Tactical Choice in Repeated Protests

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How do protest movements choose and change tactics when they repeatedly fail to accomplish their goals?



The African National Congress initially protests apartheid with peaceful civil disobedience...



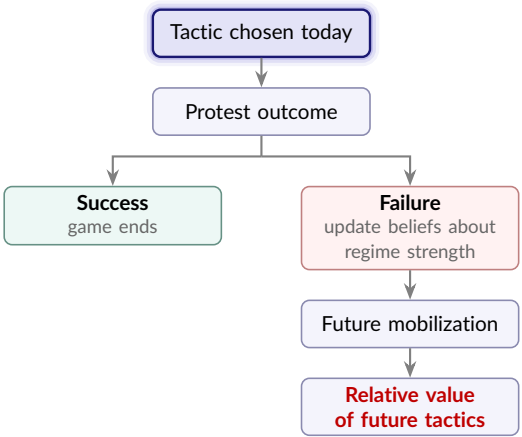
...but turn to paramilitary and sabotage tactics after repeated failures

Other movements exhibit both tactical switching and persistence. How can we understand these diverse trajectories?

Argument: Tactical choice as a tool to manage demobilization

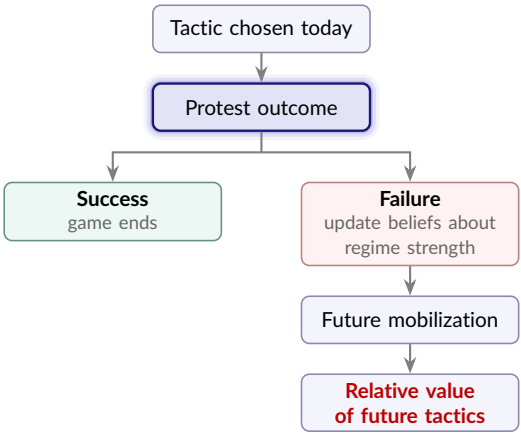
- **Bad news learning:** Failures $\rightarrow$ learn the regime is stronger than previously thought, and become less willing to turn out again
- Protests choose tactics to **anticipate and respond to** endogenous demobilization
- Tactics differ in how they convert participation into political power or leverage
  - **Peaceful/mass tactics** (marches, boycotts, occupations) **depend heavily on turnout to generate leverage**: weak when turnout is low, extremely strong when turnout is high
  - **Violent/insurgent tactics** (insurgency, sabotage) are designed to be effective with few numbers, but **scale less with turnout**

Tactical choice shapes an intertemporal trade-off



Tactics today determine the power of the challenge.

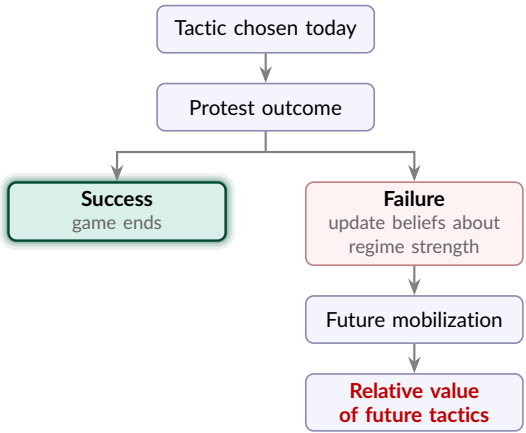
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Tactics today determine the power of the challenge.

A more powerful challenge today:

Tactical choice shapes an intertemporal trade-off

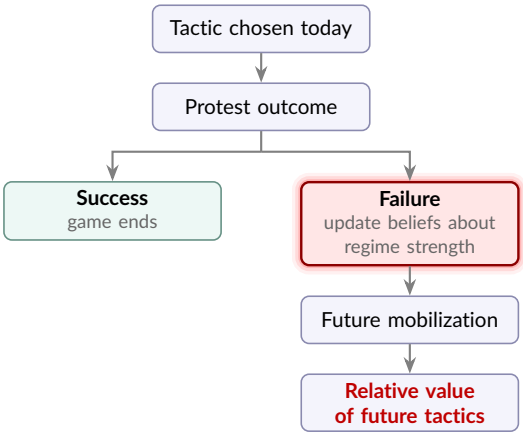


Tactics today determine the power of the challenge.

