When Cooperation Surprises: Dissident Network and State Repression

Hansol Kwak

Abstract

Governments often repress dissident movements based on perceived threat, yet existing research mostly focuses on realized dissident power. This article argues that states also evaluate dissidents against an expectation baseline derived from their publicly articulated goals. Deviations from this goal-implied structure generate meaningful signals: alliances among organizations with little goal-based reason to cooperate indicate unexpectedly strong cohesion, whereas unrealized but goal-consistent ties reflect latent coordination potential. Using bipartite network projections of dissident goals in the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns dataset, the article constructs original measures of both patterns and links them to lethal and non-lethal repression across several datasets. Surprising cohesion is robustly associated with less lethal force, while latent coordination neither raises nor lowers it. For non-lethal repression, surprising cohesion is not associated with a decrease, whereas latent coordination is associated with an increase. These findings suggest that states respond not only to the realized scale of cooperation, but also to how far it departs from expectation, recalibrating the form of repression.

Introduction

Which features of a dissident movement do states perceive as threatening, and how do those perceptions shape repression? While existing research typically treats threat as a function of realized dissident behavior, this focus cannot explain why movements exhibiting similar structures often provoke sharply different repressive responses. What it tends to overlook is that the informational meaning of a structure may depend not on its characteristics alone, but on whether it aligns with or diverges from what observers expect to see. This article addresses this gap by examining how discrepancies between observed and expected movement structure shape whether state repression takes lethal or non-lethal forms.

In this article, movement structure refers specifically to the pattern of alliances among dissident organizations, rather than to the full range of organizational, tactical, ideological, or demographic features through which movements may be described. This narrower definition is justifiable: alliance structure is relevant to threat perception because it indicates whether organizations confront the state as isolated actors or as connected parts of a broader political challenge. The pattern of ties among organizations shapes the movement's capacity for coordination, resource circulation, and strategic adaptation, and therefore provides a key basis on which states assess the risks posed by dissent. Repression is also defined narrowly. Rather than partitioning it along other dimensions, such as indiscriminate versus targeted or legal versus physical, the analysis distinguishes between lethal and non-lethal coercion. Governments confronting dissent do not only decide whether to repress; they also decide how to coerce, depending on the severity and political character of the threat they perceive.

The argument begins from the premise that observers do not evaluate dissident alliances in a vacuum. Governments and audiences hold expectations about which organizations should find it easy to cooperate based on their publicly articulated goals, constituencies, and ideological projects. These goal-based affinities create an implicit baseline for what patterns of cooperation seem natural. When observed alliances diverge from this baseline, they carry informational content that standard measures of realized cohesion cannot capture. Alliances

that form between organizations whose goals provide little basis for collaboration constitute surprising cohesion: costly cross-cleavage ties that reveal unusually strong discipline and integrative capacity. Their visibility can also raise the expected political and social costs of meeting them with lethal force. Conversely, when organizations share goals that would make cooperation feasible but fail to ally, the resulting absence of ties reflects latent coordination potential. To audiences, this suggests weak realized cohesion; yet it signals a reservoir of plausible future alliances that could emerge if political conditions shift, creating incentives for low-visibility, non-lethal coercion.

To evaluate these claims, the article develops network-based indicators that explicitly separate surprising cohesion from latent coordination potential. It does so by first modeling the relationship between dissident organizations and their stated goals as a bipartite network. A standard projection of this bipartite structure yields an ideal or goal-implied alliance network: a baseline graph that links organizations whenever they share at least one goal domain and thus identifies all dyads for which cooperation is substantively plausible. Comparing this ideal network to the observed alliance network allows the analysis to isolate two classes of deviations. Surprising cohesion captures alliances that appear without any goal-based foundation. Latent coordination potential captures dyads that are structurally plausible given shared goals but remain unrealized in practice.

The empirical analysis applies these measures to maximalist dissident campaigns in African countries from 1990 to 2015 using the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns dataset, which records organizations, their stated goals, and their alliance ties on an annual basis. To examine how these deviations from expected cooperation relate to state behavior, the study links the resulting network indicators to several repression outcomes drawn from multiple datasets.

The findings reveal a systematic pattern. Surprising cohesion is consistently associated with lower levels of lethal repression across a range of specifications and data sources. When movements form even a single alliance that lacks a goal-based foundation, states appear

less willing to employ deadly force in the following year. By contrast, latent coordination potential does not significantly lower lethal repression, nor does it reliably raise it. For non-lethal coercion, surprising cohesion is not associated with a decrease, whereas latent coordination potential is associated with an increase.

On Threats

Research on state repression has long emphasized that governments respond to perceived threats from domestic challengers (Davenport, 2007; Earl, Maher and Pan, 2022; Gartner and Regan, 1996; Hendrix and Salehyan, 2017; Hultquist, Asal and Rethemeyer, 2025; Poe and Tate, 1994; Regan and Henderson, 2002; Ritter, 2014). Classic work links the use of coercion to the magnitude and type of challenges that dissidents pose, showing that rulers adjust repression in response to multi-dimensional threat environments rather than a single indicator of opposition activity (Davenport, 1995, 1996). Subsequent scholarship extends this threat-based logic to a variety of contexts, from protest policing to civil conflict, generally finding that more threatening forms of dissent, whether because they are armed, sustained, or broadly mobilized, are more likely to provoke coercive responses (Carey, 2006, 2010; Young, 2013). In this literature, threat is typically operationalized with realized attributes of contention, such as the occurrence and size of protests, the presence of violence, or aggregate indicators of physical integrity violations.

At the same time, several lines of work point to the importance of potential or latent threat. Studies of youth bulges, minority groups, and external security environments explicitly distinguish between behavioral or active challenges and underlying structural capacities that could translate into future contention, showing that rulers may respond preemptively to these latent risks (Artabe et al., 2023; Cunningham, Ward and Owens, 2019; Heffington, 2021; Nordås and Davenport, 2013). In protest policing and the governance of dissent, scholars likewise note that authorities worry not only about the immediate disruption caused

by particular events but also about what those events might signal about the longer-term prospects for opposition organization and diffusion (Aytaç, Schiumerini and Stokes, 2017; Earl, Soule and McCarthy, 2003). These works thus suggest that states attend to both realized and potential threats: they react to what dissidents are doing now, but also to what they might plausibly be able to do if political conditions shift.

What existing empirical work rarely does, however, is treat threat as expectation-contingent: to ask how the political meaning of dissident cooperation depends on whether observed alliances align with or diverge from what would have seemed likely. The threat in most quantitative studies is inferred either from realized behaviors or from macro-structural indicators of potential risk, such as demographic pressures or regime characteristics. These approaches, while powerful, implicitly assume that all cooperation of a given magnitude conveys the same informational content. They do not consider that two movements exhibiting similar levels of realized cohesion may nonetheless differ sharply in how surprising, credible, or politically consequential that cohesion appears. Nor do they incorporate benchmarks that distinguish routine, structurally expected cooperation from alliance patterns that are improbable, costly, or revealing. As a result, existing research overlooks systematic variation in how states interpret dissident networks when cooperation either exceeds or falls short of what observers would reasonably anticipate. The theory developed below addresses this gap, treating the discrepancy between observed and goal-implied cooperation as a signal that shapes the form of repression.

Theory

Studies of rebel cooperation and opposition alliances show that who cooperates with whom matters for both movement effectiveness and regime responses. Work on rebel alliances in civil wars emphasizes how power, ideology, and external sponsorship influence alliance composition and network structure, and how these patterns in turn affect conflict duration

and outcomes (Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour, 2012; Christia, 2012; Gade et al., 2019; Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012). Related studies trace how repression can itself catalyze or reshape alliances among dissident communities, as challengers respond to state violence by forming broader coalitions (Nugent, 2020; Schubiger, 2023). Research on opposition coalitions in electoral authoritarian regimes similarly highlights the importance of cross-party coordination and coalition breadth for challenging incumbents (Sato and Wahman, 2019; Wahman, 2013). Together, these studies underline that states confront not just isolated organizations but networked movements whose alliance patterns condition their capacity to resist repression.

Because alliance patterns play such a central role in shaping dissident capacity, governments may closely monitor which organizations choose to cooperate and how these ties evolve. The observable structure of the alliance network thus provides an important threat signal. Yet these observations alone rarely capture the full strategic meaning of cooperation. Both states and audiences interpret dissident behavior not only in terms of what is observed, but also in terms of what should be observed. These expectations are grounded in dissidents' publicly articulated goals, constituencies, and ideological positions, which together define a baseline of cooperation that appears natural or structurally plausible.

Deviations from what should have occurred can matter for three related reasons. First, they provide valuable information. Both governments and audiences evaluate dissident behavior through priors shaped by stated goals. Observed cooperation that aligns with these priors produces only small belief updates because it confirms what should happen. By contrast, deviations from the goal-implied baseline, whether unexpectedly strong or unexpectedly weak, generate larger discrepancies between expectation and observation, inducing posterior revisions about dissident discipline, internal organization, and future mobilization capacity (Tappin, Pennycook and Rand, 2020). Second, they attract disproportionate attention. Governments face monitoring constraints, and both domestic and international audiences rely on heuristics to interpret complex political environments. Routine, predictable

cooperation often blends into the background, whereas unexpected alliance patterns, such as unlikely cross-cleavage coalitions or surprising absences of cooperation, stand out as anomalies and attract heightened scrutiny (Birkland, 1998). Third, surprising cooperation conveys more credible signals. Goal-incongruent alliances are costly to construct because they require dissidents to bridge ideological divides, placate skeptical constituencies, negotiate side-payments, and develop coordination mechanisms that would not normally arise from their stated objectives (Lohmann, 1993; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer and Renshon, 2018). Precisely because such alliances are difficult to form and maintain, observers treat them as reliable indicators of underlying cohesion, discipline, and strategic competence.

Deviation 1: Surprising Ties

One type of deviation arises when dissident organizations cooperate more than expected: when alliances form between actors whose goals or constituencies provide little natural basis for collaboration. These surprising or goal-incongruent alliances tend to be difficult to construct and therefore provide compelling evidence of strategic discipline, information sharing, and cross-cleavage coordination. Because such alliances exceed what observers would anticipate, both governments and audiences interpret them as markers of exceptional cohesion and strong organizational capacity. Movements capable of forging such improbable ties appear more resilient, more unified, and more strategically competent than their goal structure alone would imply.

For governments, however, this heightened capability does not translate straightforwardly into an incentive to escalate repression: the costs of repression depend on how audiences react to it. Domestic publics can respond to repression by joining or supporting the movement, raising the mobilizational costs of repression (Davenport, 2007; Honari, 2018). International actors can respond with condemnation, economic sanctions, arms embargoes, or support for the movement itself, raising the reputational and material costs of repression (Sutton, Butcher and Svensson, 2014). Lethal repression may thus be politically affordable only when

two conditions hold jointly. First, the threat must be legible to audiences, so that the resort to force appears warranted rather than arbitrary. Second, the targeted movement must be one toward which audiences feel little sympathy, so that its suppression does not galvanize support on its behalf. When both conditions are met, lethal repression may generate little political cost. When either fails, however, the same force is likely to backfire, imposing reputational and mobilizational costs that outweigh its coercive benefits.

Surprising cohesion disturbs precisely the second of these conditions. Because improbable, goal-incongruent alliances are salient and readily observed, the threat they signal is anything but hidden, and the first condition is clearly satisfied. Yet the very feature that makes these alliances compelling evidence of capacity, their ability to bridge cleavages that shared goals alone would not predict, also leads audiences to attribute legitimacy and collective resolve to the movement. Lethal force against such a movement may no longer read as the suppression of a narrow or illegitimate faction, but as the violent repression of a broadly resonant cause, inviting sympathy and backlash. The second condition thus fails, and with it the affordability of lethal repression. As a result, although surprising cohesion heightens the threat a movement poses, it raises the cost of the very instrument that conventional threat logic would prescribe. Governments confronting surprisingly cohesive movements thus face a configuration in which lethal force, however tempting on threat grounds, becomes politically unjustifiable, and they become correspondingly less likely to deploy it.[1]

Hypothesis 1a: When dissident organizations form alliances that exceed expected patterns of cooperation, governments become less likely to use lethal repression.

This constraint, however, does not imply that governments simply tolerate surprisingly

[1] On how broad, cross-cleavage or multiethnic coalitions can both signal organizational strength and raise the political costs of harsh repression, see also Dahlum (2023); Manekin, Mitts and Zeira (2024); Stephan and Chenoweth (2008).

cohesive movements. The threat such movements pose is real, and the incentive to contain it persists. Unlike lethal force, non-lethal instruments such as arrests, dispersals, and surveillance are less visible, more easily justified as routine policing, and readily disowned or reversed. They therefore provoke little of the sympathy or condemnation that lethal violence against a legitimate movement would invite, and they remain affordable even when the two conditions above are not jointly satisfied. Faced with a movement it cannot lethally repress without backlash, the government keeps employing these lower-cost instruments that serve to contain the movement. The result is a recalibration of the form of repression: lethal coercion decreases while non-lethal repression continues, so that the repressive repertoire tilts toward its non-lethal form.

