Ebb and flow? The effectiveness of mass mobilization on transitions to democracy

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Abstract

Recent studies claim that nonviolent pro-democracy movements have become less successful over time. We explicitly investigate the extent of temporal heterogeneity of the effectiveness of mass mobilization on transitions to democracy, assessing whether the current plummeting success rate is historically unprecedented, or whether there have been similar drops in the past, suggesting that mass mobilization's propensity to initiate democratic cluster temporally. We examine this using the recently completed Opposition Movements and Groups (OMG) dataset from 1900 to 2020, and find evidence that non-violent mobilization and transitions to democracy is temporally heterogeneous. Specifically, we find that it was not until the early 1980s that mass mobilization consistently exhibited a positive effect on the likelihood of democratic change. From that point onward, the effect increased significantly, peaking around 1998. However, this effect has since declined, and around 2014, it ceased to demonstrate a significant positive impact on the likelihood of democratic transitions. These observations suggest that non-violent mass mobilization campaigns have become less effective in promoting democratic change compared to the peak years of the 1990s.

Introduction

A crucial insight from the interdisciplinary study of social movements and civil resistance, drawing on political science, sociology, and economics, reveals that non-violent mass movements are efficient in toppling autocratic regimes (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Rivera and Gleditsch, 2013), triggering democratic change (see e.g. Bayer, Bethke and Lambach (2016); Karatnycky (2005); Kim and Kroeger (2019)), and fostering democratic stability (Bethke and Pinckney, 2021; Bayer, Bethke and Lambach, 2016; Kadivar, 2018)). The historic rise in the incidence of global protests might therefore offer ground for optimism (Chenoweth, 2022; Ortiz et al., 2021). However, we are currently witnessing a resurgence of autocratic regimes that have reversed democratic progress over the last 30 years (Boese et al., 2022; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). While the co-occurrence of these two trends is somewhat puzzling, they may, of course, be entirely unrelated. Alternatively, one possible explanation could be that non-violent mass mobilization no longer exerts the same democratic influence as it once did. In this paper, we therefore ask: Has the democratic influence of mass mobilization remained consistent over time, or has it undergone significant changes? Furthermore, if the latter is the case, is the current trend historically unprecedented?

Recent scholarship reports a significant decline in the success rate of non-violent movements over the past decade, suggesting that current efforts to remove incumbent autocrats face lower prospects of success compared to the 1980s and 1990s (Chenoweth, 2020; Chenoweth, Hocking and Marks, 2022). However, while the immediate ousting of an established regime may lead to democratization, there are many examples of the removal of autocrats that have not materialized in a democratic transition (e.g. Egypt, Iran), and protest success in authoritarian settings tend to involve considerable backlash after demobilization (Turner, 2023). Further, there are several examples of mass campaigns that fall short of ousting the regime, but still contribute to fostering democratic change (Albania,

South Korea). Thus, we argue that to move beyond a mere assessment of the success rate in accomplishing immediate objectives through the removal of the incumbent regime, it is crucial to analyze whether the capacity of mass mobilization to cultivate democratic change has changed over time.

We therefore explicitly investigate the extent of temporal heterogeneity of the effectiveness of mass mobilization on transitions to democracy. To explore this, we leverage the insight that substantial shifts, such as regime breakdowns and democratization, often pivot on temporal and critical structural shifts (Djuve, Knutsen and Wig, 2020; Hermansen, Knutsen and Nygård, 2021). Indeed, previous research underscores the timing of mass mobilization, arguing that protests and pressures from democratic opposition movements during pivotal junctures have played a decisive role in shaping democratic outcomes and quality (Bernhard, 2016; Bernhard and Jung, 2017; Fishman, 2017; Fernandes and Branco, 2017). Therefore, we evaluate whether the prospects for mass mobilization appear distinct today when compared to the past.

The study draws on new, global historical data from the *Opposition Movements and Groups* (OMG) dataset, covering all major mass movements with both semi-maximalist and maximalist goals between 1900 and 2020. We make use of various diagnostic tools for investigating temporal heterogeneity in a statistical model and a logistic time-varying coefficient model (cf. Hastie and Tibshirani (1993)) to better understand how the dynamics of mass mobilization and the contexts in which such mobilization is most likely to spur democratic change. We find that that it was not until the early 1980s that mass mobilization consistently exhibited a positive effect on the likelihood of democratic change. From that point onward, the effect increased significantly, peaking around 1998. However, this effect has since declined, and around 2014, it ceased to demonstrate a significant positive impact on the likelihood of democratic transitions. By 2017, the estimated effect crossed the zero line. These observations suggest that non-violent mass mobilization campaigns have become less

effective in promoting democratic change compared to the peak years of the 1990s. In addition, the results suggest that the current period is not without historical precedent. While the recent decline appears steeper than in earlier times, the estimated effect is comparable to any period prior to 1983. In fact, this historical assessment of the relationship throughout modern history suggests that, more than anything, it is the period from 1983 to 2014 that stands out as historically unprecedented. One might refer to this period as the "golden age" of mass mobilization. Additionally, we complement our analysis by examining whether the characteristics of countries experiencing mass mobilization have evolved over time, providing insights into potential changes within the local context and within the movement itself [to be added].

Literature review

There is a long tradition of studying the impact of mass mobilization on regime change (e.g. Sharp, 1973; Skocpol, 1979; Collier, 1999; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens, 1992; Moore, 1966; Bermeo, 1997; Przeworski, 2009), both directly (e.g. revolutions) (see e.g. Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Schock, 2005; Bond, 1988; Dahlum, Knutsen and Wig, 2019), indirectly (e.g. democratic concessions, coup d'état, and military defections) (see e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Nepstad, 2013), and its long-term effects and the likelihood of consolidation (Kadivar, 2018; Bayer, Bethke and Lambach, 2016). Here, we present some of the central findings within the literature.

Mass mobilization and democratic change

Since the publication of Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) seminal book, which demonstrated that nonviolent campaigns have nearly twice the success rate in toppling autocratic regimes, research on the causes and consequences of mass mobilization has flourished. Numerous

studies have examined the impact of mass mobilization on democratic change, consistently indicating an increased likelihood of democratic transition following popular mass mobilization. This finding holds across various measurements (see, e.g.: Kim and Kroeger, 2019; Hellmeier and Bernhard, 2022; Rivera and Gleditsch, 2013; Ulfelder, 2005) and research designs (Dahl, 2016; Kim and Kroeger, 2019).

The existing literature has identified three primary mechanisms connecting nonviolent mass mobilization to democratic change. Firstly, when campaigns demanding regime change succeed, autocrats are ousted, potentially paving the way for more democratic rule (Kim and Kroeger, 2019). Regimes established through non-violent mobilization tend to have a higher likelihood of being democratic compared to those formed through alternative methods. Non-violent campaigns are generally characterized by their broad base and decentralized coalitions of actors. Such structure lessens the chance of individual actors dominating the movement and thereby sets the stage for democratic rule. Consequently, regime changes brought about by non-violent mass mobilization frequently result in more democratic power-sharing arrangements. Moreover, non-violent direct action is more likely to foster a culture of compromise and nurturing preferences for democratic institutions (Rivera and Gleditsch, 2013).

Secondly, mass mobilization can foster democratic change even without displacing the incumbent regime. By compelling the regime to implement democratic reforms as a strategic survival measure, mass mobilization can induce significant political change. A significant body of research suggests that when confronted with serious revolutionary threats, regimes are often more inclined to embrace democratic reforms (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Davies, 1962; Gleditsch and Ward, 2006; Gurr, 1970). Once civil society demonstrates their ability and willingness to coordinate and sustain protests, the incentives to implement democratic reforms increase. Indeed, both successful and unsuccessful campaigns have been linked to democratic change in the aftermath of mass mobilization (Dahl, 2016).