A more powerful challenge today:

Increases the probability of immediate success…

Tactical choice shapes an intertemporal trade-off



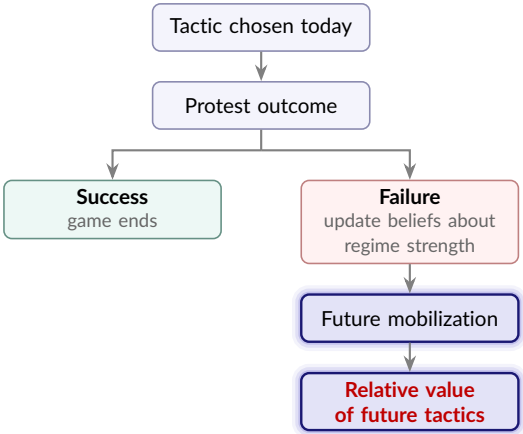
Tactics today determine the power of the challenge.

A more powerful challenge today:

Increases the probability of immediate success…

… but if it fails, reveals that the regime is stronger than previously thought.

Tactical choice shapes an intertemporal trade-off



Tactics today determine the power of the challenge.

A more powerful challenge today:

Increases the probability of immediate success…

… but if it fails, reveals that the regime is stronger than previously thought.

⇒ Greater demobilization, **which determines prospects for future contention.**

Preview of results: Experimentation and tactical sequencing

- Experimentation with a feedback loop: Exercising a tactic has some potential immediate payoff, and changes what the organizer knows about the state, as well as what their future options will be.

- Implication 1: **Perishable tactics tend to be used first.**
  - Peace relies heavily on mass participation, which is highly sensitive to learning about the regime – may lose a lot of power after failure
  - Violence retains leverage even with fewer participants, and is thus more *robust to demobilization* $\implies$ save it for later!

- Implication 2: **Stronger failures can favor peace again.**
  - In the terminal period, organizer picks the tactic best-suited to the realized state
  - Failure of a powerful challenge selects for particularly strong regimes
  - Since peace scales more with turnout, it has the higher **ceiling** of power $\implies$ matters more

Preview of results: Empirical implications

- **Different environments rationalize different tactical trajectories.**

  Two features of the environment:
  - **Relative effectiveness of tactics:** *How well* do insurgent tactics work with few people? *How much better* does the peaceful tactic scale with turnout?
  - **Mobilization resilience:** How much does participation respond to failures?

  These features determine what movements initially pick, and whether they persist or switch tactics.

- **Repression can be self-defeating.**
  - By weakening protests, repression makes failures less informative, preserving future mobilization and potentially undermining its own effectiveness.

Scope conditions

- Focus: Contention in the downswing phase
  - Rather than explaining how movements initially take off (Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994), I study how leaders respond to **setbacks and declining confidence**.

- Other mechanisms of tactical change:
  - **Selective demobilization:** Moderates withdraw, leaving a more radical activist core (della Porta 1995; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Boyer et al. 2026)
  - **Repression-induced radicalization:** State violence intensifies grievances and support for militancy (Ritter and Conrad 2016)
  - **Differential participation costs:** Nonviolence lowers barriers to mass participation (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011)

- These are undoubtedly at work!

  My goal: Isolate **how "bad news" learning about regime strength drives tactical sequencing**, even without these additional mechanisms.

Model setup

Analysis without tactical choice

Tactical choice

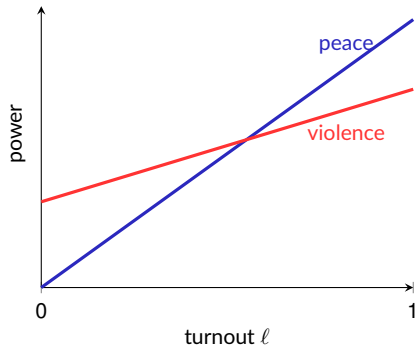
Discussion

Model overview

- Two periods, $t \in \{1, 2\}$
- Regime strength $\theta \sim \mathit{Unif}[0, M]$, $M > 1$ is unknown (common prior)
- **Organizer** chooses one tactic each period: peace or violence
- Unit mass of **citizens** observe the tactic, then decide whether to participate
  - Organizer **maximizes probability of eventual success** and does not discount
- Protest succeeds if protest power exceeds regime strength
- If period 1 fails, all players update their beliefs and the movement tries again; period 2 is terminal

