was the main international backer of governments with similar political projects, its fall meant that believers in these projects had lower probability of being in power. It is telling that the trend break in repression takes places exactly around the time of this historical event.

Consistent with this view, Guriev and Treisman (2019) provide evidence that the

[9] A note of caution is needed as the return of right-wing populism may be a harbinger of things to come.

share of autocracies with official ideologies also sharply declines with the end of the Cold War. Making a distinction between official ideology and indoctrination efforts is useful here. Official ideology reflects the political project that the state is pursuing. Indoctrination is instead a tool of political control. Re-education programs, banning of alternative political parties and ideas, censorship of information contrary to the official line are all, together with repression, deployed to ensure social acquiescence. Trying to implement an ideologically driven transformative political project necessitates intense use of all dimensions of political control, from repression to censorship and indoctrination. The drop in the share of ideological autocracies suggests that many modern autocrats have modest political projects centered around political survival and rent-seeking. It makes sense that this period has seen the rise of informational autocrats which deploy subtle censorship and information manipulation, seldom engage in indoctrination and open violence and who even mimic democratic elements such as elections and a semblance of due process. Since these autocrats are trying to accomplish less social transformation, they inflict lower social costs, and their projects are sustainable at lower levels of repression, censorship and indoctrination.

The demise of communism also contributed to a decline in repression by extreme right wing governments. The spread of communism and socialism in places such as Latin America, Africa and South Asia, had meant that many who expected to suffer under leftist political projects backed right-wing autocracies. Political resistance to these right-wing political projects was met with harsh repression. With the waning of left-wing ideology, there was less need for reactionary and repressive right-wing autocracies.[10]

[10]See Acemoglu and Robinson (2005) for a full-length treatment of regime transition based on elite-population redistributive tensions.

4 Tools and Targets of Repression

4.1 Policy Tools for Repression

Repression can be achieved through various means which partly depend on the source of resistance. In the pursuit of political projects, resistance can be broadly construed as emanating from two different constituencies, without the state (the population at large) and within the state (bureaucracy, military, security forces, etc.). Gehlbach et al. (2016) and Egorov and Sonin (2024) provide very useful surveys of relevant theoretical considerations when states attempt to exert political control over these two sets of agents. In what follows we widen the scope beyond the existing literature to consider other theoretical concerns and empirical phenomena.

Repression of the Population Existing studies have focused on repression of collective actions such as mass demonstrations and riots. The tools under consideration have thus been arrests and killings of participants, in order to increase costs and complicate coordination in environments with imperfect information. There is relatively much less emphasis on other tools of physical restraint such as migration control. However, history provides abundant examples of forced migration of entire groups.

Forced Migration sometimes takes the form of *preemptive repression*, when the objective is to preclude a group from mounting a political challenge. The Chinese Qing Dynasty (1636 - 1912) created an expansive empire that included a Han ethnic majority as well as many other ethnic groups. These groups, particularly the ones from the steppes that had historically and often successfully invaded China, were viewed with wariness as potential challengers of the Qing, who were themselves non-Han invaders from Manchuria. One of the strategies that the Qing employed to dilute the potential resistance was to forcibly move individuals from these ethnic groups, such as ethnic

Mongols, into the Han-occupied population center.

Alternatively, forced migration can be group-level punishment for real or perceived challenges to the political project such as the forced relocation of Crimean Tatars by Stalin in 1944.

Finally, it can be a combination of preemption, punishment, and the nature of the political project itself. Consider the United States. Since the administration of U.S. president James Monroe (in office 1816-1820), the American Political Project became one of western expansion, becoming a continent-spanning state. Opposing this was the American Indian population who had been living on these lands since before the arrival of Europeans. The American government responded to resistance with coercive negotiations, armed conflicts, and eventually, complete Indian Removal. Under Monroe, this began as a plan to give incentives to American Indians east of the Mississippi to move to designated Indian territories in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Andrew Jackson's administration was much more aggressive. After the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830, the "Five Civilized Tribes" (Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee), most of whom lived east of the Mississippi, were forcibly removed and relocated in the West.