Hypothesis 1b: When dissident organizations form alliances that exceed expected patterns of cooperation, governments do not reduce their use of non-lethal repression.

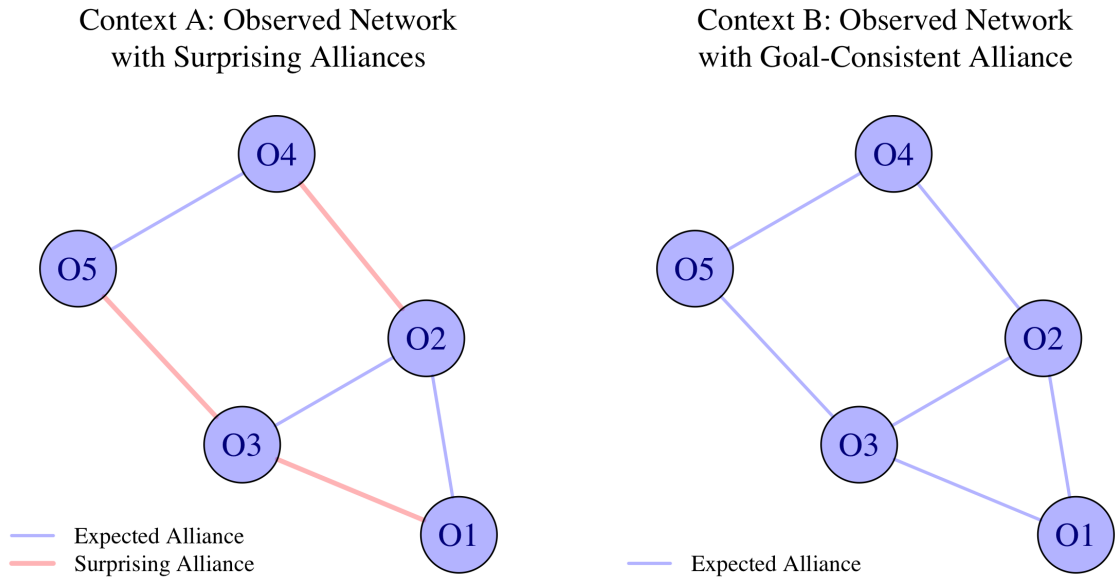


Figure 1: Toy Network: Same Observed Alliances, Different Signals

Figure 1 illustrates the core expectation-contingent logic behind Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Both panels display identical observed alliance networks: the same organizations, the same ties, the same density, and the same structural positions. What differs across panels is not the realized pattern of cooperation, but the goal-implied expectations against which that cooperation is evaluated. In Context A (left panel), several of the observed alliances connect organizations whose stated goals provide no natural basis for collaboration. These ties appear in red as surprising, signaling cross-cleavage coordination and an unusual degree of organizational discipline. Observers interpret these improbable alliances as evidence of strategic sophistication and broad-based resolve, sharply increasing the anticipated backlash costs of lethal repression. In Context B (right panel), the very same set of observed ties is fully consistent with the dense cooperation predicted by dissidents' shared goals. Here, all edges appear in blue because none deviate from expectation; the network conveys only routine coordination and does not generate a similar legitimacy premium. The figure thus makes clear why identically structured observed networks can produce different repressive incentives: the political meaning of cooperation depends not on the ties themselves, but on how far they deviate from what should have been observed.

Egypt's Kefaya movement, which mobilized against Hosni Mubarak between 2004 and 2005, illustrates this configuration. It joined Nasserists, liberals, Marxists, and Islamists, actors with little goal-based reason to collaborate who had long treated one another as adversaries, under a single anti-regime banner, bridging the very divisions the regime had relied on to keep the opposition fragmented and weak. What made the movement conspicuous was not its size, which remained modest, but the improbability of the alliance itself (Clarke, 2011). The coalition drew sustained domestic and international attention mainly because it departed so sharply from what Egypt's fragmented opposition was expected to produce. The threat was therefore legible rather than hidden: its visibility derived from the surprising character of the cohesion, not from the scale of mobilization. The regime did not ignore the movement but repressed it through arrests, dispersals, and the harassment of demonstrators rather than deadly force, measures at times brutal yet stopping short of killing (Clarke,

2011; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010). Coercion against a visible but broadly legitimate movement without killing is consistent with the argument's prediction that surprising cohesion raises the anticipated cost of lethal force without ending the use of non-lethal coercion.

Yet, goal-incongruent alliances may themselves strengthen movements by expanding resources, tactical options, or resilience, and such capacity may constrain repression independently of expectation. The argument does not deny this possibility but instead implies that the consequences of the same type of alliance also depend on the expectations against which it is observed. If expectation matters, the association with lethal restraint should weaken where goal-incongruent alliances have become historically familiar. By contrast, if the association primarily reflects added movement capacity, it should instead diminish as movements become sufficiently large or organizationally developed to deter lethal repression on their own.

Observable Implication: If the association between goal-incongruent alliances and lethal restraint is expectation-dependent, it should weaken where such alliances have become more familiar through prior experience.

Deviation 2: Failing Ties

A second type of deviation involves the opposite pattern: dissident organizations fail to cooperate despite sharing goals, constituencies, or grievances that would normally facilitate coordination. This absence of expected alliances signals weak realized cohesion. Audiences interpret such fragmentation as evidence that dissident actors are disorganized, internally divided, or strategically ineffective, lowering the perceived legitimacy of the movement. When dissidents appear fractured, force against them provokes little sympathy-based backlash, since few observers rally to the defense of a movement that appears internally divided.

From the state's perspective, however, this absence signals not low threat but latent coordination potential: alliances that have not yet formed but remain plausible and could

materialize rapidly under shifting political conditions. Because shared goals make future consolidation structurally likely, the state has reason to act before it occurs.[2] Yet the same fragmentation that lowers the movement's legitimacy also keeps this threat invisible to audiences, who see only disorganization. Lethal force against a movement that appears harmless would therefore read as arbitrary rather than justified, provoking backlash of its own. Preemption is thus pushed toward less visible, non-lethal instruments, such as surveillance, selective arrest, and the disruption of nascent ties, rather than lethal escalation.

This restraint differs from the pullback that surprising cohesion produces. There, the state withholds lethal force it would otherwise have used against a manifestly capable movement; here, the movement's apparent weakness means little lethal force was in prospect to begin with, and the invisible threat cannot license escalating it. The expected effect on lethal repression is thus not a reduction but the absence of an escalation.[3]

Hypothesis 2a: When movements fail to realize cooperative ties that appear natural or readily feasible, governments do not escalate to lethal repression.

Hypothesis 2b: When movements fail to realize cooperative ties that appear natural or readily feasible, governments become more likely to employ non-lethal repression.

Table 1 summarizes the argument: because lethal repression is affordable only when a visible threat is met against an unsympathetic target, each deviation undermines one of these

---

[2] For related arguments that states sometimes repress in response to latent or anticipated threats rather than ongoing dissent alone, see Danneman and Ritter (2014); Davenport (1995); Karreth, Tir and Gibler (2022).

[3] One distinction between the two deviations is worth noting. Surprising cohesion is not a latent threat in the sense of an unrealized structural capacity; it is observed cooperation. Its informational value lies in the fact that this realized cooperation is unexpected relative to the goal-implied baseline, and therefore reveals organizational discipline that would otherwise be difficult to infer. Latent coordination potential is the opposite case: ties that would be expected to form among organizations sharing goals but that remain unrealized in practice.

conditions and tilts the state's repertoire toward non-lethal repression.

Table 1: Conditions for Costly Lethal Repression and the Resulting Form of Repression

	Unsympathetic target	**Sympathetic target**
Visible threat	Both conditions hold. Lethal force provokes little backlash and remains affordable; the benchmark case of low-cost lethal repression.	*Surprising cohesion.* Visible threat, but legitimacy makes the target sympathetic. Sympathy backlash renders lethal force unaffordable: lethal repression *declines* while non-lethal repression is sustained (H1a, H1b).
Hidden threat	*Latent coordination.* Unsympathetic target, but the threat is hidden from audiences. Arbitrariness backlash renders lethal force unjustifiable: lethal repression is *not escalated*, and the state preempts non-lethally (H2a, H2b).	Neither condition holds. Lethal force is unjustifiable on both counts and is foreclosed; not examined here.

Indicators

To empirically identify the two kinds of deviations described above, this study should establish a benchmark that captures how dissident organizations should cooperate based on their underlying objectives. The theoretical framework assumes that observers, both governments and audiences, form expectations about coordination from the substantive demands, constituencies, and ideological positions that organizations publicly articulate. These expectations constitute the baseline against which surprising cohesion and latent threat are inferred. Observable alliances alone cannot reveal whether dissidents are cooperating more or less than expected, because they do not indicate what patterns of cooperation were structurally plausible. A valid indicator thus needs to reconstruct this expected cooperation structure, allowing for comparison of realized alliances to the alliances that would naturally arise from shared goals.

To formalize this intuition, this article models the relationship between organizations and

their stated goals as a bipartite network. Dissident organizations and their goal categories constitute two distinct types of nodes: an edge exists only between an organization and a goal it claims, never between two organizations or two goals directly. Let B denote the resulting bipartite incidence matrix, where $B_{ig} = 1$ if organization i publicly advances goal category g. This representation makes clear that coordination potential derives from the pattern of shared objectives across organizations.

From this bipartite structure, this study constructs an ideal alliance network using a standard gambit-of-groups projection: organizations are linked whenever they share at least one goal category, producing the goal-implied adjacency matrix

$$A^{\text{ideal}} \;=\; \mathbf{1}\big(BB^{\top} > 0\big)\,,$$

so that $A^{\text{ideal}}_{ij} = 1$ whenever organizations i and j overlap in at least one goal domain. This projection identifies all dyads for which cooperation is theoretically plausible given the movement's preference structure. Although these co-occurrence–based bipartite projections are often criticized for inflating clique structure and generating false-positive ties (Latapy, Magnien and Vecchio, 2008; Neal, 2014), these limitations are precisely what make the projection an analytically useful upper bound. The ideal network is not intended to recover actual cooperation, but to represent the full set of alliances that would be plausible if organizations translated every shared goal domain into coordination. This study treats the projected network as a baseline, making unexpected alliances more visible against a broad baseline and turning unrealized ties into meaningful signals of latent coordination potential.

Figure 2 illustrates the process of the gambit-of-groups projection used to construct the ideal alliance network. The left panel shows a simple bipartite structure in which organizations (blue nodes) are connected to the goal categories they publicly articulate (red nodes). The right panel displays the resulting unipartite projection, where organizations are linked directly whenever they overlap in at least one goal domain. The edges thus represent all

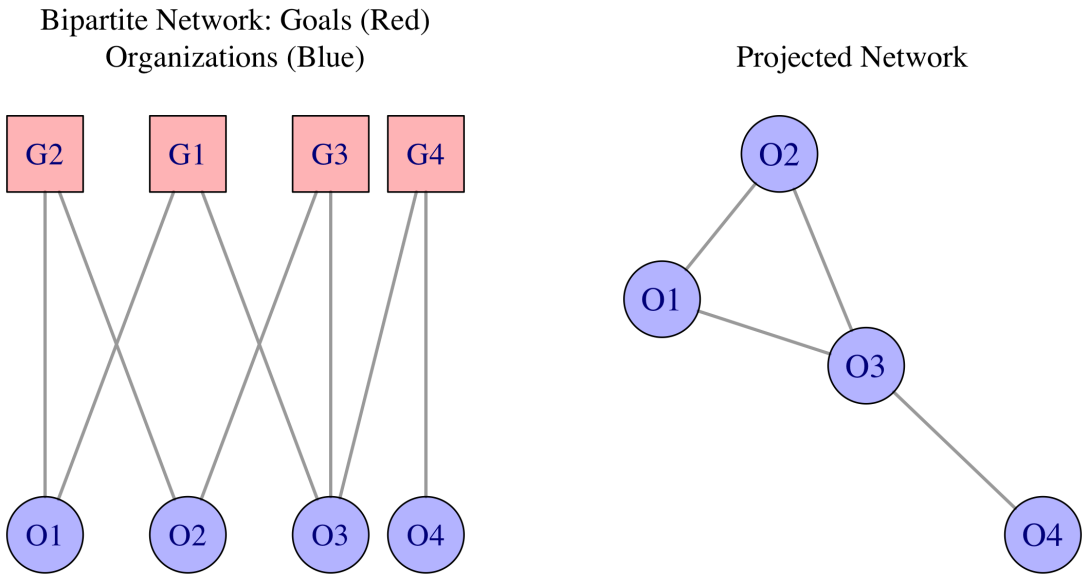


Figure 2: Toy Network: Bipartite to Unipartite Projection

dyads for which cooperation is theoretically plausible given shared claims. This projected network provides the basis for identifying potential, but unrealized, alliances in the observed movement.