Tactics as production functions

- Each tactic $\tau \in \{p, v\}$ maps turnout ℓ into protest power $A_\tau(\ell)$
- Assumptions:
  - $A_v(0) > A_p(0) = 0$: violence has a higher floor
  - $A_v(1) < A_p(1) = 1$: peace has a higher ceiling
  - $A'_v(\ell) < A'_p(\ell)$: peace is more turnout-sensitive



Participation cost and payoff

- Citizen i privately observes a participation cost

$$c_{it} = c_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

  - $c_t \sim Unif[-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon]$ is a **common participation-cost shock**: conditions that make protest easier or harder for everyone.
  - $\epsilon_{it} \sim Unif[-\epsilon, \epsilon]$ is an **idiosyncratic cost shock**: individual differences in willingness or ability to participate.
  - Both shocks are independent across t, i (individual costs are not sticky)
  - Support of the common shock guarantees two-sided limit dominance Details

- A participant receives benefit 1 if they participate in a successful protest and pays participation cost regardless of the outcome:

$$u_{it} = \begin{cases} 1 - c_{it}, & \text{participate and succeed,} \\ -c_{it}, & \text{participate and fail,} \\ 0, & \text{do not participate.} \end{cases}$$

Summary of timing

In each period in which the game remains active:

1. Given the public history and current beliefs about regime strength (F_t), the organizer chooses a tactic $\tau \in \{p, v\}$
2. Participation costs are (privately) realized. Citizens simultaneously decide whether to participate.
3. Protest occurs. Turnout ℓ_t and the protest outcome are publicly observed
4. If $A_\tau(\ell_t) > \theta$, the protest succeeds and the game ends.

   If the protest fails in period 1, beliefs are updated to F_{t+1} and the game proceeds to period 2. The game ends after period 2 regardless of the outcome.

We will look for a PBE.

Theoretical antecedents

- **Dynamic global games**
  - **Angeletos, Hellwig and Pavan (2007); Little (2017):** Regime survival is a public signal of regime strength; when individuals also get private signals of regime strength, can kill lower dominance region and restore equilibrium multiplicity
  - Here: Private cost signals preserve two-sided dominance and unique cutoff participation despite public learning.
    - Tactical choice is built on top of learning-driven changes in mobilization without relying on equilibrium selection.
- **Dynamic tactical choice**
  - **Bueno de Mesquita (2013)** on rebel tactics: Successful counterinsurgency reveals weak rebel capacity, reduces popular support, induces switch away from mass-based conventional tactics
  - **Here:** Tactics are chosen **before** mobilization observed. Decision is itself intertemporal, because shapes what failure reveals and efficacy of both tactics tomorrow

▸ Other models of protest dynamics

Model setup

Analysis without tactical choice

Tactical choice

Discussion

Goal: Establish foundational properties of this game

1. **Learning over regime strength** (very simple: since the prior is uniform, we update by truncating out all the regimes that would not have survived the last attack)
2. **Per-period participation decisions** (will be cutoff, global games-style)

   Important: In this game, all learning is over θ, there is no learning over costs

   Thus, history affects future participation through collectively updated beliefs about θ, not because some people are permanently easy or hard to mobilize
3. **The power–learning tradeoff:** What are the benefits versus cost of a bigger protest today?

We will hold a tactic A fixed for now to describe these properties, and then see what tactics add.

Participation decision

- A participant receives benefit 1 if they participate in a successful, and pays participation cost regardless of the outcome $\implies$ i participates if $\Pr(\text{success} \mid c_{it}) > c_{it}$.
- Apply Laplacian beliefs property of global games: the **marginal agent** is uniformly uncertain about her rank in the cost distribution (and thus about turnout) $\implies$ $\ell \sim \mathit{Unif}[0,1]$

Lemma 1 (Cutoff participation)

There exists a unique threshold $\hat{c}_t$ such that citizen i participates iff

$$c_{it} < \hat{c}_t, \qquad \hat{c}_t = \int_0^1 F_t(A(\ell))d\ell.$$

"The marginal participant averages the probability of success over every possible turnout level, with equal weight."

