

**Background**

In 2013, the CIA funded the Mass Mobilization Project through the Political Instability Task Force to explore protests around the world against governments. David Clark and Patrick Regan, professors at Binghamton University and the University of Notre Dame respectively, were at the head of this project, and they compiled data from over 15,000 protests in 162 countries spanning 1990 to 2020, covering a range of both qualitative and quantitative descriptors. This study only included protests of groups with more than 50 participants to maintain focus on mobilizations that would be large enough to garner attention from the government. It also excluded two major democratic countries, the United States and Australia. While the reason for excluding the latter is unclear, it appears that protest data from the US was not included as this report was intended to inform the CIA of protest trends in other countries. [1]

For this report, we analyzed data relating to location (country and region), duration, protester demands, and state response. [2] The dataset labeled state responses in seven different categories: accommodation, ignore, crowd dispersal, arrests, beatings, shootings, and killings. To quantify these labels, we used an indicator variable, where positive responses (accommodation) were given a value of 3, the neutral response (ignore) was given a value of 0, and negative responses were given values -1 to -5, respective to the order of their severity. There were four columns for state response, so to account for protest with more than one description of state response we summed the indicator across each row in the dataset, in order to come to a singular descriptive score. With this quantification, we

observed how state responses differed by region, country, time, and relevant indices outside this dataset. We find that the most accommodating states had up to a score of 5 and the states with the most severe responses resulted in scores as low as -15.

In addition to the data collected by the Mass Mobilization Project, we also used data from the Human Freedom Index, last updated with data from 2021, co-published by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute, and the Liberales Institut. [3]

**Prior Research**

In 2020, Dr. Jessica Gottlieb, assistant professor at Texas A&M University, and her team used the Mass Mobilization dataset in “Patterns of Autocracy”, to determine if there were more protests in autocracies versus democracies and whether the strategies in handling protests differed between closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies. Their study confirmed that autocracies were more likely to use violent methods to suppress protests and democracies relied more on ignoring protests, although the number of protests were similar across the board. This distinction provided context for the rest of their research into the specifics of the specific strategies that autocracies use to control protesters, diverging from our analysis. [4]

Furthermore, an article by The Washington Post covers a study on protests around the world between 2006 and 2020. This study used data from the World Protests website, supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Global Social Justice/Initiative for Policy Dialogue. It reports that the number of protests have tripled. The study points to

democratic failure as the reason, with 28% of protests demanding “real democracy”. The study also found that there has been a steady increase in violence, with a fifth of protests taking place with protester violence, and a quarter with police violence. [5]

### Protest Location

When exploring how the range of state responses differed by region four distinct groups appeared. The most accommodating of this set is Oceania, namely Papua New Guinea, which is the only region to have at least 25% of state responses above a value of 2.5. Meanwhile, the rest of the regions have equivalent or worse responses, meaning that 75% of the state responses summed up to a value that was equivalent to or worse than ignoring the protesters. Although outliers for the rest of the regions had fairly low minimums, the most significant regions whose states utilized violent methods of protest suppression were Africa and the Middle East/ North Africa (MENA).