This study then compares this ideal network to the observed alliance network, encoded in an adjacency matrix A^{obs} in which $A^{\text{obs}}_{ij} = 1$ if an alliance between i and j is recorded in the data. This comparison allows for identifying the two types of deviations theorized above: (1) alliances that form despite the absence of structural incentives to cooperate, and (2) alliances that fail to form despite strong structural incentives to do so. Each deviation provides a distinct informational signal to states and audiences and therefore requires its own empirical indicator.

A bipartite projection is preferable to a simple inter-cleavage rule because dissident organizations rarely map cleanly onto a single cleavage dimension. Many groups articulate multiple, overlapping goals, none of which can be reduced to a single categorical identity. A cleavage-based baseline thus forces the researcher to impose a single, exogenous classification on organizations whose stated objectives span several issue domains. The bipartite structure avoids this distortion by anchoring expected cooperation directly in the full set of goals

that organizations publicly advance. It captures coordination potential that cuts across, or operates within, multiple cleavages simultaneously, providing a more faithful representation of the opportunity structure against which deviations from expected cooperation can be identified.

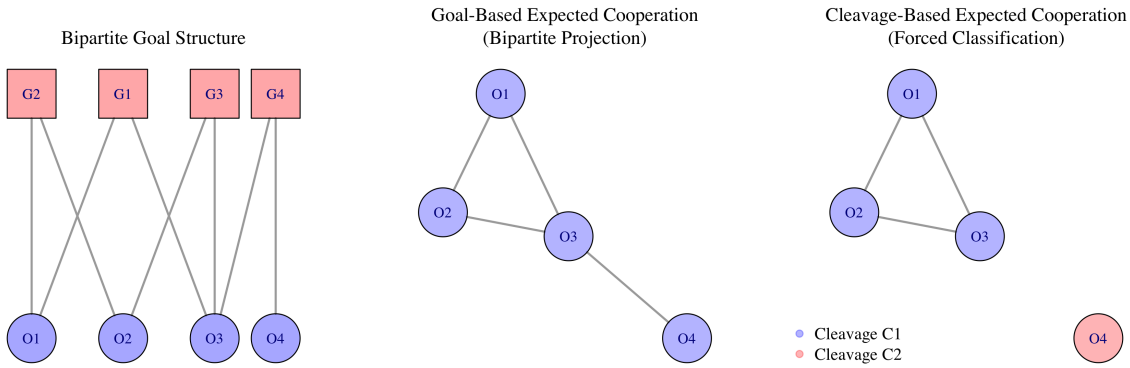


Figure 3: Toy Network: Bipartite Projection vs. Cleavage-Based Baselines

Figure 3 visualizes the conceptual differences between a bipartite-projection-based expectation baseline and a cleavage-based one. Panel 1 displays the underlying bipartite structure linking dissident organizations to the multiple goal domains they publicly articulate. As the figure makes clear, organizations rarely advance a single issue; rather, they typically pursue several overlapping objectives. This multi-goal structure is central because it implies that cooperation potential emerges from a web of cross-cutting substantive demands, not from a single categorical identity that researchers might impose. Panels 2 and 3 illustrate two distinct baselines that can be derived from this underlying structure. Panel 2 presents the expected cooperation network derived from a bipartite projection, which links organizations whenever they share at least one publicly articulated goal domain. This projection-based baseline directly reflects the opportunity structure implied by organizations' stated objectives and preserves the full complexity of their overlapping substantive claims. In contrast, Panel 3 illustrates a cleavage-based baseline that does not arise from the bipartite structure at all, but instead from a researcher-imposed classification that forces each organization into a single cleavage category. Expected alliances under this approach appear only within those

exogenously defined categories, ignoring the multi-goal nature of dissident organizations and collapsing rich cross-cutting ties into a single dimension.

Surprising Cohesion

To capture cases in which dissident organizations cooperate more than expected, this article identifies all dyads that do not share any goal category but form an observable alliance. These ties violate the structure implied by the movement's stated objectives and thus represent surprising or goal-incongruent cooperation. Formally, surprising cohesion is defined as

$$\text{Surprising Cohesion} \;=\; \frac{1}{\binom{N}{2}} \sum_{i<j} \mathbf{1}\big(A_{ij}^{\text{ideal}} = 0 \;\wedge\; A_{ij}^{\text{obs}} = 1\big)\,,$$

where the indicator function counts each pair of organizations that lacks a goal-based connection in the ideal network ($A_{ij}^{\text{ideal}} = 0$) but forms an actual alliance in the observed network ($A_{ij}^{\text{obs}} = 1$). The numerator therefore records the total number of alliances that arise without any underlying goal overlap, and dividing by the total number of possible dyads $\binom{N}{2}$ normalizes this count into a size-adjusted proportion. High values of this measure reflect unexpectedly cohesive behavior, which, as argued above, signals strong organizational capacity and raises the political costs of deploying harsh repression.

Figure 4 illustrates how surprising cohesion is identified by comparing the ideal cooperation structure implied by shared goals to the alliances that dissident organizations actually form. The left panel displays the ideal projected network, which links organizations solely based on overlapping goal domains and thus captures all dyads for which cooperation is naturally expected. The right panel overlays observed alliances onto this structure and distinguishes between expected and unexpected ties: blue solid edges represent alliances that align with goal-based predictions, while red solid edges indicate alliances between organizations that share no goal categories and therefore constitute surprising or goal-incongruent cooperation. The figure demonstrates how dissident movements can exhibit pockets of un-

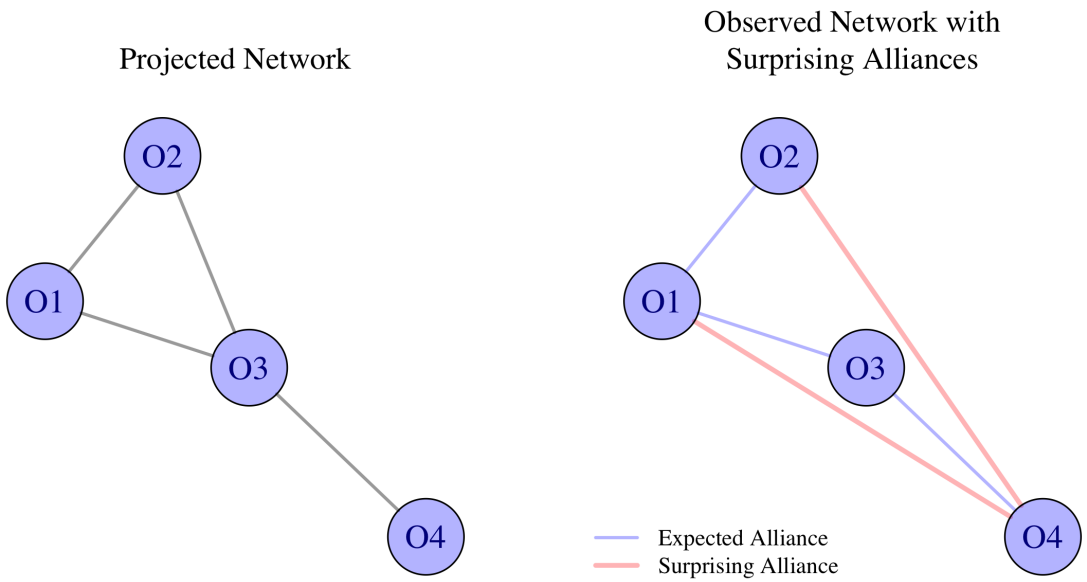


Figure 4: Toy Network: Projected vs. Observed Alliances with Surprising Ties

usually strong coordination that exceed what their stated objectives would predict, signaling higher organizational capacity than is apparent from goals alone.

Latent Coordination Potential

To capture the opposite deviation, cases in which dissident organizations fail to cooperate despite sharing goal categories, this article identifies dyads that are linked in the ideal network but not in the observed network. These are potential alliances that are structurally plausible given shared objectives but remain unrealized in practice. This latent coordination potential is defined as

$$\text{Latent Coordination Potential} \;=\; \frac{1}{\binom{N}{2}} \sum_{i<j} \mathbf{1}\big(A_{ij}^{\text{ideal}} = 1 \;\wedge\; A_{ij}^{\text{obs}} = 0\big)\,.$$

The numerator counts all such unrealized but goal-consistent ties, and dividing by the number of possible dyads yields the proportion of structurally plausible alliances that fail to materialize. Substantively, high latent coordination potential indicates that much of the collaboration implied by dissidents' shared objectives remains unrealized. As the theory

suggests, this pattern signals low audience-perceived cohesion but high latent threat, creating incentives for governments to employ preemptive repression.

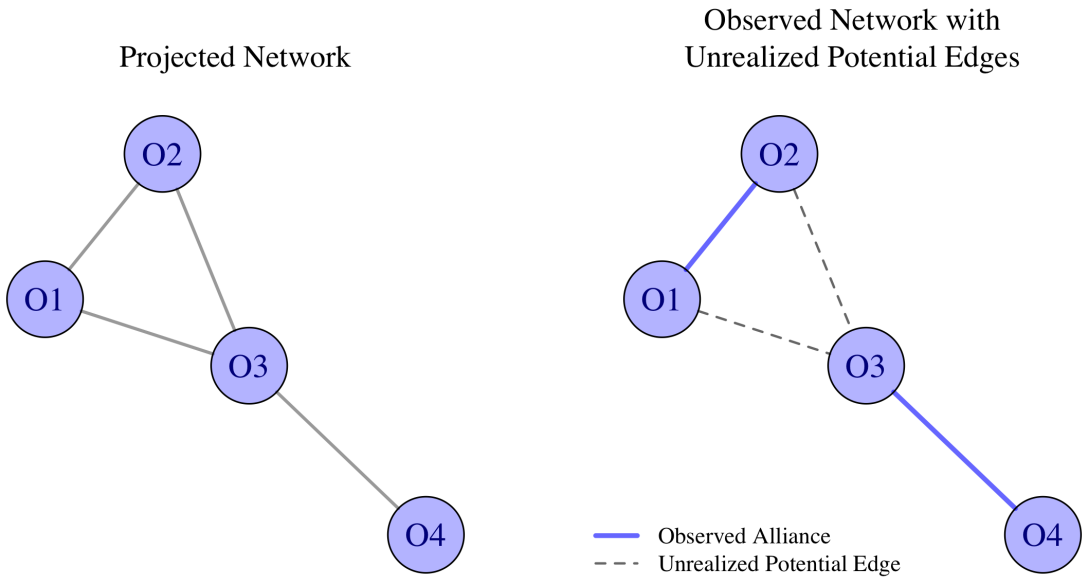


Figure 5: Toy Network: Projected vs. Observed Alliances with Unrealized Ties

Figure 5 illustrates how latent coordination potential is identified by comparing the ideal network projection to the observed alliance structure. The left panel shows the ideal projected network, and the right panel overlays the observed alliances onto this projection: solid blue ties represent alliances that actually formed, while dashed gray ties indicate potential alliances implied by shared goals that remain unrealized. The figure highlights how movements can appear loosely connected in observed alliances while still possessing substantial latent coordination potential embedded in their shared objective structure.

One feature of these indicators warrants clarification: the baseline is built from the presence of shared goals alone, not from the absence of contradictory ones. The distinction matters because incompatible objectives may block cooperation, so one could argue that compatibility also should define which alliances the baseline treats as expected. Yet alliances are positive acts of coordination organized around common purposes, not arrangements that form wherever organizations fail to conflict: without a shared objective, there is little positive

reason to expect coordination. Overlapping aims, rather than the absence of conflict, are thus what ground the baseline's expectation of cooperation. Building in compatibility would also introduce arbitrariness. Whether two organizations share a goal domain is a clear binary judgment, but whether their other goals conflict is a matter of degree and context. Deciding which goal pairs are disqualifying would force the researcher to impose the external classification that the bipartite approach was adopted to escape.

Research Design

Network Construction

This study constructs yearly dissident alliance networks using the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns (ARC) dataset (Butcher et al., 2022), which records organizations engaged in maximalist dissent in African countries from 1990 to 2015. The unit of observation is the country–organization–year: for each year in each country, ARC lists organizations that participated in maximalist contention on that country's territory, along with information about their goals, types, and organizational ties. For each country-year, this article first identifies all organizations active in maximalist dissent and treats them as the nodes of that year's dissident field. It then constructs two distinct but comparable networks over this same set of organizations.

One concern is that goals may converge after organizations begin cooperating, a possibility ARC does not exclude. Yet such convergence would work against the article's predictions. If allied partners come to share goals over time, their tie migrates from the surprising category (no shared goal, alliance present) to the routine one (shared goal, alliance present), so convergence deflates surprising cohesion and attenuates any association it would produce toward zero. Convergence also leaves latent coordination largely untouched, since it operates only among organizations that have already allied and have no channel to align the goals of pairs that never cooperate.