Remarks on the individual participation decision

$$\hat{c}_t = \int_0^1 F_t(A(\ell))d\ell$$

1. This expression embeds contemporaneous beliefs (F_t) and tactical choice (A): Shows how turnout decisions hinges on these two fundamentals
2. Although citizens are forward-looking, participation is **as-if myopic**: Since each citizen is atomistic, her action cannot affect regime survival, future beliefs, or continuation play (as with AHP)
3. This also creates **endogenous demobilization:** Learning from failure $\implies$ $\hat{c}_t$ weakly decreases tomorrow $\implies$ expected turnout is lower turnout

Uniqueness

Lemma 1 pins down a unique participation cutoff at every public history. Together with Bayesian updating, this allows us to solve the game recursively.

Proposition 1 (Unique cutoff PBE)

There exists a unique Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium in threshold strategies. At every on-path history, citizen i participates in period t if and only if $c_{it} < \hat{c}_t$.
Given any realization of regime strength θ and common shocks $\{c_t\}_{t=1}^{2}$, equilibrium play uniquely determines turnout, protest outcomes, and posterior beliefs.

- Contrast with AHP, where public learning from regime survival can eliminate dominance regions and restore multiplicity, allowing different continuation paths even with fixed fundamentals
- Uniqueness matters for my application: isolate how learning changes future mobilization and tactical choice, **without confounding these effects with equilibrium selection**

How much does learning affect expected turnout?

- Realized turnout is the share of citizens whose costs fall below $\hat{c}_t$
- As the common cost shock c_t varies:
  - Interior turnout is uniformly distributed on $(0, 1)$
  - Extreme shocks generate either zero or full turnout

- Define $\rho := \frac{1}{1+2\epsilon}$, which measures the **sensitivity** of expected turnout to beliefs, via $\hat{c}_t$:

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\ell_t \mid \hat{c}_t\right] = \underbrace{\frac{1-\rho}{2}}_{\text{interior turnout}} + \underbrace{\rho \hat{c}_t}_{\text{full turnout}}$$

(Equivalently, ρ is the probability that turnout is at one of its two extremal cases)

- Low ρ: dispersed costs $\implies$ turnout relatively **insensitive** to learning
- High ρ: clustered costs $\implies$ turnout **very sensitive** to learning

⏩ Full lemma about induced turnout

The power–learning trade-off

- More power today means more chance of success, but also does more damage to beliefs upon failure
- Does the second effect ever outweigh the first? Can a protest be “too strong”?

Not exactly:

Proposition 2 (Lifetime success is increasing and convex in period-1 power)

Fix a single tactic used in both periods. The movement’s probability of succeeding by the end of period 2, conditional on realized period-1 power x, is weakly increasing and convex in x.

Probability of success is increasing and convex in first-period power

- **More power is always better:** The immediate benefit of a stronger protest outweighs the informational downside of potential failure.
- **The marginal value of power is increasing:** Lifetime success is convex in first-period power.
- What drives convexity?
  - Uniform θ means the immediate marginal benefit of power is constant
  - But marginal continuation *loss* diminishes: after stronger failed challenges, there is progressively less prospect of future success left to sacrifice
- Implication: Holding average power constant, the movement prefers more dispersed outcomes (very weak or very strong protests) to intermediate ones

Model setup

Analysis without tactical choice

Tactical choice

Discussion

Linear setting

- For tractability, study a linear setting of the tactics:
- Normalize

$$A_p(\ell) = \ell, \qquad A_v(\ell) = \alpha + \beta\ell, \qquad \alpha + \beta < 1.$$

- α (baseline power) reflects violence's comparative advantage at low turnout
  - e.g. we can disable infrastructure, sabotage economic activity, or exploit difficult terrain against a stronger opponent

  High $\alpha \to$ violence more useful in **low mobilization states**

- β reflects how much violence scales with turnout – higher β *weakens* peace's comparative turnout advantage
  - We can better overwhelm police, security cordons with more people; our resources are more labor-intensive

  High $\beta \to$ violence **also benefits from high mobilization states**

“Flat violence” benchmark: the mobilization channel

Consider a case where the power of violence is completely independent of turnout.

Lemma 2 (Flat violence)

If $A_V(\ell) \equiv \bar{v}$, a success-maximizing organizer never uses violence in period 1.