Migration control can also come in the form of preventing people from moving. The Soviet Union famously introduced an internal passport system in December, 1932, to urban residents to help the government keep account of the flow of people. In 1937, headshots were added to the passport to help identification. This reduced the ability of people to move from different parts of the country and physically coalesce into effective resistance. It also limited the flow of information which aided repression by limiting the spread of defiance across groups. During the Great Soviet Famine (1931-33), Moscow imposed strict migration controls around the regions that suffered famine most severely. This prevented the rest of the population from learning about the famine. By 1953,

urban residents were not allowed to leave their home cities for more than thirty days without official permission.

Repression within the State The political leadership must also be wary of resistance from within the state. History provides many examples of leaders being overthrown by their own militaries (armed state functionaries) or bureaucrats. There is a rich, mostly theoretical, literature that has focused on the fundamental dilemma that the leader faces with respect to the state. On the one hand, an efficient and powerful state is necessary to pursue the political project. On the other hand, elements of a competent and well-organized state could themselves become challengers to the leader. This important loyalty-competence trade-off identified by the literature is particularly salient when it comes to repression because efficiently identifying the targets of repression, as we discuss below, is crucial.[11]

Indoctrination of the repressive apparatus is a tool of political control widely deployed within the state and generally ignored in the literature of repression. China provides a prime example. It created one of the first and most effective bureaucracies in the pre-modern world and introduced competitive examinations as a tool for selecting competent and ideologically aligned bureaucrats. The Confucian classics that formed the basis of the exams centered on the paramount need to maintain political order and the social equilibrium. These ideas were indoctrinated on prospective bureaucrats during training in the Academies. A shocking episode illustrates the importance of dealing harshly with ideological deviancy within the bureaucracy. An interpretation of Mencius teachings that contends that the rule of the Emperor is only legitimate when it serves the people became popular among scholars in the fourteenth century. The first Ming Emperor, Hongwu (1368-1398 CE), reacted swiftly to the spread of this idea. He

[11]We refer the reader to the literature reviews we listed above.

repressed Academy scholars and bureaucrats who upheld this view in a famous purge that included the execution of 7,000 bureaucrats in just 1376 CE, and 15,000 bureaucrats and their family members in 1380 CE. He also changed the Academy curriculum and future examination questions to omit the teachings of Mencius.

These purges highlight the importance of ideology in the state apparatus. This is particularly important when dealing with the repressive apparatus, as illustrated by the successive round of the Great Purge under Stalin. While the literature provides analyses of purge dynamics in authoritarian settings, interactions of this kind of repression that focus on ideological conformity have not been explored.[12]

4.2 Targets of Repression

4.2.1 Targeting and Backlash

A key challenge to repression stems from asymmetric information. The theoretical literature (Wintrobe, 1998) has highlighted an important dilemma that dictators face at the time of imposing political control. Namely, censorship and other tools of information control can blind the leadership from the level of social discontent which can then suddenly burst in ways that are hard to repress *ex post.* Here, we focus on another informational issue which has received less attention: the need to target repression.

The first reason that precise targeting of repressive activities is necessary is plain cost efficiency. Repression is costly as it requires manpower and inflicts physical costs on the victims. Being able to figure out exactly who to target with repression can therefore result in cost savings. Thus, it is not surprising that repressive states tend to infiltrate society to gather information on resistance activities.[13] This cost-saving effect is one of the ways that new information technologies can be complementary to

[12]Acemoglu et al. (2008; 2012), Montagnes and Wolton (2019).

[13]See Mattingly (2019) for an account of how the Chinese Comunist Party penetrates and coopts society in rural China.

repressive activities.[14]

There is a second, perhaps even more important, reason why precise targeting is essential to repression. If repression is indiscriminate, it will affect the lives of people who are not participating in political resistance. Returning to the framework, this implies that the pursuit of the political project inflicts higher costs on the population at large since the costs of repression must be added to the original costs of the project. This runs the risk of tilting the calculus of resistance of an additional fraction of the population who was originally ready to acquiesce. This phenomenon of added resistance in reaction to increased repression is often called "backlash" and there are numerous historical and contemporary instances in which backlash occurs and is detrimental to the repressor.

The American Revolution provides a good example. In 1770, colonists rebelled against highly unpopular British taxes. Protesters would often attack stores selling British goods. The rallying cry of "no taxation without representation" signaled a political challenge to the project of the Crown. To quell the protests, over 2,000 British soldiers were sent to Boston, which had a colonial population of around 16,000. Tensions culminated with a fight between a mob of angry Colonists and a troop of British soldiers, who ended up firing on the crowd. Five colonists were killed and six wounded. The incident was used heavily in the propaganda against the British and the perceived threat of being repressed by the British added to the dissatisfaction caused by what the Americans perceived as unfair taxation. What became known as the Boston Massacre helped energize the colonists to launch the American Revolution.