Observed Alliance Network

The observed network captures realized cooperation among organizations. ARC codes formal relationships in which organizations coordinate resistance activities, both explicit alliance agreements and participation in umbrella fronts that coordinate multiple member organizations. For each country-year, this article treats any such recorded relationship between two organizations as an undirected alliance tie in that year's network, collapsing multiple relationships between the same pair into a single edge. The result is an annual, undirected network of organizations that actually coordinated their activities in maximalist dissent.

Ideal Alliance Network

To construct an ideal baseline network that captures movements' latent coordination potential, this article uses ARC's information on organizations' stated political goals. For each country-year, this study takes the goal descriptions associated with all active organizations and maps them into a set of broad goal domains. These domains distinguish, for example, democratization and institutional reform, human and civil rights, anti-corruption and governance, labor and workplace issues, economic development and redistribution, ethnic and territorial claims, religious and ideological projects, gender and sexuality, youth and student issues, media freedom and information, public security and self-defense, environmental protection, public health and HIV/AIDS, as well as left-wing and pan-national or nationalist projects. This taxonomy is intentionally coarse: it is designed to capture the major issue cleavages around which organizations mobilize, while being stable enough to apply consistently across very different country-years. This article then treats organizations and goal domains as two node sets in a bipartite graph, linking an organization to a goal domain whenever that domain appears among its maximalist demands. The resulting projection onto the organization layer does not represent actual cooperation, but an ideal opportunity structure: it connects any pair of organizations that share at least one goal domain, thereby identifying those dyads for which alliance formation is substantively plausible even if no

alliance is currently observed.

For each country-year, this study therefore obtains a pair of graphs over the same set of organizations: an observed alliance network capturing realized cooperation, and an ideal, goal-implied network capturing the full set of dyads that could plausibly cooperate based on shared goals.

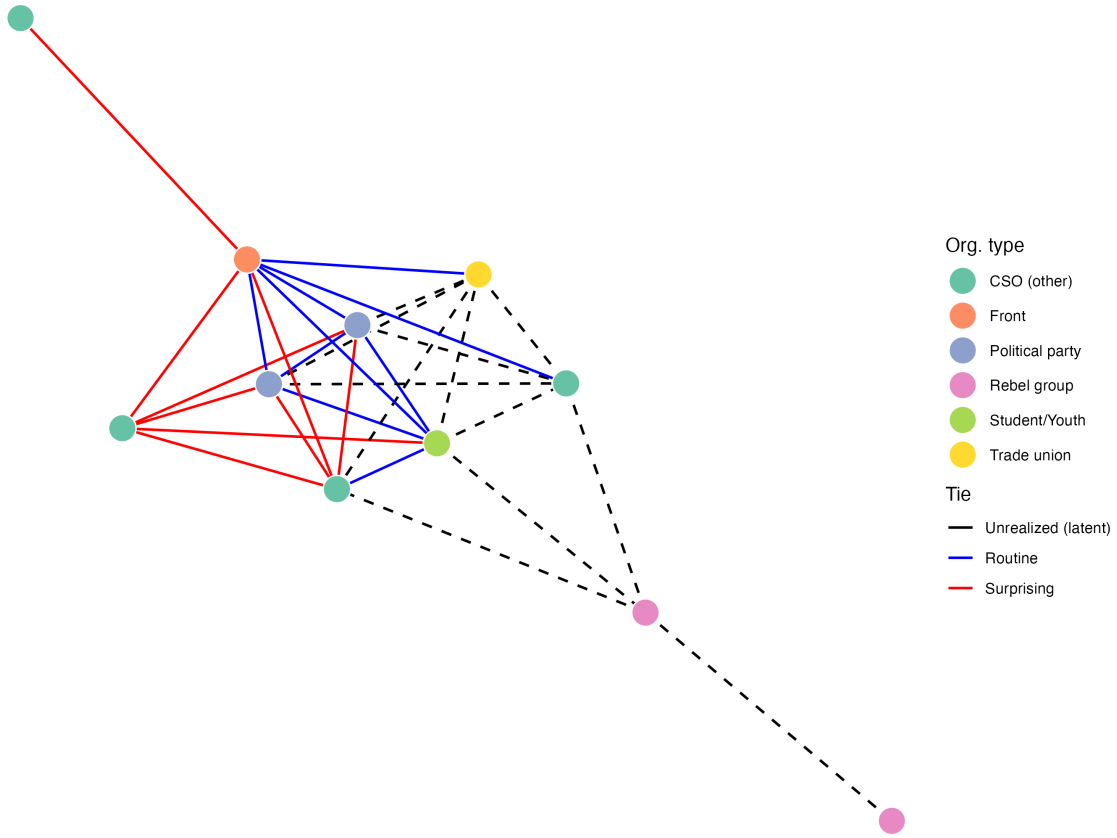


Figure 6: Surprising, routine, and unrealized ties in Mali's dissident field, 1991

Figure 6 illustrates these networks for Mali in 1991. Both surprising (red, goal-incongruent) and routine (blue, goal-consistent) ties form among civilian political organizations, while the two rebel groups enter only through unrealized latent ties (dashed grey).

Dependent Variables

To test how deviations from expected cooperation shape state responses, this article constructs measures of two forms of repression, lethal and non-lethal, each aggregated to the country-year. The lethal measures assess Hypotheses 1a and 2a and draw on four independent event-based datasets: Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcome (NAVCO 2.1) (Chenoweth and Shay, 2022), Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010), the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD) (Salehyan et al., 2012), and Mass Mobilization (MM) (Clark, Regan and H. Clark, 2016). The non-lethal measures assess the predictions in Hypotheses 1b and 2b and draw on SCAD and MM.[4] To ensure comparability with the ARC data, this study restricts all four datasets to African countries and matches their event years to the ARC temporal domain (1990 to 2015). Each dataset provides event-level or campaign-level information, which this study aggregates into country-year outcomes as follows. The six lethal measures are described first, followed by the non-lethal measures.[5]

1) Lethal Repression of Protests (NAVCO)

NAVCO 2.1 provides campaign-year data for all major violent and nonviolent campaigns. Because the analysis is conducted at the country-year level, it first aggregates these campaign-level observations by taking the maximum repression level observed among all campaigns active in that country-year. This produces a single repression value that reflects the most

[4] NAVCO records only the single most-severe level of repression per campaign-year and so cannot separate non-lethal coercion from lethal force within a unit. ACLED, in turn, enters the analysis only as a count of state-attributed fatalities, a measure with no non-lethal counterpart.

[5] Because network structures derived from ARC are constructed at the country-year level, the repression measures used in the analysis must be aligned to the same temporal and analytical resolution. This requires aggregating the event-based datasets, ACLED, SCAD, and Mass Mobilization, to the country-year level. Importantly, this aggregation is not only a practical requirement imposed by the ARC-based measures but is also theoretically justified. Even when repression is observed at the level of individual protest events, state responses are shaped by the broader alliance structure of the dissident field rather than by the characteristics of any single incident. Authorities react to events while drawing on assessments of dissident cohesion, fragmentation, and escalation potential, all of which are network-level properties captured by ARC. Aggregating repression to the country-year is thus not only a practical choice but also matches the theoretical mechanism of state threat assessment.

severe state behavior during that year. This study then converts this into a binary measure coded 1 if the country-year experienced NAVCO's highest repression category (extreme or lethal repression), and 0 otherwise.

2) Number of Fatalities (NAVCO)

This study also constructs an annual measure of regime-caused fatalities that averages the lowest and highest credible estimates reported for each campaign-year. This approach follows the NAVCO coding guidelines, which aggregate all deaths directly inflicted by state agents while excluding indirect or unrelated sources of mortality. Averaging the credible bounds provides a conservative central estimate that reduces sensitivity to reporting uncertainty and extreme values. Because the distribution of these fatality counts is highly skewed, the analysis applies a log transformation.

3) Number of Fatalities (ACLED)

Using ACLED's actor information, this study identifies all events in which state forces are a named participant and sums the reported fatalities associated with those events for each country-year. This restriction ensures that the measure reflects deaths directly attributable to state-led repression rather than to clashes between non-state groups or other forms of violence. Because the distribution of these fatality counts is highly skewed, the final measure uses the logarithm of the annual total, providing a more stable scale for empirical analysis.

4) Lethal Repression of Protests (SCAD)

The Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD) provides event-level information on protests, riots, strikes, and related social disturbances across Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The analysis uses protest events only, defined as events with organized or spontaneous, peaceful or violent demonstrations. SCAD identifies whether security forces used repression during each protest event and distinguishes between non-lethal and lethal forms. To construct a

country-year measure, the study determines which protest events involved any use of lethal state coercion, resulting in deaths. It then calculates, for each country-year, the proportion of protest events in which the state employed lethal coercive action.

5) Number of Fatalities (SCAD)

SCAD also reports the number of people killed in each protest event. To capture the extent of lethal force used by the state during episodes of contentious mobilization, the analysis sums all protest-related fatalities within each country-year and takes the log of this total to reduce skew.

6) Lethal Repression of Protests (Mass Mobilization)

The Mass Mobilization dataset provides detailed descriptions of state reactions to protest events, including arrests, beatings, crowd-dispersal tactics, shootings, and killings. The analysis restricts attention to the most severe forms of coercion, instances in which state forces inflicted fatalities during protest events. It therefore identifies all protest events in which government actors used lethal force and aggregates these to the country-year level. The resulting measure captures the share of protest events in which authorities employed deadly repression, allowing the analysis to focus on the state's most consequential coercive responses rather than broader crowd-control or non-lethal tactics.

7) Non-Lethal Repression of Protests (SCAD)

This study identifies protest events in which security forces employed non-lethal repression and computes, for each country-year, the proportion of protest events involving such non-lethal coercion, paralleling the lethal SCAD measure above. The analysis also constructs a binary indicator coded 1 if any non-lethal repression occurred in the country-year.

8) Non-Lethal Repression of Protests (Mass Mobilization)

MM records lower-intensity state reactions to protest, including arrests, beatings, and crowd-dispersal tactics, alongside lethal force. For each country-year, this study computes the proportion of protest events in which the state employed non-lethal rather than deadly coercion, and constructs a binary indicator for whether any non-lethal repression occurred.

Independent Variables

To capture cooperation that exceeds what dissidents' stated goals would normally support, this article uses two indicators derived from the gap between the ideal and observed ARC networks. The first, surprising cohesion, isolates alliances that appear despite the absence of any goal-based basis for cooperation. Such cross-cleavage ties are rare, costly to forge, and therefore signal unusually high organizational discipline and integrative capacity. To reduce concerns about simultaneity, the measure is lagged one year. This variable is further coded as a binary indicator. Surprising ties are not common, and the raw measure is therefore dominated by zeros, with the few nonzero values spread thinly across the distribution. This produces a highly skewed metric with limited variation at the continuous level. Collapsing all nonzero values to 1 thus provides a more stable representation of whether any surprising cooperation occurred in a given dissident network. Because surprising ties are difficult to construct, even a single such alliance can carry substantial informational weight. Governments are likely to interpret the mere presence of one goal-incongruent tie as evidence of unusual discipline and cross-cleavage coordination within the dissident network. Thus, a binary specification captures the idea that the occurrence of surprising cooperation, rather than its exact count, constitutes the meaningful signal to the state.

The second indicator, latent coordination potential, captures the opposite condition: instances in which organizations share goals that would make collaboration feasible but do not form alliances in practice. High values indicate that substantial goal-consistent cooperation remains unrealized and thus reflects latent capacity for future consolidation. This measure is also lagged by one year.

Control Variables

To isolate the effect of unrealized and unexpected cooperation from more conventional indicators of dissident capacity, the models include several controls. First, the analysis accounts for the size of the dissident field by including the logged number of active organizations in each country-year, adjusting for baseline coordination possibilities unrelated to goal structure. It also controls for the density of the observed alliance network, since realized cohesion can shape state threat perceptions on its own. To gauge overall mobilization capacity, it incorporates total organizational size, summing ARC's organization-level size assessments for each country-year after averaging multiple entries for the same group within a year.

Political and structural conditions are captured through three additional controls. Economic capacity is measured using logged GDP per capita, demographic pressures with logged population size (Fariss et al., 2022), and regime characteristics with the V-Dem polyarchy index (Teorell et al., 2019), which reflects the extent to which political institutions constrain or deter coercive state behavior. All controls are lagged by one year to ensure temporal separation from the repression outcomes and to reduce concerns about reverse causality.

Results

Table 2 reports the lethal repression models. The outcomes are estimated as two-way fixed-effects models with country-clustered standard errors. On the other hand, the binary NAVCO lethal-repression outcome is estimated using a Firth-penalized logit to guard against separation and small-sample bias in a sparse binary series.