- **Peace first:** Exploit favorable mobilization today; violence remains **just as powerful after failure**
- If you were to use violence first and it fails, then repeating it cannot succeed, and we’ve wasted the strongest version of the peaceful tactic we’ll ever have
- Even when violence attracts more participants, generates more expected power, and has a higher immediate probability of success, the organizer opens peacefully!

Continuation problem: the selection pathway

- We will backward induct, starting with the continuation problem: what should a protest do after observing a failure of size x?

Proposition 3 (Continuation tactics)

There exists a cutoff

$$c_\rho(\alpha, \beta; M) \in [0, \alpha + \beta)$$

such that violence is strictly preferred in period 2 following a failed first-period protest of size x iff

$$x < c_\rho(\alpha, \beta; M).$$

- Counterintuitive! Strong failures depress turnout, and low turnout is when violence is *advantaged*, right?
- However, strong failures also **select** for strong regimes, where violence's lower ceiling is costly

Remarks on the continuation problem

1. Failures pull the movement in two forces: mobilization falls $\rightarrow$ violence, learning about the regime $\rightarrow$ peace
   - When the failure is bigger, it is more informative, so the second effect **(selection)** dominates
   - Even if violence could generate more power at low levels of mobilization, we now know the regime we are facing is not one for which this would matter very much
2. The continuation is not always path dependent
   - If $c_\rho = 0$, peace follows every failure – the continuation tactic is essentially fixed
   - When $c_\rho > 0$, violence follows sufficiently weak failures, while stronger failures lead back to peace – **what we use tomorrow depends on what we tried today**
3. Corollary: **The cutoff is weakly increasing in α and β**
   - The more capacity the violent tactic has, the more failures after which we want to use it

Opening choice incentives

- Backward induct to period 1. Let x denote the realized power of the first-period protest. Schematically, the organizer's $t = 1$ problem is:

$$\max_{\tau_1 \in \{p,v\}} \mathbb{E}_{x|\tau_1} \Bigg[\underbrace{\Pr(\text{success now} \mid x)}_{\text{immediate success}} + \underbrace{\Pr(\text{failure now} \mid x)}_{\text{reach period 2}} \cdot \underbrace{\max_{\tau_2 \in \{p,v\}} \Pr(\text{success later} \mid \text{failure at } x, \tau_2)}_{\text{optimal continuation given mobilization state induced by } x} \Bigg]$$

- A key intertemporal linkage: How much does period 1 failure change expected turnout tomorrow?
  - $\rho = \partial \mathbb{E}\left[\ell_t | \hat{c}_t\right] / \partial \hat{c}_t$
- We'll build intuition with two limiting cases: $\rho \to 0$, and $\rho \to 1$

Resilient mobilization: $\rho \to 0$

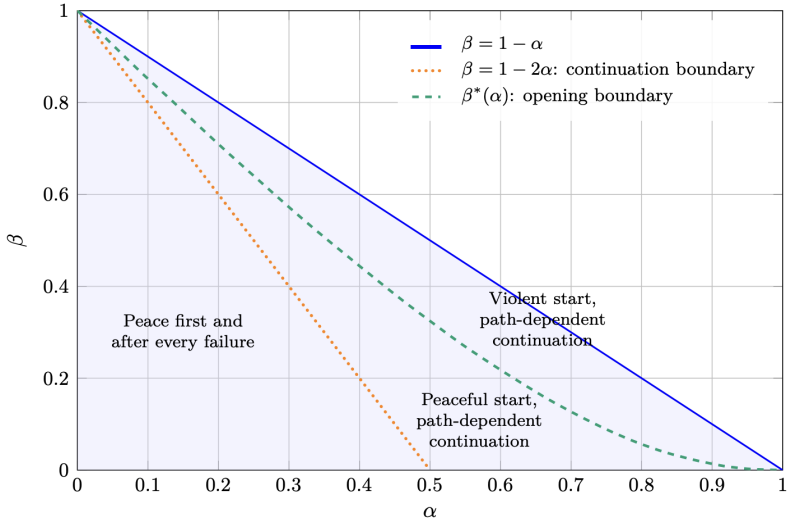
- Even after failure, the distribution of turnout remains approximately $\mathit{Unif}[0, 1]$, regardless of beliefs.
- Learning no longer causes demobilization, it only reveals information about regime strength
- Closer to conventional experimentation: Today's tactic affects the probability of immediate success and what the organizer learns about the regime
  - Learning changes which tactic is **preferable** tomorrow, but not how much turnout is available to "fuel" that tactic
- $\implies$ with no reason to preserve turnout-robust tactics for later, **sufficiently scalable violence may be worth using immediately.**