Thirdly, mass mobilization can foster democratic reforms by inducing or incentivizing elite splits, which in turn can facilitate negotiated democratic reforms (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001; Dahl and Gleditsch, 2023; Geddes, 1991; Kim and Kroeger, 2019; Przeworski, 1991; Thyne and Powell, 2016). Early research on the third wave of democratization predominantly focused on the role of elite splits and pacts, yet largely overlooked the catalysts behind these initial divisions between soft-liners and hard-liners (Collier and Mahoney, 1997). These splits were often treated as exogenous events, with scant consideration given to the potential influence of popular mobilization. However, upon re-examining two iconic cases, Spain and Peru, Collier (1999) found that popular mobilization had played a far more pivotal role in precipitating the splits than previously acknowledged (Wood, 2001). Elite divisions could enhance the likelihood of campaign success, thereby motivating the regime to implement democratic reforms beforehand. Furthermore, visible divisions within the ruling regime make it more challenging to pursue the autocratic agenda, potentially making democracy the sole viable alternative, thus propelling democratic reform (Dahl and Gleditsch, 2023; Miller, 2021).

While this research has primarily focused on examining the connection between mass mobilization and democratization, other scholars have delved into the reasons why certain movements succeeds while others do not based on movement characteristics and contexts (Pinckney, 2020; Chin, Song and Wright, 2023). The initial body of research primarily concentrates on elucidating why certain large-scale maximalist campaigns effectively attain their primary objectives. These studies have shown that success is linked to a non-violent strategy, the size of movement (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011) and the diversity of the movement (Dahlum, 2023). Also, there is a substantial literature that highlights the importance of the social background of participants, organizational capacities and regime types. Scholars spanning centuries have crafted models to predict which social groups are most prone to advocate for and stimulate democratic shifts (see, e.g., Marx and Engels, 1848; de Tocqueville, 1856;

Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979; Dahlum, Knutsen and Wig, 2019). Empirical research has established that non-violent campaigns mobilizing industrial workers or urban middle classes prove particularly potent in propelling democratic change (Butcher and Svensson, 2014). These groups encompass both the motivation and capacity to bring about democratization (Dahlum, Knutsen and Wig, 2019). Furthermore, research has highlighted the importance of campaign's organizational capacity, demonstrating that strong organizational structures increase the likelihood of democratic change (Pinckney, Butcher and Braithwaite, 2022).

Mass mobilization and autocratic change

While mass mobilization is closely linked to democratic change and consolidation, the outcomes are far from straightforward. In numerous instances, mobilization fails to yield democratic change and can even result in the erosion of democratic institutions or the fortification of autocratic ones (Turner, 2023). While some movements successfully topple autocratic regimes, examples such as Iran and Egypt demonstrate that they can lead to the establishment of new autocracies. Notably, in the case of Egypt, the fall of Mubarak's regime was followed by the strengthening of autocratic institutions and an increased use of repression (see e.g. Lührmann and Rooney, 2021). Indeed, while the emphasis within the scholarship has predominantly centered on the mechanisms linking mass mobilization to democratic change, several scholars outline why mobilization could instead engender autocratic change or consolidation. For instance, some researchers emphasize that mass mobilization might serve to justify elite actions that undermine democracy (Bermeo, 2003). Within the distributionist school of regime change, if lower classes articulate extensive political or economic demands, it could unsettle upper classes, prompting severe responses to prevent democratic transition and even eliciting reactionary backlash within existing democracies (Bernhard and Edgell, Forthcoming).

Moreover, some scholars stress that for mass mobilization to achieve short-term success, it

must leverage or trigger elite splits (Miller, 2021). When a movement confronts a regime that remains united, this cohesion can be interpreted as a manifestation of strength, rendering subsequent opposition efforts challenging. Others have highlighted that successful revolutions can pave the way for enduring forms of modern dictatorship, as illustrated in the aftermath of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. These revolutions are fundamentally underpinned by popular mobilization, serving as a tool for rulers to compel citizens to overtly demonstrate loyalty (Hellmeier and Bernhard, 2023).

Lastly, another set of scholars directs their attention towards a distinct category of movements, those grounded in anti-liberal or pro-autocratic sentiments. For example, Bernhard and Edgell (Forthcoming) examines the impact of both left-wing and right-wing anti-system movements. They find that right-wing anti-system mobilization poses a significant threat to democracy, while there is no consistent connection observed with left-wing anti-system movements. Also, Hellmeier and Bernhard (2023) demonstrate that pro-autocratic movements enhance the likelihood of democratic erosion or autocratic consolidation. This form of pro-autocratic or anti-liberal mobilization can contribute to solidifying autocratic regimes or rationalizing the erosion of democratic institutions.

The effectiveness of mobilization on democratic change

We argue that it plausible that the influence of mass mobilization on democratic change will fluctuate over time, and that the impact of mass mobilization on democratization is challenging to observe by only looking at short-term variation in democracy levels. While many studies account for time effects in estimating the influence of mass mobilization on democratization, none have delved into the potential fluctuation of this effect over time. "Time is fundamental to our understanding of many political processes" (Hermansen, Knutsen and Nygård, 2021, 485), and according to Huntington (1991), certain time periods are associated

with structural changes that fundamentally alter the "data-generating process" underlying episodes of democratization. Other scholars contend that these changes also modulate the causal relationships between key determinants of democracy and democracy itself (Boix, 2011; Hermansen, Knutsen and Nygård, 2021).

Beyond democratization, scholars have noted temporal variation in regime breakdowns and transitions. This include fluctuations in the frequency of these events, the causal mechanisms driving them, and the manners in which regimes come to an end (Boix, 2011; Ross, 2012). For example, in an extensive study examining patterns of regime breakdown across 2,000 regimes from the time of the French Revolution through to 2016, Djuve, Knutsen and Wig (2020) find distinct disparities across different periods in both the frequency of regime terminations and the modalities of these terminations.

However, research on mass mobilization and regime change tends to classify the outcome of a non-violent campaign as a dichotomous, discrete feature of either success or failure in achieving democracy. There are two issues with this. First, initial success may lead to eventual failure, counter-campaigns may influence how democratization processes evolve, and protest success in authoritarian settings tend to involve considerable backlash after demobilization (Turner, 2023). According to (Chenoweth and Cunningham, 2023), "global trends in nonviolent mobilization, state response and counter-revolution suggest that revolutionary successes occur at great cost, are exceedingly short-lived, or are disappointingly inadequate in addressing underlying causes of the uprising".

Second, by the same token, initial failure may lead to eventual success. The avenues through which mass mobilization triggers democratic change extend beyond the immediate ousting of an established regime. For example, throughout history, a central driver of this process has been the empowerment of civil society. This empowerment arises from the very threat of revolution, compelling regimes to adopt democratic reforms to prevent being overthrown (Acemoglu, 2006). While mass mobilization may not directly result in the ousting

of the incumbent regime in the campaigns immediate aftermath, it serves as a powerful signal, indicating widespread dissatisfaction among the masses and demonstrating their willingness and ability to mobilize and challenge the existing regime. This, in itself, exerts considerable pressure on the regime and can prompt it to introduce democratic changes as a strategy to avert future protests. Consequently, even in cases where mass mobilization campaigns fall short in ousting the regime, they can still contribute to fostering democratic changes. Hence, it may be that democratic concessions are achieved, and that the diminishing success rate of democratization reflects a new autocratic rulers´ strategy of controlled liberalization rather than giving way to full-fledged liberal democracy.