The results offer consistent support for the expectation-contingent logic. Surprising cohesion, instances in which organizations ally despite no goal-based reason to cooperate, is robustly and negatively associated with lethal repression. The effect is large and significant in the NAVCO lethal-repression model and recurs across the fatality measures in other datasets. Only the SCAD lethal-repression share departs from this pattern, where the coef-

Table 2: Factors of Lethal Repression

	NAVCO Lethal Repression (Logit)	NAVCO Fatalities	ACLED Fatalities	SCAD Lethal Repression	SCAD Fatalities	MM Lethal Repression
(Intercept)	-6.899^{**}					
	(2.622)					
Surprising Cohesion	-2.210^{**}	-0.950^{*}	-0.493^{*}	0.027	-0.701^{**}	-0.133^{*}
	(0.738)	(0.463)	(0.230)	(0.044)	(0.262)	(0.053)
Latent Coordination	$1.059^{\dagger}$	-0.443	0.325	0.006	0.110	0.069
	(0.571)	(0.439)	(0.246)	(0.046)	(0.361)	(0.084)
Number of Nodes	0.318	-0.780	0.620^{*}	-0.010	0.920^{***}	-0.008
	(0.832)	(0.484)	(0.294)	(0.039)	(0.253)	(0.072)
Density	1.156	-0.866	-0.617	-0.165^{*}	0.459	0.023
	(0.950)	(1.310)	(0.533)	(0.074)	(0.461)	(0.126)
Organization Size	-0.109	1.530^{***}	-0.320	0.016	-0.192	0.082
	(0.739)	(0.387)	(0.304)	(0.040)	(0.235)	(0.060)
GDP Per Capita	-0.000^{**}	0.000	0.000^{*}	0.000	0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Population	1.423^{***}	-0.135	-1.070	0.039	-0.207	0.076
	(0.429)	(3.832)	(1.277)	(0.224)	(1.214)	(0.304)
Electoral Democracy	2.475	-5.774^{***}	-1.827	-0.085	-1.963	0.099
	(1.982)	(1.653)	(1.531)	(0.171)	(1.559)	(0.274)
AIC	47.967					
BIC	78.672					
R^2		0.116	0.108	0.027	0.076	0.033
Adj. R^2		-0.217	-0.164	-0.243	-0.180	-0.347
Num. obs.	224	224	292	346	346	263

$^{\dagger}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

ficient is small and indistinguishable from zero. Across datasets, the direction is consistent: an unexpected cross-cleavage alliance corresponds to less lethal repression in the following year, as states appear to read these improbable alliances as costly, high-credibility signals of cohesion that raise the political risks of escalation. Latent coordination potential, by contrast, does not systematically predict harsher lethal responses. Its coefficient is positive and marginally significant in the NAVCO lethal-repression model, but null across the remaining five outcomes, where the estimates are small and inconsistent in direction.

This null corresponds with what the theory predicts: Hypothesis 2a anticipated no esca-

lation because the threat latent coordination poses is hidden from audiences, leaving deadly force open to the charge of arbitrariness. The same backlash logic, in which lethal force is affordable only against a visible threat that is also an unsympathetic target, implies that surprising cohesion restrains lethal force while leaving non-lethal coercion to continue (Hypothesis 1b), and latent coordination invites non-lethal preemption by keeping the threat invisible to audiences (Hypothesis 2b). This accords with work on preventive repression, which finds that anticipated or structural threats are managed through low-visibility tools such as surveillance, legal harassment, and selective arrests rather than overt killing (Ritter and Conrad, 2016).

To test whether this pattern reflects expectation rather than movement capacity alone, the analysis examines whether the association between surprising cohesion and lethal repression varies with the prior familiarity of goal-incongruent alliances. Familiarity is measured using both the cumulative share of previously observed alliances that were goal-incongruent and the corresponding share over the preceding five years, constructed from prior years only; each measure is interacted with surprising cohesion in the baseline lethal-repression models. If expectation matters, the negative association should weaken where such alliances have become routine; if capacity is doing the work, their prior frequency should matter less. Figure 7 is broadly consistent with the former pattern. Ten of the twelve interactions are positive, six reach conventional significance, and one is marginally significant, while none is significantly negative. The association with lethal repression is strongest where goal-incongruent alliances are least expected and weakens as comparable cooperation becomes more familiar, suggesting that the political significance of these ties depends partly on how far they depart from prior expectations.

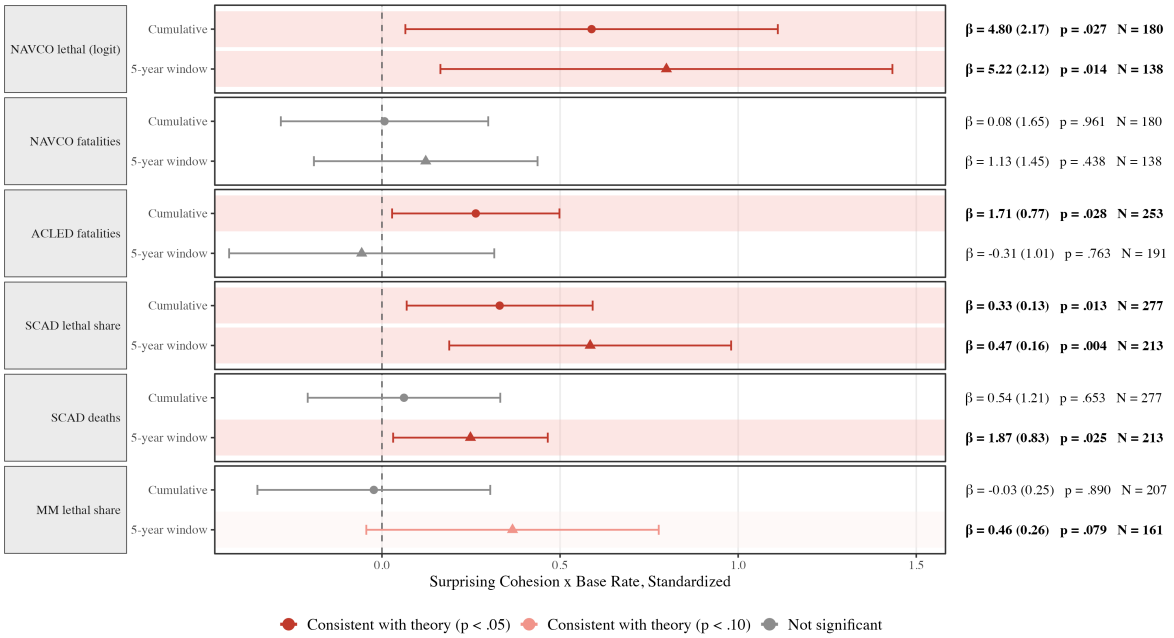


Figure 7: Surprising Cohesion and Lethal Repression by Prior Familiarity with Goal-Incongruent Alliances

As a complementary test of the capacity account, presented in Figure 8, surprising cohesion is also interacted with the number of organizations, total organizational size, and observed alliance density. The association shows little systematic attenuation as movements become larger or more organizationally developed: only one interaction reaches conventional significance, and its sign is negative rather than positive. This provides little support for the view that the result is driven primarily by the marginal capacity added by cross-cleavage alliances.

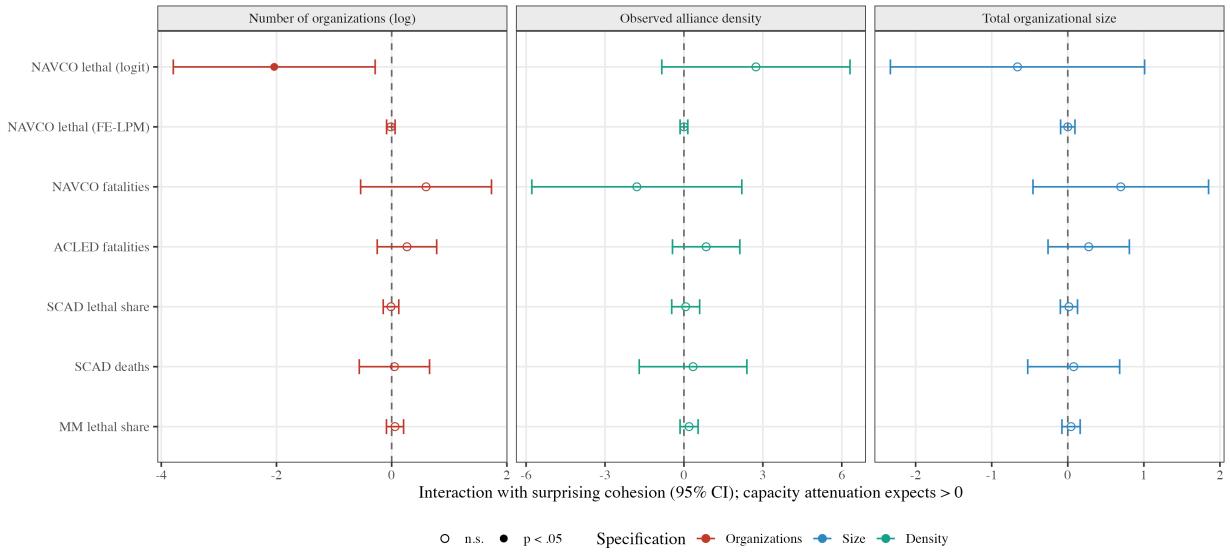


Figure 8: Interactions of Surprising Cohesion with Measures of Movement Scale

Table 3 reports the non-lethal models, estimating the share outcomes as two-way fixed-effects linear models and the occurrence outcomes as two-way fixed-effects logits, again with country-clustered standard errors. The clearest signal concerns latent coordination potential, which is positively associated with non-lethal repression in all four specifications, reaching conventional significance in the SCAD share model and marginal significance in both Mass Mobilization models. This is the pattern Hypothesis 2b anticipates: where the threat of future consolidation is real but invisible to audiences, states appear to manage it through lower-cost, non-lethal instruments rather than deadly force. Surprising cohesion is positively signed in three of the four models but more weakly, marginal in the SCAD share and Mass Mobilization occurrence models and indistinguishable from zero elsewhere. Consistent with Hypothesis 1b, surprising cohesion is not associated with less non-lethal repression in any specification.

Taken together, states respond to surprising displays of realized cohesion by withholding lethal force, the article's most robust finding. Latent coordination has little systematic association with lethal repression and is more tentatively linked to non-lethal coercion. This indicates that states act more sensitively on what dissident cooperation reveals, not on what it merely makes possible.

Table 3: Factors of Non-Lethal Repression

	SCAD Non-Lethal Share	SCAD Non-Lethal (FE Logit)	MM Non-Lethal Share	MM Non-Lethal (FE Logit)
Surprising Cohesion	$0.089^{\dagger}$	0.713	-0.002	$1.073^{\dagger}$
	(0.051)	(0.717)	(0.102)	(0.597)
Latent Coordination	0.118^{**}	0.501	$0.161^{\dagger}$	$0.906^{\dagger}$
	(0.044)	(0.638)	(0.092)	(0.526)
Number of Nodes	-0.002	0.305	0.040	$1.098^{\dagger}$
	(0.053)	(0.583)	(0.077)	(0.645)
Density	0.025	0.781	0.183	-1.037
	(0.054)	(0.630)	(0.167)	(0.902)
Organization Size	-0.053	$-0.967^{\dagger}$	-0.020	-0.902
	(0.049)	(0.565)	(0.092)	(0.640)
GDP Per Capita	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Population	-0.246	0.738	-0.519	$-7.358^{\dagger}$
	(0.322)	(3.077)	(0.328)	(4.276)
Electoral Democracy	-0.163	0.303	-0.338	0.592
	(0.238)	(4.412)	(0.282)	(3.158)
AIC		379.881		464.358
BIC		597.550		718.793
R^2	0.037		0.046	
Adj. R^2	-0.230		-0.330	
Num. obs.	346	262	263	349

$^{\dagger}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

Alternative Explanations and Robustness

Institutional Change An alternative explanation is that lower repression in year t + 1 might reflect democratization or regime turnover following movement success rather than strategic restraint by incumbents. Re-estimating the models on panels segmented at sharp shifts in the V-Dem polyarchy index, so that alliance structures and subsequent repression are compared only within periods of institutional continuity, leaves the outcome largely consistent. The results are reported in the Appendix.

Underreported Alliances Another concern is that this pattern could reflect the difficulty of observing cross-cleavage cooperation, which is often informal or concealed and so may go unrecorded. To assess how sensitive the results are to such under-observation, the Appendix re-estimates the models after injecting plausible missing edges into the observed networks across a range of assumed false-negative rates. These checks largely support the main findings: surprising cohesion remains negatively associated with lethal repression across specifications and assumed rates.

Response Timing A further possibility is that the negative association is specific to the one-year lag used in the main models, masking a different temporal structure closer to the conventional logic in which greater threat invites more repression. Re-estimating the lethal-repression models with surprising cohesion entered contemporaneously and at a two-year lag shows the relationship to be negatively signed in the same year and strongest at the one-year horizon, so it is not an artifact of the particular lag or of same-year simultaneity. This pattern is no longer robust at longer horizons: it attenuates by two years and, for the binary measure of extreme repression alone, reverses, though the robust pattern across measures remains the near-term negative association. These estimates are reported in the Appendix.