Combining the continuation and opening problems

When and how is violence used when $\rho \to 0$? Two thresholds, which reflect:

- **When is violence worth using in continuation?**
  - Consider the weakest possible failure, which reveals essentially nothing about regime strength.
  - If violence is not attractive even then, it will never be used after a failure
- If violence is not worth using in the continuation, it's *also* not worth using initially
- **When is violence worth using first?**
  - As β increases *further*, violence becomes more competitive with peace when mobilization is favorable.
  - Eventually, its probability of success under the prior is high enough to merit using immediately

Three equilibrium regions when mobilization is resilient



Fragile mobilization: $\rho \to 1$

When participants respond similarly to beliefs, turnout becomes **all-or-nothing** $\approx$ nobody or everybody participates.

- **Peace generates extreme outcomes:**
  - Low turnout $\implies$ zero power; failure reveals little about regime strength
  - Full turnout $\implies$ the strongest possible challenge without leaving anything on the table
- **Violence generates more intermediate outcomes:**
  - Even low-turnout failures reveal *some* bad news ($\alpha > 0$)
  - Even full turnout cannot match peace's maximum power ($\alpha + \beta < 1$)

Recall **convexity**: dispersed power outcomes are valuable, concentrated intermediate outcomes are the worst of both worlds

$\Rightarrow$ **Peace is always used first,** even when violence is highly scalable.

General opening result

Proposition 4 (Mobilization responsiveness and violent openings)

For every (α, M), there exists a unique threshold $\bar{\rho}(\alpha, M) \in (0, 1)$ such that:

- *If $\rho < \bar{\rho}$, sufficiently scalable violence is used first ($\beta > \beta^*_\rho(\alpha; M)$).*
- *If $\rho \geq \bar{\rho}$, peace is used first for every admissible violent technology.*

- When mobilization is sufficiently fragile, the advantage of deploying peace while turnout is still high outweighs even the strongest incentives to open with violence.

Mobilization fragility reshapes tactical trajectories

As mobilization becomes more fragile:

- Violence becomes **more attractive as a fallback**: low-turnout effectiveness matters more after failure.
- But violence becomes **less attractive as an opening tactic**: the incentive to preserve robust tactics grows.
- Thus, the region with peace throughout shrinks, while the region with violent openings eventually disappears

$\Rightarrow$ The region with **peaceful openings followed by contingent violence expands from both directions.**

Mobilization responsiveness and tactical trajectories

As we increase the belief sensitivity of turnout:

Equilibrium trajectory	$\rho \to 0$	$\rho \to 1$	As ρ rises
Peace throughout	Possible	Possible	Shrinks
Peace first; contingent violence	Possible	Possible	Expands
Violence first; contingent violence	Possible	Absent	Shrinks

- Implication: Greater mobilization fragility shifts the role of violence from an *opening tactic* toward a *contingent fallback*
- Movements with very similar **technological** options can end up facing different sequencing incentives because of their sensitivity

Empirical implications I: Urbanization and urban design



→



Urbanization and the timing of violence

- Urban redesign changes the comparative advantage of each tactic – in particular, **how the effectiveness of the violent tactic on mass participation**.
- **Example: Haussmannian renovation of Paris**
  - Pre-Haussman: Narrow streets favored barricades defended by relatively small groups of insurgents;
  - Post-Haussman: Broad boulevards facilitated troop movement, making small-group barricade fighting less effective. Even confrontational tactics become more turnout-dependent
- **Model translation:** $\alpha \downarrow$ (baseline capacity of the violent option falls), $\beta \uparrow$ (and violence becomes more turnout dependent)
- **Equilibrium regions:** we are moving "northwest" to peaceful start + path-dependent continuation, or even the exclusively peace region
  - Provides a reason why urban civic revolutions in the 20th and 21st century typically begin with peace, and oftentimes stick with it