Another example of failed repression is the November, 2013, Maidan Uprising or *Euromaidan*. In one of the largest protests in Eastern Europe since 1989, Ukrainians took to the streets to protest President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to bow to Russian

[14]Beraja et al. (2023) study the implications of Artificial Intelligence for the repressive state.

pressure and not sign a widely popular agreement with the European Union. The violent suppression of the protests triggered more Ukrainians to join, culminating in armed clashes between police and protesters in February, 2014. The result was the removal of Yanukovych from office as he and his ministers fled Ukraine for Belarus and Russia.

The problem of targeting is particularly acute when deploying preemptive repression. These are repressive policies put into place to prevent challenges to the state from emerging. For example, the aforementioned forceful relocation of Mongols in Qing China was done in advance, not in response to actual resistance. In modern times, states may deploy checkpoints and roadblocks in order to prevent rioters or terrorists from reaching their targets. The advantage of these repressive tactics is that they can save on costs, particularly if actual resistance activity is very damaging. The disadvantage is that by its very nature, preemptive repression affects a large share of the population which may not originally have had anything to do with political resistance. Thus, preemptive repression risks triggering backlash dynamics.

Benmelech et al. (2015) illustrates the problem of preventive repression, targeting and backlash. The state of Israel has long engaged in house demolitions of Palestinians as a repressive tool. These come in two kinds. On the one hand, there was a policy of demolishing the houses of those found to engage in terrorist activities (often suicide bombings). On the other hand, housed demolitions would also take place for preventive reasons such as installing a checkpoint or opening clear fire lanes. The former precisely targeted families involved in resistance. The latter did not. The paper finds that the latter is much more likely to engender backlash and further resistance.

The complex dynamic nexus between resistance, repression and targeting is a topic that needs much future research.

4.2.2 Repressing Social Groups

Lack of precise targeting technology has often led states to repress entire groups on the basis of observable ascriptive characteristics such as ethnicity or religion. For example, during the 16th Century struggle for political power between the Catholic House of Valois and the Huguenot House of Navarre, Huguenots were often repressed as an entire group even though many were not actively opposing Valois rule. During the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine, ethnic Ukrainians were systematically repressed because a small minority had offered resistance to the Bolsheviks' agricultural collectivization. Being the target of such repression can generate backlash in the form described above and also generate long-lasting issues for the state in the form of stronger group identification and long-term resistance to the political project of the state.[15]

Repression at the group level can eventually quell the resistance, but this can take a long time with many ebbs and flows. The persecution of the Huguenots lasted for centuries, and incurred the deaths and exile of hundreds of thousands of Huguenots. It is believed that 70,000 were killed in the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre alone. It took the Bolsheviks several episodes of intense repression to establish control over agricultural production. The abolition of private agriculture had been unpopular amongst Soviet peasants from the time of its first introduction in 1918. There were many back-and-forth between resistance and repression, including *dekulakization* in 1930-31 that led to the deportation of millions of farmers and hundreds of thousands of deaths, and the intense collectivization that led to the famine of 1932-33, which was particularly intense wherever Ukrainians were living as their identity was used as a marker for resistance (Markevich et al., 2024). Ultimately, Catholics retained control of France and the peasant resistance to agricultural collectivization was stamped out. Similarly, Ukrainian resistance was eventually subdued. But these efforts required

[15]See Balcells (2012) and Blaydes (2018).

generations and incurred tremendous human costs.

While often very costly in terms of resources spent and lives affected, repression at the group level has some additional grim advantages above and beyond the fact that it is less information-intensive. First, groups that have suffered or expect to suffer collective punishment for the resistance activities of some members often engage in self-policing to avoid further indiscriminate violence from the state. Rozenas and Zhukov (2019) suggests that the memory of repression against Ukrainians was very long-lasting and reflected in electoral patterns decades later.