Given this, we therefore have limited understanding of the impact of non-violent mobilization on transitions to democracy in the long term. We explicitly investigate the extent of temporal heterogeneity of the effectiveness of mass mobilization on transitions to democracy, assessing whether the current plummeting success rate is historically unprecedented, or whether there have been similar drops in the past, suggesting that mass mobilization´s propensity to initiate democratic cluster temporally over time.

Empirical strategy

Data

To measure mass mobilization campaigns, we harness the recently compiled Opposition Movement Groups Dataset, spanning the period from 1789 to 2020 and covering 151 countries. The OMG project defines a campaign as "one or more related and temporally contiguous events of organized mass collective action within a polity, which are at least partly conducted with the purpose of altering the current political regime, removing the head of state or government, or altering the territorial composition of the polity". To be eligible for inclusion in the OMG dataset, a campaign must assert a claim related to territorial

integrity, the political regime or institutions, specifically regarding the exercise of political power, civil rights, freedom of expression, election rules, and executive constraints (Dahl, Dahlum, Fjelde, Gjerløw, Knutsen, Strøm-Sedgwick and Wig, 2023).

For our analytical purposes, we narrow our focus to campaigns firmly rooted in democratic and human rights principles. These campaigns either call for elections, are motivated by the pursuit of increased civil liberties and the promotion of freedom of speech, or explicitly advocate for democracy.[1] With this approach, we accept campaigns' stated goals at face value and utilize them to guide our identification of democracy campaigns. By requiring campaigns to articulate democratic institutional demands or explicitly state democracy as a goal, we aim to identify campaigns with a minimum commitment to democracy (Dahl, Dahlum, Fjelde, Gjerløw, Knutsen, Metternich and Wig, 2023). An alternative approach is to include all regime-changing and liberal institutional campaigns that predominantly employ non-violent strategies. This method is well-represented in the literature. However, a shortcoming is its dependence on the specific categorization of non-violent and violent campaigns (see e.g.: Dworschak, 2023). To investigate whether our results are dependent on our definition of mass mobilization campaigns, we also present results based on the latter definition in the Appendix (see Table A3), as well as results based on the NAVCO dataset.

To identify democratic transitions, we rely on the extensive V-Dem collection and its measure of liberal democracy. This measure assesses the extent to which the ideal of liberal democracy is realized, graded on a scale from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the attainment of a fully established liberal democracy. Following the approach outlined by X, we classify non-democracies as countries scoring below 0.4 on this scale. Consequently, a democratic transition is defined as a country moving from a score of less than 0.4 to more than 0.4 within two years following the conclusion of the campaign. This threshold guides our selection of campaigns for analysis. Specifically, our methodology focuses on pro-democracy campaigns

[1]This is based on a sub-sample that excludes explicitly anti-liberal campaigns.

in non-democratic countries, as only these possess the potential to qualify as a democratic transition. In the Appendix, we complement the analysis by assessing the effect on democratic changes instead of transitions. Here, we consider all changes on the liberal democracy scale larger than 0.1 as a democratic change, as depicted in Figure A4. This allows us to evaluate movements occurring in non-autocratic countries.

We maintain a parsimonious model in the analysis. A key assertion in Przeworski et al. (2000) is that previous studies examining the relationship between income and democracy have often confounded the concepts of democratic transitions and the survival of democracies. According to their analysis, a higher income level contributes to the stability of democracies, reducing the likelihood of a democratic system reverting to autocracy. However, higher income and economic growth do not necessarily increase the likelihood of transitioning to democracy. Indeed, they make an even stronger claim; that transitions to democracy are entirely random, and that observed differences in regime stem exclusively from the link between performance and regime stability. While this claim may be somewhat overstated, it is true that there are few robust predictors of transitions apart from mobilization, as demonstrated by previous research. Therefore, we opt for a relatively parsimonious model. However, Boix and Stokes (2003) challenges Przeworski et al.'s (2000) findings and argues that the post-1950 sample fails to reflect the clear positive impact of higher income on transitions in earlier time periods. Consequently, we include GDP per capita in natural logs (log (GDP per capita*1000)) (Fariss et al., 2022), assuming a declining effect with higher income.

Further, some work have suggested that smaller countries are more likely to be democratic and that larger countries are more likely to have instability that might be related to transitions. We thus control for total population size (log(Populations*10000)) (Fariss et al., 2022). There is also strong evidence of time dependence and consolidation effects, where countries that have previously been democratic are more likely to see a return to democratic

rule following crises. To capture this we count the observed number of consecutive years that a country has been an autocracy, in natural logs, adding 1 to the base.

Finally, it should be noted that we disregard diffusion effects and spatial clustering in the analyses here, due to the added complexity of models with dependent observations.

Methods

To test whether the capacity of campaigns to foster democratic change has changed over time, we use logistic regression on a global sample covering 1900 to 2020. A transition model has been a standard workhorse in studies of transitions to democracy since Przeworski et al. (2000); Przeworski and Limongi (1997). In short, we look only at countries that are non-democracies at t-1 and then consider the likelihood that they will become democracies at t based on various covariates. Since the variance in logit/probit is not estimated but set to 1 for identification, there is no advantage of estimating the full two-way transition model over a separate equation for transition to/from democracy. We are only interested in transitions to democracy here and do not consider transitions from autocracy.

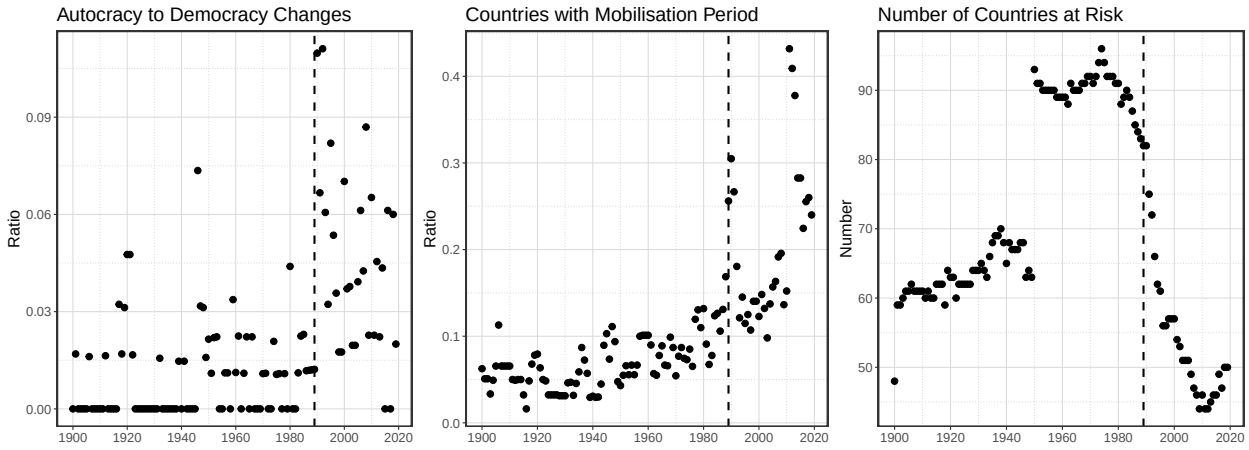
We begin by employing monitoring bridge plots (Hermansen, Hjort and Kjesbu, 2016) to test whether the effect is homogeneous over time. Then we investigate the temporal homogeneity of the effect of the coefficients of the model using the method from Hjort and Koning (2002)). Both analyses indicate temporal heterogeneity in the relationship between data and the model. Therefore, we complement this analysis by testing for various time-varying effects in the model (see Hastie and Tibshirani (1993) for a general introduction to such models), where we use a cubic spline to model the time-varying effect. The best model (based on BIC) included an time-varying effect for mass mobilization, essentially a special type of (smooth) interaction between mass mobilization and year. Subsequently, we conduct a bootstrap analysis to assess the magnitude of the relationship over time.