Strategic Endogeneity of Cooperation A further alternative is that alliance patterns are produced by state action rather than read as a signal by it: if incumbents work to prevent

coordination, an absence of ties may reflect successful preemption, while alliances may form where the state is too weak to block them, so cooperation and repression are jointly driven by state capacity. However, both network measures are lagged one year, so repression cannot mechanically generate the cooperation it is regressed on. Further, the models condition on regime and economic capacity through polyarchy and GDP per capita.

Illustrative Trends

Figure 9 presents three illustrative country trends that present the temporal expectations of the argument. In each panel, surprising cohesion is measured at t – 1 and plotted at year t, while repression outcomes (the number of fatalities) and electoral democracy are measured at t. The cases are selected to highlight instances in which cohesion and repression move in opposite directions over time, while differing in their regime trajectories.

Nigeria (ACLED) and Ethiopia (NAVCO) provide relatively clean illustrations of the proposed trend. In both cases, the association between surprising cohesion (t – 1) and fatalities (t) is negative, and this relationship holds in institutional contexts without abrupt democratic breaks. In particular, Ethiopia exhibits a largely stable and low level of electoral democracy throughout the period. Here, sharp fluctuations in surprising cohesion (t – 1) tend to coincide with fatalities (t), suggesting that significant changes in protest coordination and informational signals can precede coercive responses even in the absence of regime transition. Nigeria shows a similar relationship between cohesion signals and fatalities, despite a gradual improvement in electoral democracy.

Egypt (SCAD), by contrast, serves as a boundary case. Before 2011, Egypt's electoral democracy score remained low and stable, and the negative association between surprising cohesion (t – 1) and fatalities (t) is broadly consistent with the expectation. The 2011 Arab Spring, however, introduces a sharp institutional rupture: electoral democracy rises abruptly, while fatalities remain high amid regime collapse, elite fragmentation, and subsequent military intervention. In this post-2011 period, repression dynamics may thus reflect

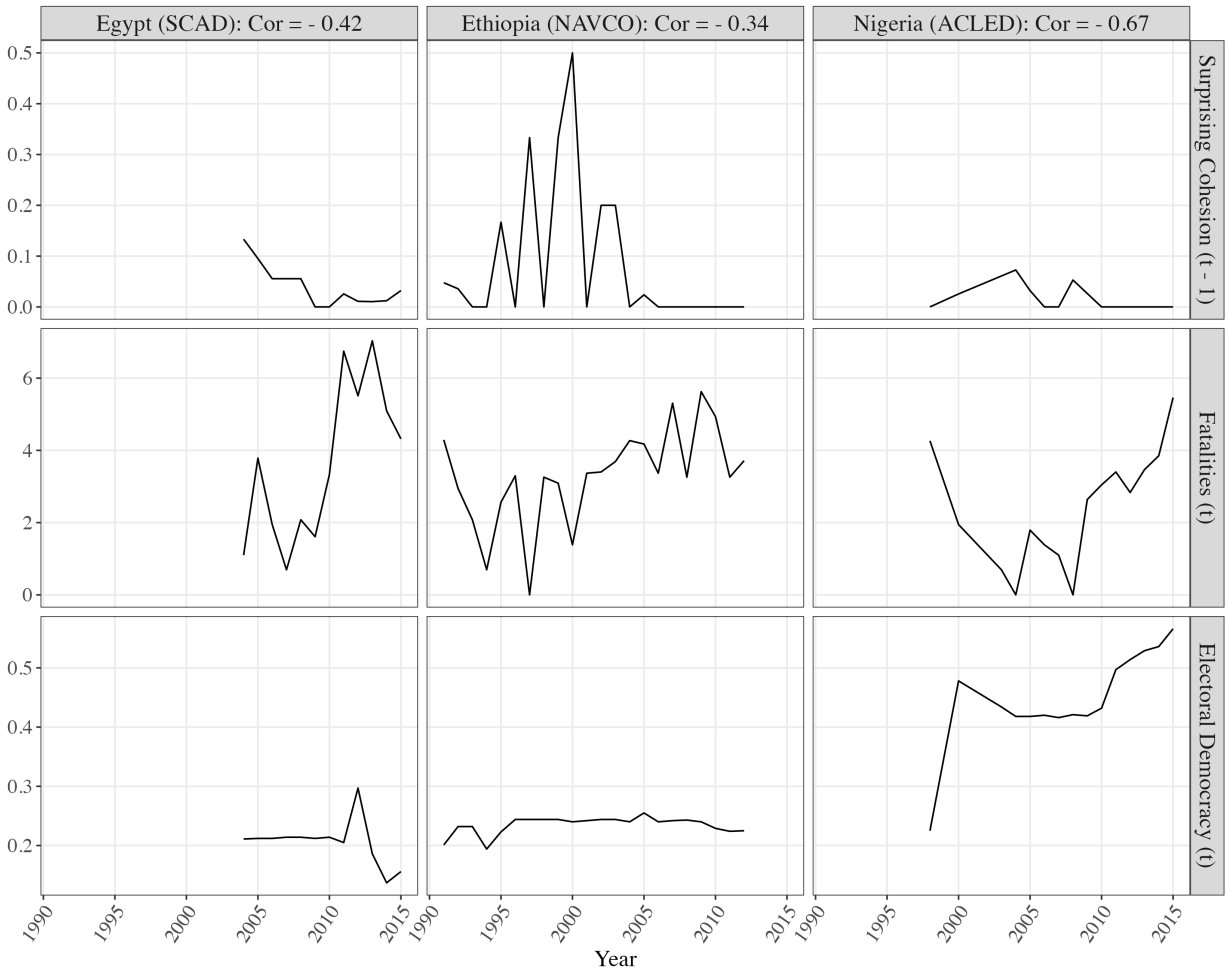


Figure 9: Illustrative Trends in Surprising Cohesion, Repression, and Electoral Democracy

struggles over regime control rather than responses to protest coordination signals. These illustrations may suggest a key scope condition or a limitation of the argument: when regime transitions or institutional shocks considerably restructure the political environment, the proposed mechanisms could be overshadowed by political tumults.

In sum, these cases help interpret the regression results by clarifying both the temporal trend and the scope conditions of the argument. Especially, periods of abrupt regime transition, such as Egypt's post-2011 episode, appear to disrupt the relationship between protest coordination signals and repression. This pattern suggests that the estimated average effects reported above should be understood as operating primarily outside moments of major institutional rupture.

Conclusion

This article has argued that state responses to dissent cannot be understood solely by examining realized dissident power. Governments do not observe alliance structures in isolation. They interpret cooperation against a backdrop of expectations formed by dissidents' publicly articulated goals. When alliance patterns deviate from this goal-implied baseline, they generate signals that differ from those conveyed by routine, expectation-consistent cooperation. The central claim is that these deviations matter for how threatening movements appear, and for how costly repression seems to states.

The empirical results show that the two different deviations leave different imprints on repression. Surprising cohesion is robustly associated with less lethal force, as though states read improbable, goal-incongruent alliances as costly and credible signals that raise the political costs of escalation. Latent coordination, by contrast, neither raises nor lowers lethal repression; its imprint appears instead on the non-lethal side, where states seem to manage a hidden but plausible threat through quieter instruments. Taken together, the findings suggest that repression reflects not only the realized scale of cooperation, but also how far that cooperation departs from expectation, with these deviations shaping the form of repression.

These findings have several implications for the study of repression and dissent. First, they indicate that conventional indicators of threat based on realized alliance density, move-

ment size, or protest frequency may miss important variation in how states interpret dissident networks. Two movements with identical observed alliance structures can produce different incentives for repression if one contains alliances that substantially exceed goal-implied expectations while the other does not. Second, the results suggest that regimes are especially sensitive to visible, surprising displays of cohesion that are likely to attract public attention and generate legitimacy for dissidents, even if those displays emerge from a relatively small subset of the network. Finally, the analysis demonstrates that bipartite network projections of goal structures can be used not only to study coalition formation among oppositional actors but also to construct expectation baselines against which to evaluate the political meaning of cooperation and non-cooperation.

A further implication is related to the strategic dilemmas faced by movements whose constituencies, goals, or issue domains are highly diverse. Such movements are often more fragmented at baseline because they encompass multiple cleavages that make routine cooperation less likely. Yet the findings here suggest an ironic consequence of this heterogeneity: precisely because cross-cleavage alliances are harder to form, the informational value of overcoming these divides is greater. When heterogeneous organizations manage to coordinate despite their differences, the resulting alliances are especially surprising and therefore carry a disproportionately large de-escalatory effect on state repression. This implies that coalition-building across disparate goals may yield not only organizational benefits for dissidents but also protective effects against the most severe forms of coercion.

At the same time, the study faces limitations that point to avenues for future research. The empirical strategy focuses on maximalist campaigns in African countries and relies on annual country-level aggregation, which may obscure important within-year dynamics and local variation in both alliance formation and repression. The measures of surprising cohesion and latent coordination potential are deliberately parsimonious and do not differentiate between different types of goals, organizations, or alliance mechanisms that might condition how states interpret deviations from expected cooperation. Future work could extend this

framework by examining how expectation-contingent signaling operates in other regions, regime types, and issue domains, or by connecting these deviations to other state responses, such as accommodation and co-optation, that lie beyond the coercive measures examined here. Future work could also construct the goal-implied baseline with less reliance on a predefined taxonomy, for instance, by deriving goal similarity from text-based embeddings of organizations' stated objectives rather than from coarse domains, though such approaches introduce their own modeling choices and would need to preserve the multi-goal structure that the present coding retains.

More broadly, the argument underscores the value of conceptualizing threat as expectation-contingent rather than as a simple function of realized power. By incorporating the gap between what is observed and what seems plausible given dissidents' goals, researchers can better capture the informational environment in which states make coercive decisions. Surprising cohesion and latent coordination potential represent two concrete ways of operationalizing this gap. Although surprising cohesion is the clearer signal on the lethal margin and latent coordination on the non-lethal one, both concepts highlight the importance of thinking about dissident networks not just as collections of ties, but as patterns of cooperation and non-cooperation that derive their meaning from the expectations against which they are judged.

Appendix

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4: Descriptive statistics (NAVCO Model Variables; Original Panel)

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	224	0.982	0.133	0.000	1.000	1.000
Latent Coordination	224	0.589	0.357	0.000	0.662	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	224	0.263	0.441	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	224	1.448	0.784	0.693	1.099	4.159
Density	224	0.175	0.269	0.000	0.066	1.000
Organization Size	224	2.450	0.767	0.000	2.303	5.215
GDP Per Capita	224	10067.661	15474.573	62.255	3762.369	76144.245
Population (log)	224	7.550	1.082	4.459	7.708	9.789
Electoral Democracy	224	0.265	0.115	0.072	0.240	0.769
Fatalities (log)	224	4.227	2.485	0.000	4.790	8.810

Table 5: Descriptive statistics (ACLED Model Variables; Original Panel)

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Fatalities (log)	292	0.957	1.456	0.000	0.000	7.375
Latent Coordination	292	0.510	0.333	0.000	0.502	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	292	0.356	0.480	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	292	1.696	0.873	0.693	1.609	4.290
Density	292	0.169	0.243	0.000	0.093	1.000
Organization Size	292	2.622	0.881	0.000	2.565	5.252
GDP Per Capita	292	10639.814	17228.508	70.600	3849.688	84743.808
Population (log)	292	7.455	1.226	4.253	7.463	9.844
Electoral Democracy	292	0.310	0.136	0.072	0.279	0.769

Table 6: Descriptive statistics (SCAD Model Variables; Original Panel)

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	346	0.137	0.229	0.000	0.000	1.000
Non-Lethal Repression	346	0.285	0.281	0.000	0.250	1.000
Latent Coordination	346	0.522	0.333	0.000	0.502	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	346	0.376	0.485	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	346	1.690	0.854	0.693	1.609	4.290
Density	346	0.166	0.232	0.000	0.100	1.000
Organization Size	346	2.607	0.859	0.000	2.565	5.252
GDP Per Capita	346	10279.750	16546.122	65.489	3579.413	84743.808
Population (log)	346	7.457	1.171	4.644	7.459	9.844
Electoral Democracy	346	0.301	0.132	0.072	0.270	0.769
Fatalities (log)	346	1.889	1.959	0.000	1.386	8.613

Table 7: Descriptive statistics (MM Model Variables; Original Panel)

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	263	0.235	0.341	0.000	0.000	1.000
Non-Lethal Repression	263	0.580	0.368	0.000	0.591	1.000
Latent Coordination	263	0.516	0.318	0.000	0.500	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	263	0.445	0.498	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	263	1.775	0.865	0.693	1.792	4.290
Density	263	0.153	0.201	0.000	0.105	1.000
Organization Size	263	2.671	0.899	0.000	2.639	5.252
GDP Per Capita	263	9363.424	16505.772	62.255	3220.015	84743.808
Population (log)	263	7.312	1.251	4.459	7.262	9.844
Electoral Democracy	263	0.311	0.138	0.072	0.280	0.769