Second, the state can use social divides to enlist civilians of other groups, typically the majority, in repressive activities. This has several benefits. Firstly and most immediate, the state saves on the state resources that need to be devoted to repression. A notable example of this phenomenon is the Rwandese Genocide of 1997. Up to 12% of the civilian population, mostly ethnic Tutsis whose leaders opposed Hutu rule, was killed over a period of three months. The large share of the population killed and the tools of killing, which were often machetes and pick axes, imply that a very large number of executioners participated.

Finally, and most important, group versus group dynamics generate space for divide-and-rule tactics. It is much easier to maintain political control against a population that is fragmented in groups that are distrustful of each other, than against a population that is united against the state.[16] Furthermore, the repression of a minority can actually increase government legitimacy and support among other groups. Research has found that the intense repression of the Muslim Brotherhood has helped President Al-Sisi's consolidate popular support among the majority of Egyptians.[17] Similarly, India's Hindu nationalist BJP party increases in popularity when the Muslim minority

[16]For a theoretical description of this mechanism see Padró i Miquel (2007).
[17]Lachapelle (2022).

is repressed with the active or passive participation of the state.[18]

It is also important to note that the political project of many states is often cast explicitly or implicitly in terms of social groups. This is very clear in the case of ethno-nationalist or religious autocratic projects. However, as implied in many examples throughout this chapter, such projects are also sustainable in democracies precisely because they impose steep costs on minorities while potentially privileging electoral majorities. In either case, repression and resistance under these kinds of political projects very often becomes particular to specific social groups and thus subject to the considerations we have discussed.

5 The Success and Failure of Repression

In evaluating the success or failure of repression, the entirety of the political project of the state should be taken into account. This differs from the existing literature, which has almost exclusively focused on political survival as the sole objective of the political leader and thus the key measure of success. Our framework implies that the relevant question for success should be: is repression able to subdue political resistance to the point that the state is able to continue pursuing the political project? In one extreme, there is a clear failure if repression is unable to produce political survival. At the other extreme, there is a clear success if repression prevents the emergence or quells any bout of resistance and the political project can unfold undisturbed. Unfortunately, history seldom produces such neat narratives, with most episodes falling in the intermediary between these two extremes.

A brief examination of the Soviet period illustrates a few important considerations. The Soviet Union was created in 1917. The regime was highly repressive, but repression

[18]See Wilkinson, 2004 for the electoral advantage conferred by anti-Muslim rioting.

did not always work. A central element of the Bolshevik political project was the collectivization of agricultural property – the abolition of private land and asset ownership and market transactions. In the face of stiff peasant resistance, the project was implemented in starts and stops. Collectivization was first introduced under Lenin during War Communism (1918-21). Intense popular resistance undermined the implementation and contributed to the Russian Famine of 1921-22, where three to ten million died. The threat to political and economic stability was so great that Lenin relented and, with the New Economic Policy (1921-28), allowed some market transactions. With better organization and more control over the country after the defeat of the White Russians and leftist opposition groups, the Bolsheviks, now led by Stalin, again pursued collectivization. The implementation incorporated the lessons from the first failed attempt and was much harsher. Millions of peasants were identified as "kulaks" and were arrested, killed or deported to Siberia. Some of the kulaks had resisted collectivization, but most of the persecutions were preemptive because the Bolsheviks expected productive peasants to resist collectivization. When famine became imminent in 1931, the Stalin-led government, instead of relenting, interpreted it as an intentional effort by the peasantry to undermine agricultural collectivization. Stalin sent his trusted deputies, Molotov and Kaganovich, to enforce grain procurement and persecute any bureaucrat who did not cooperate. Five to ten million peasants had starved to death by 1933. The resentment this and other repressions motivated was further repressed in additional persecutions such as the Great Purge (1936-38), when Stalin used the NKVD to purge over a million Soviet citizens, including military officials, intellectuals, former kulaks, others in society who are not obviously aligned with Bolshevik ideology, and the family members of these targeted individuals. Ultimately, the state prevailed and agriculture was collectivized without further resistance for another fifty years.

The first issue this narrative demonstrates is that a political project is seldom limited

to one policy and instead it is pursued with a bundle of policies that unfold over time. At a given point in time, the state may be able to implement some elements of the project (e.g., overcome the White Russians and leftist opposition and achieve political survival), but be prevented from pursing some other elements of the project in the face of stiff social resistance (e.g., collectivization). The Lenin-led government had to give up on parts of its agenda in the New Economic Policy and War Communism repression failed to bring about the Bolshevik's desired social transformation. But in achieving political survival, the Bolsheviks were able to try again. Thus, the goal of repression (and political control) should be conceptualized as allowing the state to expand the set of achievable policies and objectives over time.