Empirical Analysis

To explore whether the impact of non-violent mobilization on transitions to democracy has changed over time, we start with a simple illustration of the number of transitions from autocracy to democracy between 1900 and 2020 in Figure 1. The left-hand plot shows the share of countries going from autocracies to democracies between 1900 and 2020. The plot in the middle shows the share of countries who have experienced mass mobilization in the same period, while the right-hand plot shows the number of autocracies that could potentially democratize[2] (countries at "risk" of democratization). It shows a quite significant shift around 1989, indicating that the ratio of democratic transitions does not seem to be constant over time. However, this observation alone does not imply a systematic change in the relationship between mass mobilization and democratic change. External factors might, instead, be shaping this trend.

Figure 1:

Changes from autocracy to democracy, 1900-2020



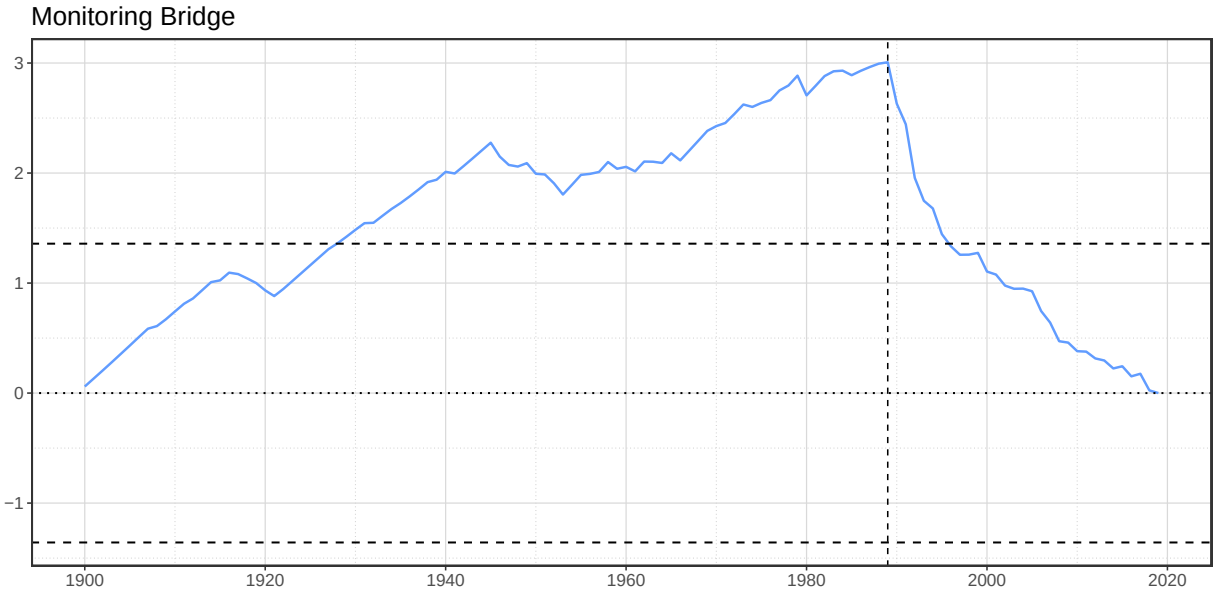
We therefore proceed to investigate whether it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between mass mobilization and democracy has remained homogeneous over time

[2]The jump in the number of countries is due to data availability and several countries decolonizing.

or whether it has undergone a fundamental shift. In other words, are the observed changes merely natural fluctuations over time or indicative of something more systematic? To examine this, we employ a monitoring bridge plot, as shown in Figure 2. Monitoring bridge plots, as introduced by Hermansen, Hjort and Kjesbu (2016), serve as a visualization tool for exploring model homogeneity. They are based on the large-sample properties of the log-likelihood function, operating under the assumption that the model exhibits homogeneity across the entire dataset Hermansen, Knutsen and Nygård (2021, 491).

Figure 2:

Monitoring bridge plot



The plot visually represents the monitoring bridge. In short, it compares (or plots) the maximized log-likelihood for the entire period with maximized log-likelihood for increasing subsets of data, going from left to right in time, adding all observations for a given year (to the subset) one year at the time. Under the null-hypothesis of no change in the relationship between the data and the fitted model (here the logistic regression model), this monitoring bridge plot (suitable normalized) will converge to a Brownian bridge in the limit (as the number of samples goes to infinity). Without going into the details, this means that the plot

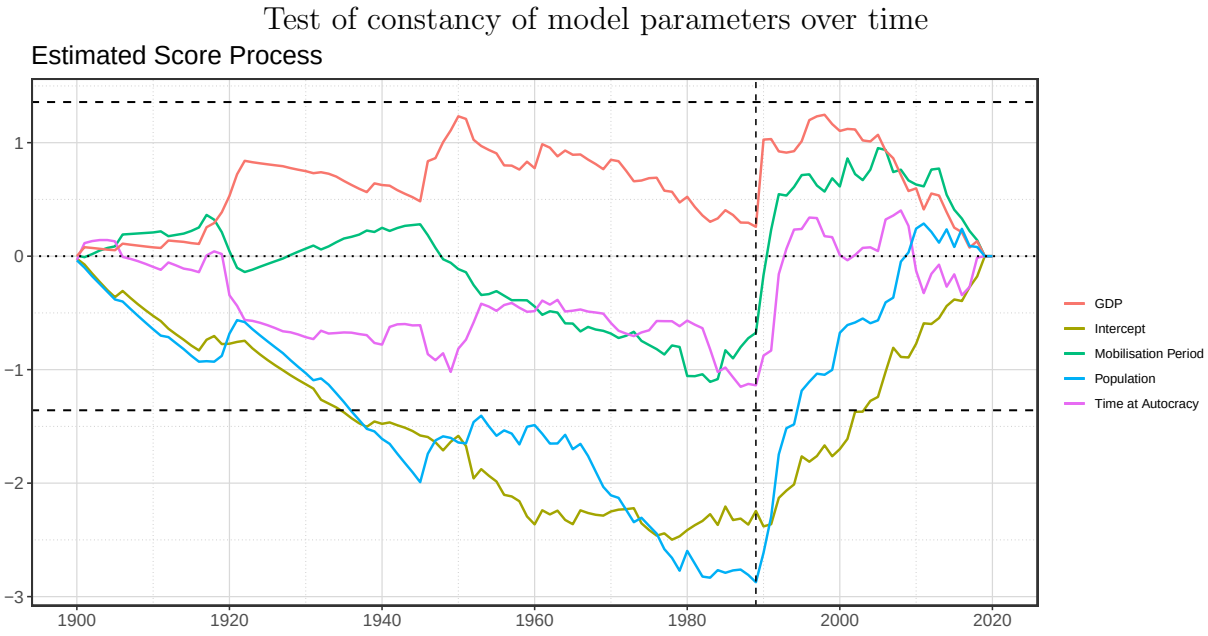
should behave as a Brownian bridge, a known type of random walk, if the null-hypothesis is true. And in that sense, we can think of this as a process version of a one-dimensional test statistics that has a standard normal distribution (under the null-hypothesis) in the limit. Therefore, if the corresponding monitoring plot crosses the upper/lower (say) 0.95 confidence bounds of a Brownian bridge ($\pm$ 1.358), we see this as evidence against the null-hypothesis (zero change over time). In practice, this point is the year where we observe the largest (scaled) difference between the maximized log-likelihood when the model is fitted to the entire data set and compared to the subset consisting of all data points from 1900 up to that year.