Empirical Implications II: Authoritarianism and mobilization fragility

- The composition of the movement's base determines **how sharply participation responds to failure**
- Under authoritarianism, participation is relatively fragile
- Supporters rely heavily on common signals: Mobilization can surge rapidly, but also collapse sharply after failure (high ρ).
- Compared to situations where parties, unions, and activist networks sustain participation, turnout is mercurial and the peaceful tactic is especially perishable
  - Strong incentives to begin with peace, even if the violent alternative is high-capacity
- Hence, movements with similar available repertoires but different mobilization bases may choose different tactical trajectories

A few comments on repression (extension)

- Regimes can weaken particular protest tactics, potentially inducing substitution toward alternatives $\Longrightarrow$ **different patterns of tactical choice than generated in the baseline model**

- **Repression can backfire through a "belief refund"**:
  - Repression weakens the immediate challenge, so its failure is **less informative** about regime strength
  - Preserving optimism and future mobilization can partly, fully, or even more than fully offset the immediate benefits of repression

- **Repression can prolong violence.**
  - Weakening a violent opening makes weak failures more likely – precisely the states in which violence remains attractive.
  - Unless repression induces a switch away from violence initially, it can increase the expected incidence of violent contention.

▸ Repression extension: Details

Model setup

Analysis without tactical choice

Tactical choice

Discussion

Tactical choice as political experimentation

- Protest outcomes do two things:
  - Reveal information about regime strength
  - Reshape future mobilization, changing how effectively different tactics work
- Experimentation differentially erodes the value of tactics
  - Leaders may hold effective tactics in reserve, even at the expense of immediate success
  - Tactical trajectories may or may not be path dependent
  - If they are, then *weak* failures favor violence, *strong* failures favor peace

$\Rightarrow$ Tactics help movements manage the trade-off between current success and the political environment in which future contention takes place

Broader implications

- The success premium of nonviolent resistance:
  - Movements may succeed peacefully before violence is ever deployed
  - Observed violence may disproportionately follow earlier failures and deteriorating mobilization
- Repression intervenes in the same learning environment, sometimes to its disadvantage: By making failures less discouraging, it can preserve future mobilization and even backfire.
- Beyond protest: Similar incentives arise whenever political actors choose among technologies whose effectiveness depends on resources that past experience can erode or replenish.
  - Lots of interesting possible directions here!

Thanks!

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Appendix contents

A1 Support assumptions

A2 Other models of protest dynamics

A3 Deriving realized turnout

A4 Turnout distribution and responsiveness

A5 Repression extension

Why these supports?

- The support of the common shock $[-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon]$ guarantees well-behaved participation decisions at both extremes:
  - If $c_t \leq -\epsilon$, then even the highest-cost citizen has

    $$c_{it} = c_t + \epsilon_{it} \leq 0,$$

    so everyone wants to participate.
  - If $c_t \geq 1+\epsilon$, then even the lowest-cost citizen has

    $$c_{it} = c_t + \epsilon_{it} \geq 1,$$

    so no one wants to participate.
- Thus the support guarantees two-sided dominance: sufficiently favorable conditions produce full participation, while sufficiently unfavorable conditions produce zero participation.

Why these supports? cont.

- It also keeps every possible participation cutoff away from the boundaries of the common-shock distribution.
- Since a participation cutoff is a probability of success, $\hat{c}_t \in [0, 1]$.
- Therefore

$$[\hat{c}_t - \epsilon, \hat{c}_t + \epsilon] \subseteq [-\epsilon, 1 + \epsilon].$$

So marginal participation decisions are never distorted by hitting the edge of the assumed shock distribution.

⏩ Return to main slides

Other models of protest dynamics

- **Correa (2025):**
  - $\approx$ War of attrition between protesters and the government.
  - Heterogeneous participation costs and "veteran rewards" generate gradual entry; strategic government concessions and participant exit generate the subsequent decline.
- **Matta (2026):**
  - Citizens receive stochastic opportunities to join an ongoing protest.
  - **Sequential pivotality:** Declining an opportunity risks never getting another chance to contribute, generating accelerating mobilization.
- **Gieczewski and Koçak (2025):**
  - Altruistic citizens care about their contribution to the collective outcome.
  - Anticipated future protest reduces incentives to participate today, generating **collective procrastination and protest cycles**.