This leads to the second consideration of the time horizon of successful project implementation. It can take a long time to implement the political project and depending on the time of evaluation, the efficacy of repression can look very different. While Bolshevik repression seemed to have been on the verge of failure in 1922, it seemed successful in achieving both political survival and social transformation by 1940. A related question pertains to how long the implementation needs to last to be deemed a success. Three generations were subject to the full Bolshevik political project which included state control of the entire economy, the abolition of private property, the elimination of the monarchy and aristocracy and the banishment of religion. But the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Does this mean that repression ultimately failed?

A third important consideration has to do with the difference between success and optimality. Repression is very costly in material and human terms. Labor that could serve productive purposes is instead diverted to implementing violence or infiltrating society to gather information for repressive ends. Targets of repression suffer direct and tremendous costs that range from the physical to the economic and psychological, as well as opportunity costs. The Ukrainian famine caused the deaths of 7.5% to

11.3% of Ukrainian peasants and resulted in a decline in aggregate grain production for four years. These are enormous human and economic costs. Thus, even if repression successfully implemented collectivization, it unlikely to have been the most cost-effective method.

Finally, while in this chapter we have taken autocratic political projects as exogenous, it is apparent that autocracies do change and adapt political projects in some circumstances. To the extent that the changes are taken in the face of social resistance, they suggest repression failures. Consider the British Empire, which faced widespread political resistance in many colonies. Maintaining the Empire in its original form, that is, mainly by repressive means, implied enormous costs that the metropolis was not willing or able to expend after two World Wars. The political project was thus successively diminished: first, by offering limited forms of self-government to the Colonies, and, eventually, by giving up the colonies and replacing the Empire with the extremely loose ties of the Commonwealth. The British example shows that political challenges to the political project can be met with suitable modifications of the project. In a strict sense and taking the original project as exogenous, these modifications are a form of repression failure since resistance derailed the initial project. However, applying some repression may be what allowed a gradual retreat of the original project instead of a wholesale rout.

Note that these examples show that the weight assigned to political survival versus social transformation is important in evaluating the success of repression. Political survival must receive some positive weight because the demise of the regime will preclude all possibility of attaining other aspects of the political project. The difficult question is the balance between survival and the rest of the project. Can repression be deemed successful, if for example, the state has to abandon all other aspects of the project in order to surive?

In sum, repression is just one component of a complex political problem that includes various tools of political control and adjustments to the political project. The fact that repression is only one tool among the many available complicates the characterization of repression "success," which may be the reason why the literature has focused on political survival. But this only captures the most extreme failure. In reality, there is a gradient of successfulness and serious evaluation requires consideration of the political project, the degree of implementation and the time horizon of implementation and duration.

6 Conclusion

Throughout history, governments have used repression as a tool to achieve political control, which is necessary to unfold the political project of the state onto society. In this chapter, we introduce the notion of the political project and we show that it is essential for a proper definition of repression. We argue that the costs the political project inflicts on the population, the more political resistance it encounters, and hence the more repression is needed. Our conception of repression explains why democracies are less repressive on average and why repression declined after the 1990s. It also highlights the nuances in evaluating the success of failure of repression, which will depend on the implementation of the government's preferred policies, the time horizon, and the weight assigned to political survival versus social transformation.

References

Acemoglu, Daron, Georgy Egorov, and Konstantin Sonin (2008). "Coalition Formation in Non-Democracies." *Review of Economic Studies* 75.4, pp. 987–1009.

Acemoglu, Daron, Georgy Egorov, and Konstantin Sonin (2012). "Dynamics and Stability of Constitutions, Coalitions, and Clubs." *American Economic Review* 102.4, pp. 1446–1476.

Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson (2005). *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Balcells, Laia (2012). "The Consequences of Victimization on Political Identities: Evidence from Spain." *Politics & Society* 40.3, pp. 311–347.

Benmelech, Efraim, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban F. Klor (2015). "Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions." *The Journal of Politics* 77.1, pp. 27–43.

Beraja, Martin, Andrew Kao, David Y Yang, and Noam Yuchtman (2023). "AI-tocracy." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 138.3, pp. 1349–1402.