The figure demonstrates that the monitoring bridge falls outside the confidence interval, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis of model homogeneity over time. Moreover, the plot suggests a significant shift around the year 1989, as evidenced by the solid line reaching its maximum during that period. This is the point where the difference between the model estimated on a subset of the data (1900–) and the model estimated on the entire dataset (1900–2020) is the largest.

To look closer at what parameters in the model that are changing, we analyze whether the effect of each parameter (Mobilization Period, GDP per capita, Population and Time at Autocracy) in the model is constant over time (see e.g. Hjort and Koning (2002)). It is constructed using similar methods as the monitoring bridge above, but instead of the relationship between data and the entire model, it focus on the time-homogeneity of the parameters in the model. In Figure 3, we conduct a test to assess the constancy of model parameters over time, which indicates that, once again, something changes around 1989. This suggests that there is time heteroscedasticity in the model. It appears that the effect of the parameters changes the most for the intercept and population, but we observe a clear effect in all parameters.

Based on the test of constancy of model parameters over time, we suggest that there

Figure 3: Monitoring plots for checking the constancy of coefficients in the logistic regression model over time.



is an effect of time in the model. However, we also know that both GDP and population correlates with time. To account for this correlation we also fit a model that allows a non-constant relationship between the explanatory variables and outcome (the likelihood for an autocracy experiencing democratic change). To test this, we model an interaction between time (Year) and the different explanatory variables. Doing this for each predictor and using the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) for model selection, we compare the fit to a baseline model without any time-varying effect. Here, for a given model $\boldsymbol{M_\theta}$, where $\boldsymbol{\theta} \in \mathbb{R}^p$ is the parameter associated with the model $\boldsymbol{M_\theta}$, the BIC is defined as $\text{BIC}(\boldsymbol{M_\theta}) = 2 \times \text{log-likelihood}_{\text{max}}(\boldsymbol{M_\theta}) - \log(n) \times p$. It is clear that there is most to gain by letting the effect of non-violent campaigns vary over time, as seen in table 1. In this context, *Year* represents a purely time-varying effect. There is little to no additional gain in including an extra time-varying effect after modeling the effect of Mobilization Period as time-varying. Therefore, we model this as an interaction between Mobilization Period and Year by using

a cubic spline Hastie and Tibshirani (1993).

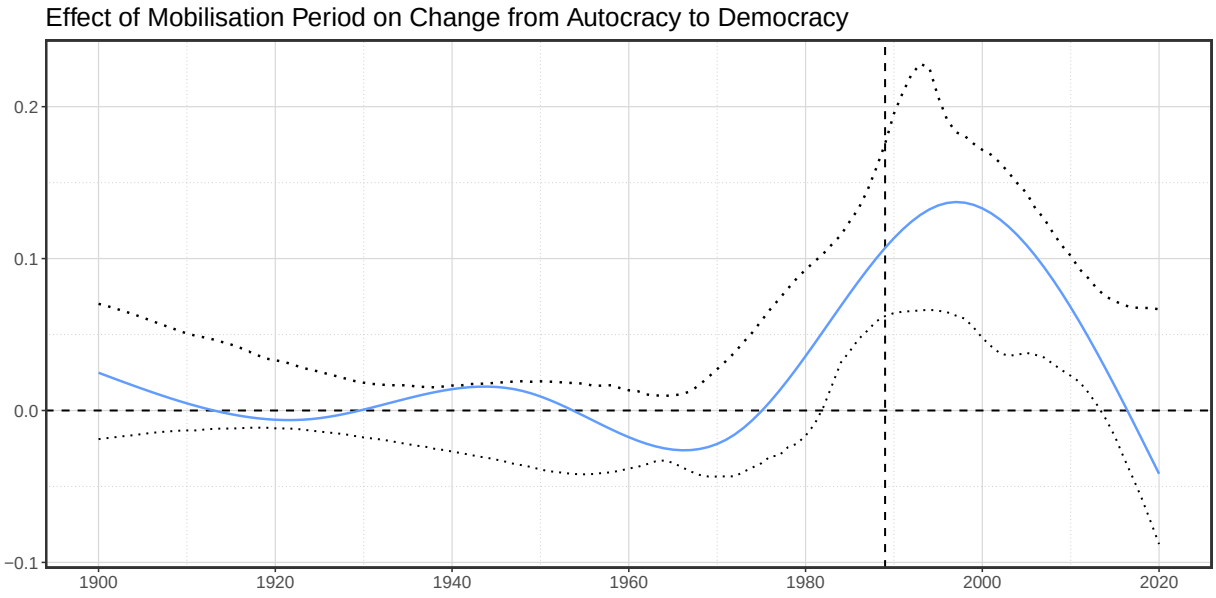
Table 1: BIC

Variable	BIC
Baseline	10398.86
Year	10420.29
Mobilization Period	10493.43
Time at Autocracy	10391.61
GDP	10185.97
Population	10420.48

In our analysis, we conduct a bootstrap analysis where we also include the effect of choosing specific smoothness and flexibility choices of the spline. Figure 4 presents the effect of Mobilization Period over time with a corresponding 0.95 bootstrap confidence interval. The figure illustrates the historical fluctuation in the impact of mass mobilization on democratic change. It was not until the early 1980s that mass mobilization consistently exhibited a positive effect on the likelihood of democratic change. From that point onwards, the effect increased significantly, peaking around 1998. However, this effect has since declined, and around 2014, it ceased to demonstrate a significant positive impact on the likelihood of democratic transitions. By 2017, the estimated effect crossed the zero line.

These observations suggest that non-violent mass mobilization campaigns have become less effective in promoting democratic change compared to the peak years of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the figure also reveals that the current period is not without historical precedent. While the recent decline appears steeper than in earlier times, the estimated effect is comparable to any period prior to 1983. In fact, this historical assessment of the relationship throughout modern history suggests that, more than anything, it is the period from 1983 to 2014 that stands out as unprecedented. One might refer to this period as the "golden age" of mass mobilization. To understand whether and how we can return to such a period, we require a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to this change, which we will explore in the following section.

Figure 4: Effect of mass mobilization on democratic change



Discussion [Work in progress]

Trends indicate that mass mobilization has increased in incidence. However, its capacity to promote democracy has waned over the past decade, and beginning in 2014, it no longer displays a discernible systematic impact on the likelihood of democratic change. To gain a better understanding of why this is the case, we explore three sets of explanations:

1. Non-violent mobilization is now occurring in countries where the prospects for generating democratic transitions are less favorable.