◂ Back to main slide

From cutoff to realized turnout

- Given cutoff $\hat{c}_t$, citizen i participates iff $c_t + \epsilon_{it} < \hat{c}_t$.
- Since $\epsilon_{it} \sim \mathit{Unif}[-\epsilon, \epsilon]$, turnout is

$$\ell_t = \begin{cases} 1, & c_t \le \hat{c}_t - \epsilon, \\ \dfrac{\hat{c}_t - c_t + \epsilon}{2\epsilon}, & \hat{c}_t - \epsilon < c_t < \hat{c}_t + \epsilon, \\ 0, & c_t \ge \hat{c}_t + \epsilon. \end{cases}$$

- Since $c_t \sim \mathit{Unif}[-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon]$, define

$$\rho = \frac{1}{1+2\epsilon}.$$

- Then $\Pr(\ell_t = 1) = \rho \hat{c}_t$, $\Pr(\ell_t = 0) = \rho(1 - \hat{c}_t)$, and with remaining probability $1 - \rho$, turnout is interior and uniform.
- Hence expected turnout is

$$\mathbb{E}[\ell_t \mid \hat{c}_t] = \frac{1-\rho}{2} + \rho \hat{c}_t.$$

Induced turnout

- Recall that the support of c_t has length $1 + 2\epsilon$. Define

$$\rho := \frac{1}{1 + 2\epsilon}$$

- There are three cases for turnout:
  - **Full turnout:**

$$\Pr(\ell_t = 1) = \rho \hat{c}_t$$

  - **Zero turnout:**

$$\Pr(\ell_t = 0) = \rho(1 - \hat{c}_t)$$

  - **Interior turnout:**

$$\Pr(0 < \ell_t < 1) = \frac{2\epsilon}{1 + 2\epsilon} = 1 - \rho$$

    Conditional on being interior, ℓ_t is uniform on $(0, 1)$.

Beliefs and realized turnout

Lemma 3 (Equilibrium turnout)

Given cutoff $\hat{c}_t$,

$$\Pr(\ell_t = 1) = \rho \hat{c}_t, \qquad \Pr(\ell_t = 0) = \rho(1 - \hat{c}_t),$$

while with probability $1 - \rho$, turnout is interior and uniform. Hence

$$\mathbb{E}[\ell_t \mid \hat{c}_t] = \frac{1 - \rho}{2} + \rho \hat{c}_t.$$

Return to main slides

Repression can redirect contention

- So far, the movement's tactical environment has been fixed. But regimes can intervene to **weaken particular tactics**: policing public spaces, fortifying targets, interdicting weapons, etc.
- **Tactical substitution:** Repressing the organizer's preferred tactic can induce a switch to the alternative.
  - Repression can therefore *reverse* the tactical changes induced by learning from failure.
- **A limit to repression:** Once the organizer switches tactics, further weakening the abandoned tactic no longer helps the regime.
  - Even an *unused* alternative tactic can constrain repression!

◂ Back to main presentation

Repression can be self-defeating: The belief refund

- Repression makes the first protest weaker, increasing its chances of failure.
- But a **weaker failure is less discouraging**: it rules out fewer weak regimes, preserving optimism and future mobilization.
- This creates a **belief refund**: some of the regime's immediate gain from repression is returned to the movement through better continuation prospects.
  - When $\rho = 0$, the refund can be **complete**: repression changes *when* some regimes are defeated, but not *whether*.
  - When $\rho > 0$ and $\beta > 0$, the refund can be **more than complete**: preserved turnout makes the movement's fallback tactic more powerful.

These results concern sufficiently weak first-period challenges, holding period-2 repression fixed at zero.

Weakening violence can make it persist

- Suppose the movement opens violently, and the regime represses that tactic.
- Stronger repression makes violence more likely to fail, shifting failures toward **lower realized power**.
- But recall: **weak failures favor violent continuation!**
- Repression that weakens violence, but does not displace the violent opening, can therefore make a second episode of violence more likely.

$\Rightarrow$ **Weakening violence** and **inducing a peaceful opening** can have opposite consequences for the expected incidence of violence.

◂ Back to main presentation