Table 8: Descriptive statistics (NAVCO Model Variables; Split Panel)

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	224	0.982	0.133	0.000	1.000	1.000
Latent Coordination	224	0.589	0.357	0.000	0.662	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	224	0.263	0.441	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	224	1.448	0.784	0.693	1.099	4.159
Density	224	0.175	0.269	0.000	0.066	1.000
Organization Size	224	2.450	0.767	0.000	2.303	5.215
GDP Per Capita	224	10067.661	15474.573	62.255	3762.369	76144.245
Population (log)	224	7.550	1.082	4.459	7.708	9.789
Electoral Democracy	224	0.265	0.115	0.072	0.240	0.769
Fatalities (log)	224	4.227	2.485	0.000	4.790	8.810

Table 9: Descriptive statistics (ACLED Model Variables; Split Panel)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Fatalities (log)	276	0.937	1.423	0.000	0.000	7.375
Latent Coordination	276	0.515	0.331	0.000	0.516	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	276	0.355	0.479	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	276	1.684	0.867	0.693	1.386	4.290
Density	276	0.167	0.242	0.000	0.093	1.000
Organization Size	276	2.630	0.856	0.000	2.565	5.252
GDP Per Capita	276	10970.207	17634.551	70.600	3942.431	84743.808
Population (log)	276	7.475	1.236	4.253	7.491	9.844
Electoral Democracy	276	0.307	0.134	0.099	0.277	0.769

Table 10: Descriptive statistics (SCAD Model Variables; Split Panel)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	323	0.139	0.232	0.000	0.000	1.000
Non-Lethal Repression	323	0.288	0.282	0.000	0.250	1.000
Latent Coordination	323	0.518	0.331	0.000	0.500	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	323	0.378	0.486	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	323	1.684	0.854	0.693	1.609	4.290
Density	323	0.166	0.232	0.000	0.100	1.000
Organization Size	323	2.620	0.839	0.000	2.565	5.252
GDP Per Capita	323	10462.621	16898.132	65.489	3598.226	84743.808
Population (log)	323	7.477	1.184	4.644	7.491	9.844
Electoral Democracy	323	0.299	0.132	0.084	0.270	0.769
Fatalities (log)	323	1.867	1.932	0.000	1.386	8.613

Table 11: Descriptive statistics (MM Model Variables; Split Panel)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Lethal Repression	243	0.225	0.339	0.000	0.000	1.000
Non-Lethal Repression	243	0.591	0.370	0.000	0.600	1.000
Latent Coordination	243	0.511	0.316	0.000	0.500	1.000
Surprising Cohesion	243	0.453	0.499	0.000	0.000	1.000
Number of Nodes (log)	243	1.775	0.867	0.693	1.792	4.290
Density	243	0.152	0.203	0.000	0.105	1.000
Organization Size	243	2.686	0.880	0.000	2.639	5.252
GDP Per Capita	243	9406.009	16910.781	62.255	3129.497	84743.808
Population (log)	243	7.322	1.261	4.644	7.239	9.844
Electoral Democracy	243	0.310	0.138	0.116	0.277	0.769

Segmented Panel Regression

Table 12: Factors of Lethal Repression (Segmented Panels by Polyarchy Transitions)

	NAVCO Fatalities	ACLED Fatalities	SCAD Lethal Repression	SCAD Fatalities	MM Lethal Repression
Surprising Cohesion	−0.713	−1.022**	−0.025	−1.169***	−0.356**
	(0.679)	(0.326)	(0.059)	(0.340)	(0.103)
Latent Coordination	−0.159	0.479*	0.013	0.614	0.024
	(0.335)	(0.228)	(0.066)	(0.441)	(0.119)
Number of Nodes	−0.528	1.423***	0.155*	0.944	0.154
	(0.653)	(0.406)	(0.062)	(0.612)	(0.142)
Density	−0.879	−1.294**	−0.200**	0.160	−0.215
	(1.224)	(0.476)	(0.061)	(0.497)	(0.170)
Organization Size	0.970*	−0.995**	−0.144*	−0.025	0.023
	(0.473)	(0.374)	(0.065)	(0.521)	(0.119)
GDP Per Capita	−0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	−0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Population	1.018	−1.501	1.407**	7.508	0.742
	(6.408)	(3.632)	(0.496)	(5.382)	(0.983)
Electoral Democracy	−7.837**	−4.439	0.442	6.736*	1.167
	(2.966)	(3.153)	(0.254)	(3.210)	(0.833)
R^2	0.085	0.195	0.119	0.134	0.129
Adj. R^2	−0.418	−0.338	−0.455	−0.430	−1.022
Num. obs.	224	154	196	196	131

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 12 reports the lethal-repression models re-estimated on the segmented panels. Surprising coalition cohesion remains negative across all five specifications and attains statistical significance in three of them (ACLED fatalities, SCAD fatalities, and MM lethal repression), reproducing the baseline pattern: movements whose alliances exceed their goal-implied baseline face less lethal force, not more. Latent coordination, by contrast, is null across most outcomes, with a single positive coefficient on ACLED fatalities; consistent with H2a, the failure to realize feasible ties does not provoke systematic lethal escalation. Where the size of the dissident field (number of nodes) reaches significance, it carries a positive sign (ACLED

fatalities, SCAD lethal repression), the opposite of surprising cohesion. The restraint that follows unexpectedly cohesive networks thus reflects how dissidents cooperate rather than how many they are, and it persists within spells of institutional continuity rather than tracking democratization or regime turnover.

Table 13: Factors of Non-Lethal Repression (Segmented Panels by Polyarchy Transitions)

	SCAD Non-Lethal Share	SCAD Non-Lethal (FE Logit)	MM Non-Lethal Share	MM Non-Lethal (FE Logit)
Surprising Cohesion	0.173**	1.291	−0.110	0.994
	(0.059)	(1.587)	(0.132)	(0.896)
Latent Coordination	0.088	−0.797	0.037	0.227
	(0.047)	(1.765)	(0.107)	(0.830)
Number of Nodes	−0.034	0.586	0.149	2.278
	(0.061)	(2.983)	(0.179)	(2.017)
Density	0.096	2.430	−0.066	−6.388
	(0.075)	(2.013)	(0.260)	(3.564)
Organization Size	−0.051	−3.607	−0.082	−2.455
	(0.056)	(3.142)	(0.203)	(2.101)
GDP Per Capita	0.000	−0.001*	−0.000	−0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Population	−1.642**	−32.607	−0.529	−2.493
	(0.499)	(17.741)	(1.395)	(7.683)
Electoral Democracy	−0.112	14.168	−0.434	−7.066
	(0.422)	(8.424)	(0.772)	(9.923)
R^2	0.106		0.020	
Adj. R^2	−0.478		−1.276	
Num. obs.	196	130	131	167

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 13 turns to non-lethal repression on the same segmented panels. Consistent with H1b, surprising cohesion is positively and significantly associated with the SCAD non-lethal share and is positively signed in both occurrence (FE logit) models, indicating that the repressive response does not vanish when lethal force becomes harder to justify but continues through lower-cost, non-lethal instruments. Latent coordination is positively signed in three of the four cells yet does not reach significance once panels are restricted to institutionally comparable spells, so the preemptive non-lethal pattern anticipated by H2b receives only

tentative support in this more demanding specification.

False-Negative Edge Sensitivity

Because cross-cleavage cooperation is often informal or concealed, some genuine alliances may go unrecorded, and such false negatives would deflate surprising cohesion. To gauge their impact, missed edges implied by an assumed false-negative rate q are drawn back into each country-year's network, the affected dyads are reclassified, and the lethal-repression models are refit. A random scheme spreads missed edges across absent dyads in proportion to prevalence; an adversarial goal-incongruent scheme assigns them all to goal-incongruent dyads, maximizing the inflation of surprising cohesion. Rates range from five to thirty percent over 500 draws each, with a coefficient counted as robust only if significant at $p < 0.05$.

As Figure 10 shows, the coefficient on surprising cohesion stays negative across both schemes and all rates for every outcome except the SCAD lethal-repression share, which was already null in the main analysis. Significance is strongest at the lower, more plausible rates and fades at the highest ones, the expected consequence of injecting many edges into sparse measures. The negative association is thus robust to plausible under-observation, including the adversarial case in which the missed ties are the cross-cleavage alliances most likely to be missed.

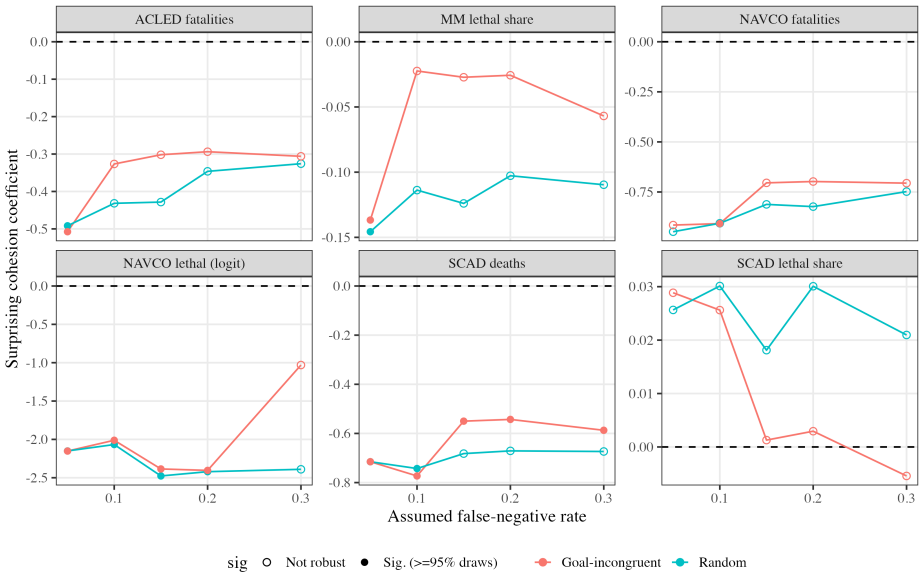


Figure 10: Surprising Cohesion Coefficient under Simulated False-Negative Edges

Results from Different Time Horizons

Table 14 reports the coefficient on surprising cohesion when it is entered contemporaneously (t), at the one-year lag used in the main models ($t-1$), and at a two-year lag ($t-2$), with repression measured at year t throughout. The negative association is concentrated at the one-year horizon, where it is statistically significant in five of the six outcomes: the NAVCO lethal-repression logit, NAVCO fatalities, ACLED state fatalities, SCAD deaths, and the Mass Mobilization lethal share. At the contemporaneous horizon, the coefficients are negatively signed across these same outcomes, but do not reach significance, so the relationship is already present in the same year while emerging most clearly after a one-year interval. At the two-year horizon, the association weakens toward zero in most models; the one exception is the NAVCO binary measure of extreme repression, whose coefficient turns positive, though this is a single binary outcome and the robust pattern across measures remains the negative association at the one-year lag. The SCAD lethal-repression share does not follow this pattern at any horizon, but this measure was also indistinguishable from zero in the main analysis, so its behavior here reflects a null that is present from the outset rather

than a departure introduced by the timing checks.

Table 14: Surprising Cohesion and Lethal Repression across Timing Horizons

Outcome	Horizon	Coefficient	SE	p
NAVCO lethal repression (logit)	t	−1.617	1.248	0.195
	$t-1$	−2.210	0.738	0.003
	$t-2$	2.799	0.869	0.001
NAVCO fatalities	t	−0.372	0.503	0.460
	$t-1$	−0.950	0.463	0.042
	$t-2$	−0.319	0.549	0.562
ACLED state fatalities	t	−0.252	0.245	0.304
	$t-1$	−0.493	0.230	0.033
	$t-2$	−0.218	0.308	0.481
SCAD lethal repression share	t	0.011	0.030	0.713
	$t-1$	0.027	0.044	0.542
	$t-2$	−0.029	0.029	0.312
SCAD deaths	t	−0.396	0.281	0.160
	$t-1$	−0.701	0.262	0.008
	$t-2$	−0.080	0.402	0.842
MM lethal repression share	t	−0.050	0.063	0.431
	$t-1$	−0.133	0.053	0.014
	$t-2$	−0.110	0.092	0.233

Note: The NAVCO model is a bias-reduced (Firth) logit; the others are two-way fixed-effects within estimators. Standard errors are clustered by country throughout.

Temporal Ordering of Movement Capacity and Surprising Cohesion

Surprising cohesion might be a by-product of strength that already existed, appearing only after a movement has grown. To test this, four capacity proxies are related: the number of active organizations, total organizational size, observed alliance density, and a mobilization-scale measure for the NAVCO subsample. For each, Table 15 reports a contemporaneous regression of surprising cohesion on the proxy and a lagged one conditioning on surprising cohesion's own lag.