2. Structural changes across the globe have made mass mobilization less efficient.

3. Changes in regime´s repressive behavior and tactics (repression and surveillance).

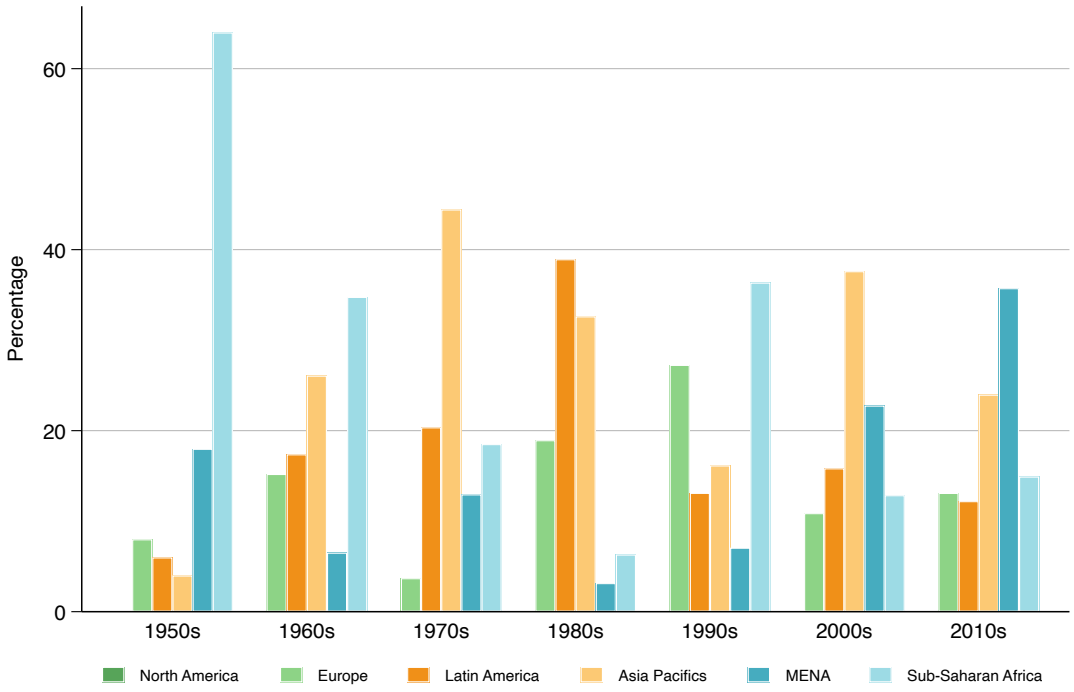
4. Changes in campaign structures, tactics.

Shifts in countries experiencing mass mobilization

The first set of explanations features whether the observed shift is a consequence of mass mobilization occurring in regimes that are markedly different today from those of the 1980s and 1990s. If mass mobilization has relocated to countries with less promising prospects for democracy, it could directly contribute to the observed change in the relationship between mass mobilization and democratic transitions. However, assessing this is not a straightforward task, primarily due to the unpredictable nature of autocratic regime breakdown (see Kuran (1995); Howard and Walters (2014)). Nevertheless, we can investigate whether the countries currently experiencing mass mobilization systematically differ from those in across variables suspected to influence the likelihood of achieving democratic change.

Figure 5:

Country-years with mass mobilization campaigns by region

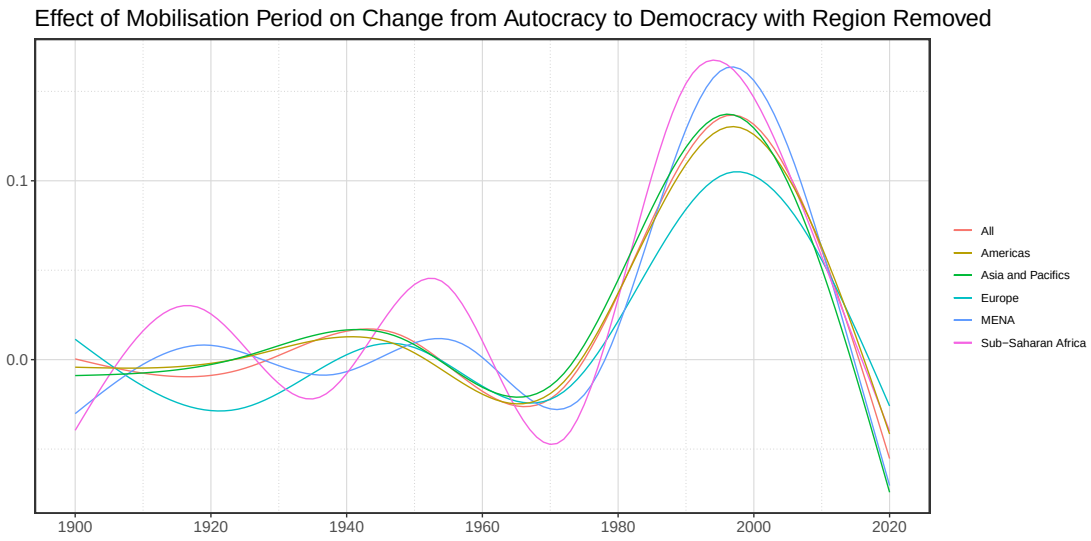


To investigate this, we begin by assessing whether there has been a shift in the regions where mass mobilization occurs, as illustrated in Figure 5. This figure presents the

percentage-wise occurrence of campaigns within each region for each decade (Figure A1 in the Appendix provides the frequency distribution for each region).

As shown in the figure, during the 1980s, the majority of mass mobilization campaigns were concentrated in Latin America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific. Additionally, there was a notable presence in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. However, in the 2000s and 2010s, while the Asia Pacific still hosted a significant portion of these campaigns, they became less prominent in the other three regions. Instead, there was a remarkable upsurge in the MENA region. In the 1980s and 1990s, this region accounted for only 3% and 7% of the observed mass mobilization years, respectively. In the 2010s, this proportion substantially increased to 36%.

Figure 6:



We therefore set out to evaluate whether these fluctuations are influenced by shifts toward specific regions. Figure 6 displays the estimated effect of mass mobilization periods, resembling Figure 4, with the omission of one region at a time. This analysis reveals minor disparities when each region is removed, with one notable exception - Sub-Saharan Africa. The fluctuations become more pronounced when this region is excluded from the analysis.

In contrast to what was alluded to above, removing the MENA region from the sample does not affect the plot.

Structural changes

Since regional shifts do not seem to explain this change, we now proceed to test whether the differences stem from countries experiencing mass mobilization periods today appearing distinct from those in the past in terms of variables known to influence the likelihood of autocratic breakdown and democratic transitions. More specifically, we examine a set of economically oriented variables. We assess whether the estimated scores vary for each decade across time, considering all countries globally, non-democratic countries, countries experiencing these mass mobilization periods, as well as comparing the year before the mass mobilization period began. To conduct this analysis, we regress each decade on each of these variables, using the 1990s, which corresponds to the peak shown in Figure 4, as the reference category.

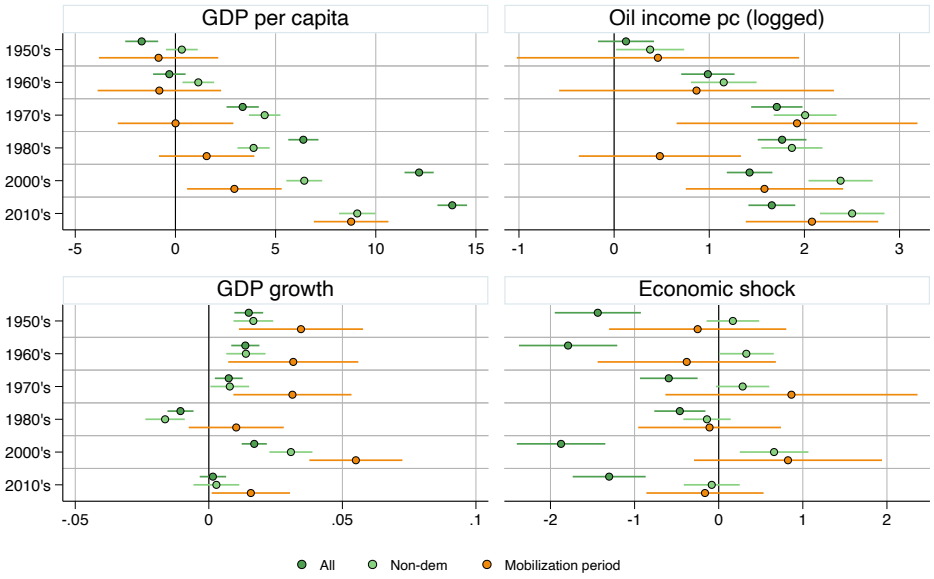
Figure 7 presents coefficient plots derived from OLS models for three distinct samples: a global sample, a non-democratic sample, and a sample limited to country-years with a mobilization period. In this analysis, we apply decade dummies, with the 1990s as the reference category.[3] Notably, we observe significant differences in income levels. Countries with mass mobilization campaigns in the 2000s and 2010s exhibit higher levels of wealth compared to those in the 1990s. While this trend aligns with global patterns, it also indicates that countries with mass mobilization events somewhat lag behind the global sample during the 2000s and 2010s.