Besley, Timothy and Torsten Persson (2009). "The Origins of State Capacity: Property Rights, Taxation, and Politics." *American Economic Review* 99.4, pp. 1218–1244.

Blattman, Christopher and Edward Miguel (2010). "Civil War." *Journal of Economic Literature* 48.1, pp. 3–57.

Blaydes, Lisa (2018). *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton University Press.

Cantoni, Davide, Yuyu Chen, David Y. Yang, Noam Yuchtman, and Y. Jane Zhang (2017). "Curriculum and Ideology." *Journal of Political Economy* 125.2, pp. 338–392.

Egorov, Georgy and Konstantin Sonin (2024). "The Political Economics of Non-Democracy." *Journal of European Literature* 62.2, pp. 594–636.

Fariss, Christopher J. (2014). "Respect for Human Rights Has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability." *American Political Science Review* 108.2, pp. 297–318.

Fariss, Christopher J., Fridolin J. Linder, Zachary M. Jones, Charles D. Crabtree, Megan A. Biek, Ana-Sophia M. Ross, Taranamol Kaur, and Michael Tsai (2015). "Human Rights Texts: Converting Human Rights Primary Source Documents into Data." *PLOS ONE* 10.9, pp. 1–19.

Gehlbach, Scott, Konstantin Sonin, and Milan W. Svolik (2016). "Formal Models of Nondemocratic Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19.1, pp. 565–584.

Goldstein, Robert Justin (1978). *Political Repression in Modern America from 1870 to the Present*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

González, Felipe, Josepa Miquel-Florensa, Mounu Prem, and Stéphane Straub (2024). "The Dark Side of Infrastructure: Roads, Repression and Land in Authoritarian Paraguay." *The Economic Journal* 135.666, pp. 653–669.

Guriev, Sergei and Daniel Treisman (2019). "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33.4, pp. 100–127.

— (2022). *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press.

Hassan, Mai, Daniel Mattingly, and Elizabeth R Nugent (2022). "Political Control." *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, pp. 155–174.

Keremoğlu, Eda, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Nils B. Weidmann (2022). "Thin-Skinned Leaders: Regime Legitimation, Protest Issues, and Repression in Autocracies." *Political Science Research and Methods* 10.1, pp. 136–152.

Lachapelle, Jean (2022). "Repression Reconsidered." *Comparative Politics* 54.4, pp. 695–716.

Linz, J.J. (2000). *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Mares, Isabela and Lauren E. Young (2019). "Conditionality & Coercion: Electoral Clientelism in Eastern Europe." Oxford University Press.

Markevich, Andrei, Natalya Naumenko, and Nancy Qian (2024). "The Causes of Ukrainian Famine Mortality, 1932-33."

Mattingly, Daniel C. (2019). *The Art of Political Control in China*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Migdal, JOEL S. (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

Montagnes, B. Pablo and Stephane Wolton (2019). "Mass Purges: Top-Down Accountability in Autocracy." *American Political Science Review* 113.4, pp. 1045–1059.

Padró i Miquel, Gerard (2007). "The Control of Politicians in Divided Societies: The Politics of Fear." *The Review of Economic Studies* 74.4, pp. 1259–1274.

Qian, Nancy and Marco Tabellini (2021). *Racial Discrimination and the Social Contract: Evidence from U.S. Army Enlistment during WWII*. Tech. rep. w29482. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, w29482.

Qian, Nancy and David Yanagizawa-Drott (2009). "The Strategic Determinants of U.S. Human Rights Reporting: Evidence from The Cold War." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 7.2-3, pp. 446–457.

— (2017). "Government Distortion in Independently Owned Media: Evidence from U.S. News Coverage of Human Rights." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 15.2, pp. 463–499.

Rozenas, Arturas, Roya Talibova, and Yuri M. Zhukov (2024). "Fighting for Tyranny: State Repression and Combat Motivation." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 16.3, pp. 44–75.

Rozenas, Arturas and Yuri M. Zhukov (2019). "Mass Repression and Political Loyalty: Evidence from Stalin's 'Terror by Hunger'." *American Political Science Review* 113.2, pp. 569–583.

Werth, Nicolas, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Panné, Jean-Louis Margolin, Andrzej Paczkowski, and Stéphane Courtois (1999). *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 159–160.

Wilkinson, Steven I. (2004). *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wintrobe, Ronald (1998). *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press.