Capacity does not anticipate surprising cohesion: no lagged proxy positively predicts it, and the only significant lagged term, in the mobilization measure, is negative. Surprising co-

Table 15: Surprising Cohesion and Realized Capacity: Contemporaneous and Lagged Associations

Capacity proxy	Direction	Coef.	SE	N
Number of nodes (log)	Contemporaneous ($t \leftrightarrow t$)	0.011^*	(0.005)	415
	Capacity$_{t-1} \rightarrow$ Surprising$_t$	-0.004	(0.005)	300
Organization size (log)	Contemporaneous ($t \leftrightarrow t$)	0.006	(0.006)	415
	Capacity$_{t-1} \rightarrow$ Surprising$_t$	0.002	(0.004)	300
Observed density	Contemporaneous ($t \leftrightarrow t$)	0.171^*	(0.067)	415
	Capacity$_{t-1} \rightarrow$ Surprising$_t$	-0.004	(0.034)	300
Mobilization (log part.)	Contemporaneous ($t \leftrightarrow t$)	-0.001	(0.002)	247
	Capacity$_{t-1} \rightarrow$ Surprising$_t$	-0.005^*	(0.002)	200

$^*p < 0.05$. Each row is a two-way fixed-effects within model with country-clustered standard errors. The dependent variable is surprising cohesion throughout. "Contemporaneous" regresses surprising cohesion$_t$ on the capacity proxy$_t$; "Capacity$_{t-1} \rightarrow$ Surprising$_t$" regresses surprising cohesion$_t$ on the lagged proxy, conditioning on surprising cohesion$_{t-1}$. The mobilization proxy is available only for the NAVCO subsample.

hesion is associated with the number of active organizations and observed density within the same year, though not with organizational size or mobilization, so the same-year association with realized strength is present but partial.

Stability of Articulated Goal Domain

To gauge how much articulated goals vary, this analysis quantifies variation in the same coarse goal domains from which the ideal network is built. Within each country-year, it measures how dispersed organizations are across domains using a Herfindahl index, where higher values indicate concentration in fewer domains. Over time, it compares the domain set a country advances in consecutive years using the Jaccard similarity, the size of the intersection divided by the size of the union of the two years' sets, with its complement giving the share of the combined set that changed. Jaccard suits this task because it compares sets rather than counts, registering when domains are swapped in or out, even if their number is unchanged, and because dividing by the union makes movements of different sizes comparable.

Table 16 reports the results. Within a country-year, the dissident field advances a moderate range of domains rather than collapsing onto a single issue or scattering across all

Table 16: Variation in Articulated Goal Domains, Within Movements and Over Time

Quantity	Value
Within country-year	
Country-years	655
Mean distinct domains advanced	4.67
Median distinct domains advanced	4
Mean domain concentration (HHI)	0.436
Year to year (within country)	
Consecutive-year transitions	477
Mean Jaccard similarity ($t-1$ to t)	0.693
Median Jaccard similarity	0.750
Mean domain turnover (1−Jaccard)	0.307
Share of transitions with no domain change	0.382

Goal domains are coded with the same taxonomy used for the bipartite projection. HHI is the Herfindahl concentration of organizations across domains within a country-year, where higher values indicate that organizations cluster in fewer domains. Jaccard similarity compares the set of domains a country's dissident field advances in consecutive years; 1 indicates an identical domain set and 0 no overlap. Turnover is its complement.

of them. Across consecutive years, the domain set is fairly stable: most of the domains a country advances in one year recur in the next, and in a substantial share of transitions, the set does not change at all, though stability is not complete. By mapping demands onto broad domains, the coding absorbs minor reformulations while still registering substantive shifts, so the goal-implied baseline rests on a structure that is largely persistent from year to year rather than one that fluctuates arbitrarily, while retaining enough movement to carry real information.

Organization Types in Surprising Alliances

To describe the organizations behind these alliances, each observed tie is split into surprising ties, those between organizations sharing no goal domain, and routine ties, those with a shared domain, and the ARC organization-type code is attached to both endpoints. A tie is recorded as involving a violent actor whenever either endpoint is coded as a rebel group, ARC's category for armed organizations that pursue their goals through force. The compo-

sition of surprising ties is then summarized by the most common pairings of organization types and by how often a rebel group appears, with routine ties serving as a comparison.

Table 17: Organization Types in Surprising and Routine Alliances

Tie type	Ties	With a rebel group	Share
Surprising	769	68	0.088
Routine	1635	408	0.250
Most common type pairings among surprising ties			
Front + Political party		275	0.358
CSO (other) + Front		120	0.156
CSO (other) + CSO (other)		59	0.077
Front + Trade union		58	0.075
Front + Rebel group		44	0.057
Political party + Political party		37	0.048

Organization types are from ARC; a tie involves a rebel group if either endpoint is coded type 7.

Table 17 shows that surprising alliances are predominantly formed among nonviolent political organizations rather than armed actors. The most common pairings join fronts, political parties, civil society organizations, and trade unions, with coalition fronts featuring especially often, consistent with their role in bridging organizations that shared goals alone would not connect. Rebel groups are comparatively rare in these ties: a violent actor appears in only about nine percent of surprising alliances, against roughly twenty-five percent of routine ones. The pattern the measure captures is thus largely one of cross-cleavage coordination among civilian political organizations, and the de-escalatory association documented earlier is not an artifact of armed groups driving both cooperation and the state's response.

References

Artabe, Eugenia, Samantha Chapa, Leah Sparkman and Patrick E. Shea. 2023. "External Threats, Capacity, and Repression: How the Threat of War Affects Political Development and Physical Integrity Rights." *British Journal of Political Science* 53(4):1311–1327.

Aytaç, S. Erdem, Luis Schiumerini and Susan Stokes. 2017. "Protests and Repression in New Democracies." *Perspectives on Politics* 15(1):62–82.

Bakke, Kristin M., Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham and Lee J. M. Seymour. 2012. "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(2):265–283.

Birkland, Thomas A. 1998. "Focusing Events, Mobilization, and Agenda Setting." *Journal of Public Policy* 18(1):53–74.

Butcher, Charles, Jessica Maves Braithwaite, Jonathan Pinckney, Eirin Haugseth, Ingrid Vik Bakken and Marius Swane Wishman. 2022. "Introducing the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns (ARC) dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(3):449–460.

Carey, Sabine C. 2006. "The Dynamic Relationship Between Protest and Repression." *Political Research Quarterly* 59(1):1–11.

Carey, Sabine C. 2010. "The Use of Repression as a Response to Domestic Dissent." *Political Studies* 58(1):167–186.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2010. "Kifaya.".

Chenoweth, Erica and Christopher Wiley Shay. 2022. "Updating Nonviolent Campaigns: Introducing Navco 2.1." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(6):876–889.

Christia, Fotini. 2012. *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press.

Clark, David, Patrick Regan and David H. Clark. 2016. "Mass Mobilization Protest Data: Protests Against Governments.".

Clarke, Killian. 2011. "Saying "Enough": Authoritarianism and Egypt's Kefaya Movement." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16(4):397–416.

Cunningham, David, Geoff Ward and Peter B. Owens. 2019. "Configuring Political Repression: Anti-Civil Rights Enforcement in Mississippi*." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 24(3):319–343.

Dahlum, Sirianne. 2023. "Joining Forces: Social Coalitions and Democratic Revolutions." *Journal of Peace Research* 60(1):42–57.

Danneman, Nathan and Emily Hencken Ritter. 2014. "Contagious Rebellion and Preemptive Repression." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(2):254–279.

Davenport, Christian. 1995. "Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception and State Repression: An Inquiry into Why States Apply Negative Sanctions." *American Journal of Political Science* 39(3):683.

Davenport, Christian. 1996. "The Weight of the Past: Exploring Lagged Determinants of Political Repression." *Political Research Quarterly* 49(2):377–403.

Davenport, Christian. 2007. "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10(1):1–23.

Earl, Jennifer, Sarah A. Soule and John D. McCarthy. 2003. "Protest Under Fire? Explaining the Policing of Protest." *American Sociological Review* 68(4):581–606.

Earl, Jennifer, Thomas V. Maher and Jennifer Pan. 2022. "The Digital Repression of Social Movements, Protest, and Activism: A Synthetic Review." *Science Advances* 8(10):eabl8198.

Fariss, Christopher J., Therese Anders, Jonathan N. Markowitz and Miriam Barnum. 2022. "New Estimates of Over 500 Years of Historic Gdp and Population Data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66(3):553–591.

Gade, Emily Kalah, Michael Gabbay, Mohammed M. Hafez and Zane Kelly. 2019. "Networks of Cooperation: Rebel Alliances in Fragmented Civil Wars." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63(9):2071–2097.

Gartner, Scott Sigmund and Patrick M. Regan. 1996. "Threat and Repression: The Non-Linear Relationship Between Government and Opposition Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 33(3):273–287.

Heffington, Colton. 2021. "External Threat and Human Rights: How International Conflict Leads to Domestic Repression." *Journal of Human Rights* 20(1):2–19.

Hendrix, Cullen S. and Idean Salehyan. 2017. "A House Divided: Threat Perception, Military Factionalism, and Repression in Africa." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(8):1653–1681.

Honari, Ali. 2018. "From 'the Effect of Repression' Toward 'the Response to Repression'." *Current Sociology* 66(6):950–973.

Hultquist, Agatha Skierkowski, Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer. 2025. "Why Do States Violently Repress Some Political Organizations, but Not Others? Evidence from Ethnopolitical Actors in the Middle East and North Africa." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 48(5):557–580.

Karreth, Johannes, Jaroslav Tir and Douglas M Gibler. 2022. "Latent Territorial Threat and Democratic Regime Reversals." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(2):197–212.

Latapy, Matthieu, Clémence Magnien and Nathalie Del Vecchio. 2008. "Basic Notions for the Analysis of Large Two-Mode Networks." *Social Networks* 30(1):31–48.

Lohmann, Susanne. 1993. "A Signaling Model of Informative and Manipulative Political Action." *American Political Science Review* 87(2):319–333.

Manekin, Devorah, Tamar Mitts and Yael Zeira. 2024. "The Politics of Allyship: Multiethnic Coalitions and Mass Attitudes Toward Protest." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121(19):e2314653121.

Neal, Zachary. 2014. "The Backbone of Bipartite Projections: Inferring Relationships from Co-Authorship, Co-Sponsorship, Co-Attendance and Other Co-Behaviors." *Social Networks* 39:84–97.

Nordås, Ragnhild and Christian Davenport. 2013. "Fight the Youth: Youth Bulges and State Repression." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4):926–940.

Nugent, Elizabeth R. 2020. "The Psychology of Repression and Polarization." *World Politics* 72(2):291–334.

Pearlman, Wendy and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham. 2012. "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56(1):3–15.

Poe, Steven C. and C. Neal Tate. 1994. "Repression of Human Rights to Personal Integrity in the 1980s: A Global Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 88(4):853–872.

Raleigh, Clionadh, Rew Linke, Håvard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen. 2010. "Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5):651–660.

Regan, Patrick M and Errol A Henderson. 2002. "Democracy, Threats and Political Repression in Developing Countries: Are Democracies Internally Less Violent?" *Third World Quarterly* 23(1):119–136.

Ritter, Emily Hencken. 2014. "Policy Disputes, Political Survival, and the Onset and Severity of State Repression." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(1):143–168.

Ritter, Emily Hencken and Courtenay R. Conrad. 2016. "Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression." *American Political Science Review* 110(1):85–99.

Salehyan, Idean, Cullen S. Hendrix, Jesse Hamner, Christina Case, Christopher Linebarger, Emily Stull and Jennifer Williams. 2012. "Social Conflict in Africa: A New Database." *International Interactions* 38(4):503–511.

Sato, Yuko and Michael Wahman. 2019. "Elite Coordination and Popular Protest: The Joint Effect on Democratic Change." *Democratization* 26(8):1419–1438.

Schubiger, Livia Isabella. 2023. "One for All? State Violence and Insurgent Cohesion." *International Organization* 77(1):33–64.

Stephan, Maria J. and Erica Chenoweth. 2008. "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict." *International Security* 33(1):7–44.

Sutton, Jonathan, Charles R Butcher and Isak Svensson. 2014. "Explaining Political Jiu-Jitsu." *Journal of Peace Research* 51(5):559–573.

Tappin, Ben M., Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand. 2020. "Bayesian or Biased? Analytic Thinking and Political Belief Updating." *Cognition* 204:104375.

Teorell, Jan, Michael Coppedge, Staffan Lindberg and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2019. "Measuring Polyarchy Across the Globe, 1900–2017." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 54(1):71–95.

Wahman, Michael. 2013. "Opposition Coalitions and Democratization by Election." *Government and Opposition* 48(1):3–32.

Yarhi-Milo, Keren, Joshua D. Kertzer and Jonathan Renshon. 2018. "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(10):2150–2179.

Young, Joseph K. 2013. "Repression, Dissent, and the Onset of Civil War." *Political Research Quarterly* 66(3):516–532.