However, the relationship between income and democratic change is complex. Wealthier nations possess more resources to manage potential opposition and secure the loyalty of

[3]We choose the 1990s as the reference category based on its representation of the peak of the most efficient period for mass mobilization.

Figure 7:

Economic changes by decade



With standard errors; 95% confidence intervals.

security forces through material incentives, facilitating the continuation of autocratic rule. In contrast, classical modernization theory, initially formulated by Lipset (1959), originally identified high-income countries as the most likely candidates for successful democratic transition. Although this theory has faced criticism and refinements, the debate on this topic continues.

Another factor often associated with campaign failure and a reduced likelihood of democratic transitions is the presence of oil revenues (REF). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the MENA region. As shown in Figure 7, it is evident that oil revenues in countries with mass mobilization were smaller in the 1990s compared to the 2000s and 2010s. Notably, this trend is not exclusive to countries with mobilization periods; coefficient plots show similar differences in the global sample, with more pronounced disparities in the non-democratic sample.

Moving on to economic growth, we find that it is significantly higher in the 2000s and

2010s compared to the 1990s. Again, this is not an exclusive trend, but it signifies that regimes facing mass mobilization might be equipped with more resources to grease the wheels, suggesting that regimes facing mass mobilization might be better equipped with resources to navigate challenges.

Finally, we also evaluate whether economic shocks are more prevalent in the later years. However, the test results indicate no significant differences. This contrasts with the global trend, which indicates that economic shocks have become less frequent over the last two decades when compared to earlier periods.

In conclusion, this observation may suggest that the regimes confronted with mass mobilization campaigns in the later decades are better equipped with the resources to effectively navigate and overcome these challenges compared to the 1980's and 1990's.

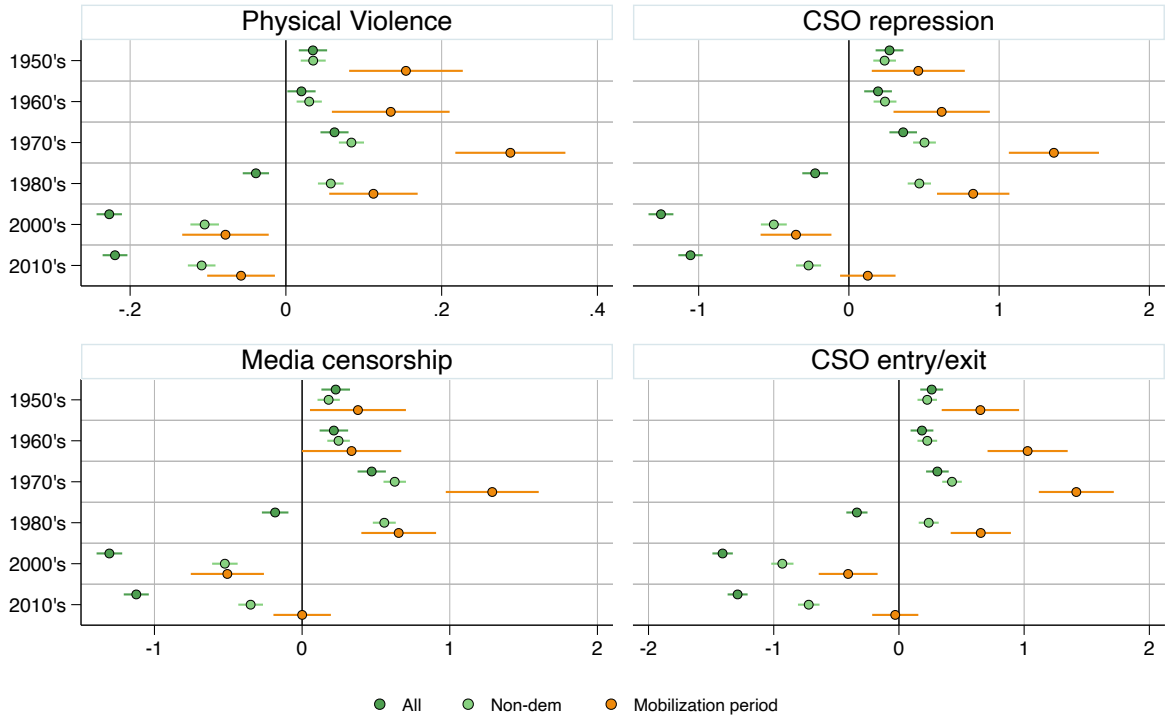
Changes in regime´s repressive behavior and tactics

Next, in Figure 8 our attention turns to assessing the impact of repression and censorship. To explain the diminished success rate of non-violent resistance on democratization, research has pointed to factors such as the widespread adoption of new technologies that enable unparalleled levels of surveillance, propaganda and misinformation (Roberts, 2018; Weidmann and Rød, 2019; Carter and Carter, 2021; Rød and Weidmann, 2015; Gohdes, 2020), the use of smart repression tactics that aim to demobilize movements and reducing the likelihood of a backfiring effect (Kurtz and Smithey, 2018; Chenoweth, 2020; Guriev and Triesman, 2019; Arnon, Edwards and Li, 2023). All variables are derived from the V-dem dataset, and we have adjusted them so that higher values now indicate more substantial levels of repression and censorship, simplifying the interpretation of the results.

We start by examining the Physical Violence Index, which assesses the extent to which physical integrity is disregarded. A clear-cut pattern emerges, showing that physical violence is less prevalent in countries with mass mobilization campaigns in the 2000s and 2010s, in

Figure 8:

Changes in repression and censorship by decade



With standard errors; 95% confidence intervals.

contrast to the 1990s and all previous decades. This pattern reflects a global trend and is not exclusive to specific campaigns.

Moving on, we evaluate the level of repression faced by civil society organizations. Notably, repression of civil society organizations was more pronounced in the 1990s and the 1980s compared to the subsequent decade. However, this trend is reversed again in the 2010s, displaying a positive effect and no statistically significant difference from the 1990s. This coincides with the decade when we observe the effect of mass mobilization periods crossing the 0 line.

We now turn our attention to media censorship, investigating whether governments make direct or indirect attempts to censor print or broadcast media. Once again, a trend emerges toward reduced censorship in regimes during the 2000s. However, this trend is reversed in

the 2010s. While the former aligns with global trends, the latter deviates from the expected pattern.

Finally, we appraise the degree of government control over the entry and exit of CSOs into public life. This scale ranges from unrestricted entry to complete government monopoly, with higher values indicating more significant government influence. Similar to the CSO repression index and media censorship, we observe that the 2000s are associated with lower levels compared to the 1990s and previous decades. However, in the 2010s, this trend is reversed, with levels comparable to those of the 1990s.

In contrast, lower scores on the three forms of softer repression are predominantly evident in the 2000s. However, by the 2010s, these scores have risen to levels similar to those of the 1990s. This raises the possibility that, with the increased use of advanced internet technologies for surveillance, regimes can apply softer repression more efficiently. This may enable them to navigate external threats with greater skill and adaptability, with less pressure to make democratic turns.

Changes in campaigns structures and tactics

Finally, the diminishing success rate may be due to changing factors inside the movement, related to changes in campaign organizational capacity and execution. For example, contemporary campaigns tend to mobilize a smaller number of the population than successful movements in the 80s and 90s, and often rely solely on conventional demonstrations, rather than adopting a diverse array of non-violent methods that would increase the likelihood of success (Chenoweth, 2020; Cunningham, Dahl and Frugé, 2017). Lacking a long-term strategy and diversified tactics may undermine both the short and long-term success of a movement Lakey (1973). The mobilization of regime supporters further factors into explanations of the diminished success rate of democratic movements over the last decade (Ekiert, Perry and Xiaojun, 2020).

Have the organizations become more superficial, is joining a campaign less of a commitment today than it used to be?

Does reduced capacity to bring about democratic change mirror the increases in the number of organized violent campaigns?

Do institutional demands follow the same trajectory?

Conclusion

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Appendix

Figure A1:

Country-years with mass mobilization campaigns by region

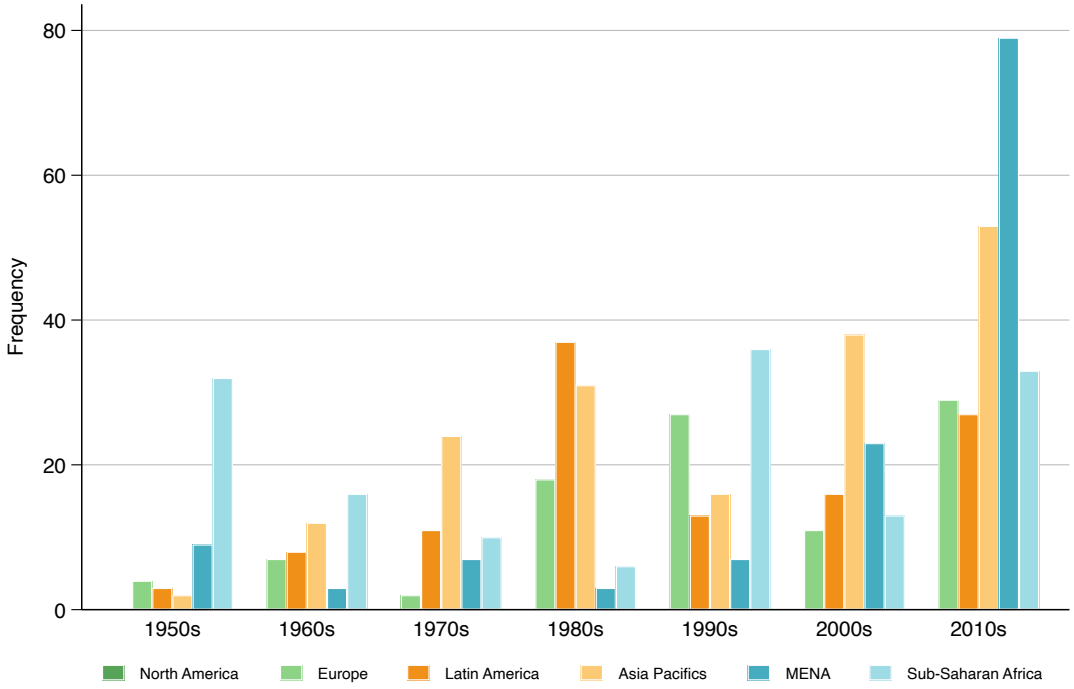

Figure A2:

Country-years one year prior to mass mobilization campaign starts, by region

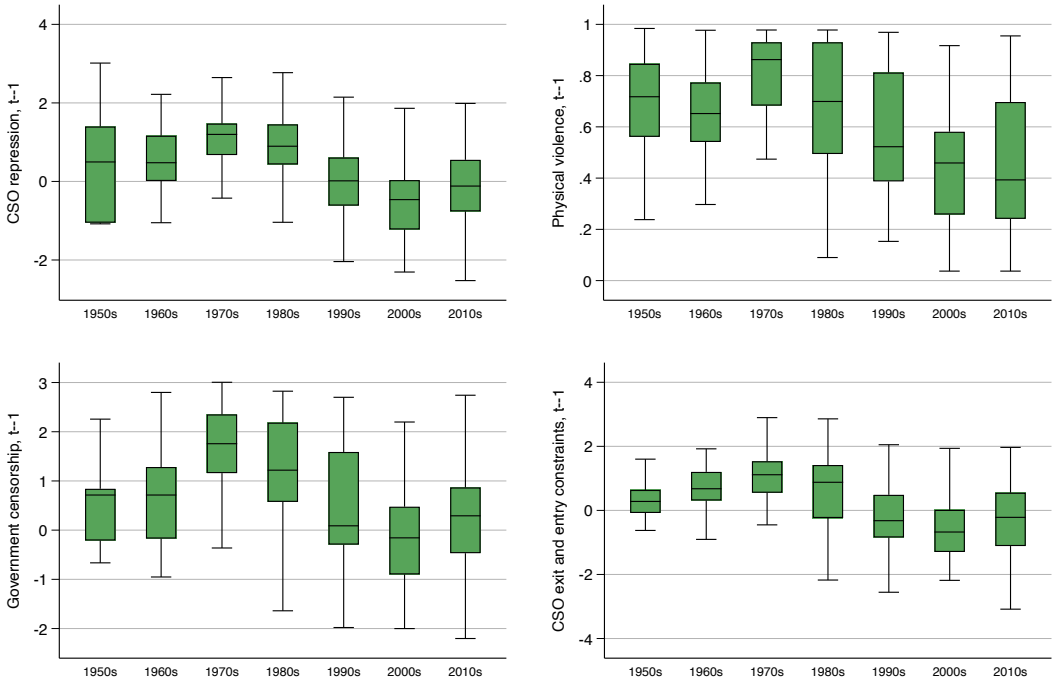

Figure A3:

Alternative measure of mobilization period

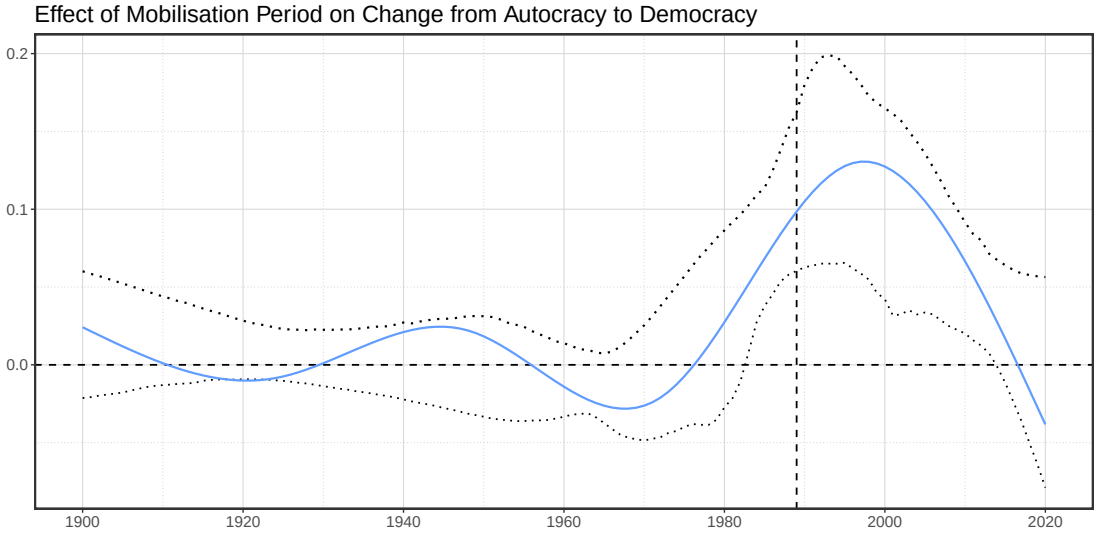

Figure A4:

Not threshold-dependent regime transition measure