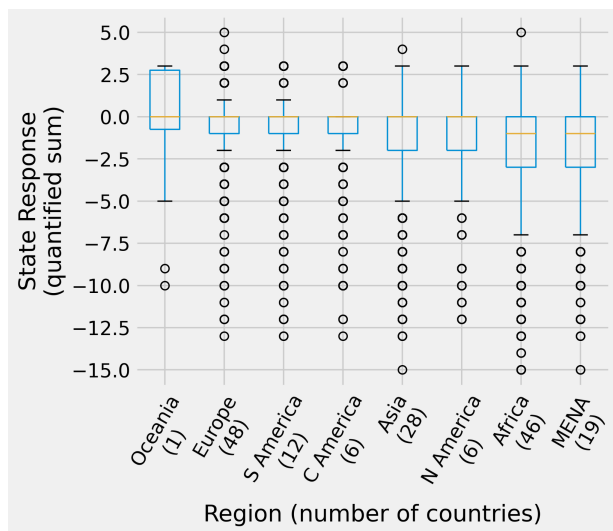


Fig. 1: State Response by Region

Examining within the regions, we limited the analysis to countries with at least one-hundred recorded protests in order to make the data more resistant to outliers. In this filtered analysis, 3 distinct clusters of boxplots appear. Namibia, Ireland, Germany, Thailand, Romania, and France included protests where at least the middle 50% of the state responses to protesters averaged no better nor any worse than a value of 0 (ignore). However, of this subset, Namibia has both the highest and lowest outliers, of 5 and 11, respectively. The middle third of this set all had state responses with lower and upper bounds (1.5 times the 25th and 75th percentiles of the data) between values -2 and 1, making these states slightly more aggressive than the top third. On the far right, there are the countries Russia, South Korea, China, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, in decreasing severity of the bottom 25% of the protests for that country.

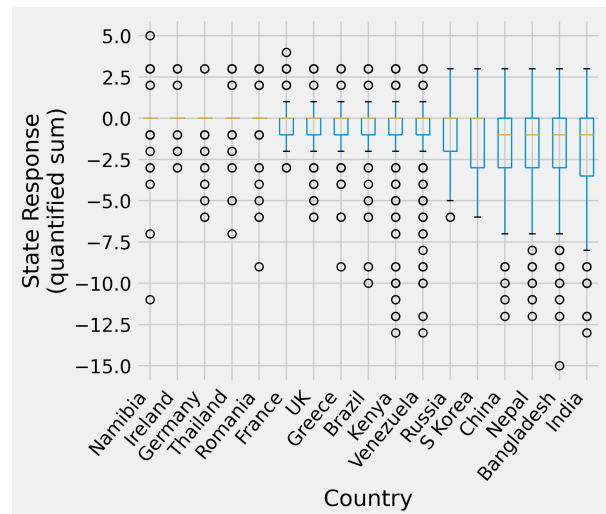


Fig. 2: State Response by Country

To provide context for the range of state responses, we identified the personal freedom index for each of the countries in this study

and to see if the index correlated with the severity of state response. The personal freedom index indicates the fairness of laws, personal safety, freedom of movement and assembly, freedom of religion, freedom to run for political office, freedom of press, freedom of speech, and freedom in marriage. Even in states with lower personal freedom indices, there were protests where the state did not respond aggressively. Since there are countries for each freedom index which positively exceed a state response value of zero, it would have been unhelpful to test for the overall correlation. By assessing only the minimum values for each index, we see that there is greater potential for more severe responses in countries with lower freedom indices. We see there is a positive correlation between each freedom index's minimum state response score and the freedom index itself, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.52. For each additional increase in the personal freedom index, the predicted minimum state quantified response score increases on average by about 1.69.

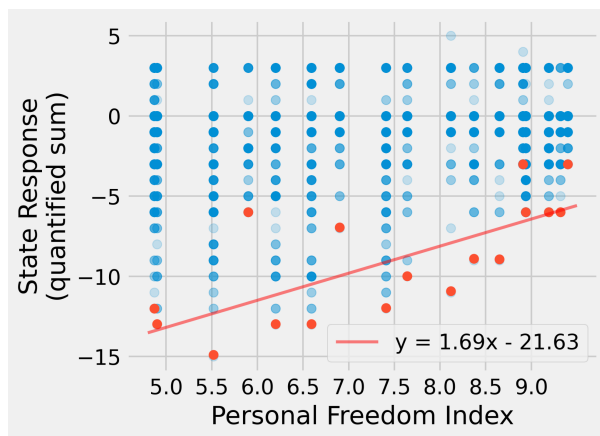


Fig. 3: State Response by Personal Freedom Index

### Protest Duration

To make the data clearer, extremely long protests (above the 0.999th percentile) were excluded in this analysis. In the dataset of 15,201 protests, this excludes the longest 38. The coefficient of determination was 0.59 for a third degree polynomial fit for the maximum duration for each state response score.

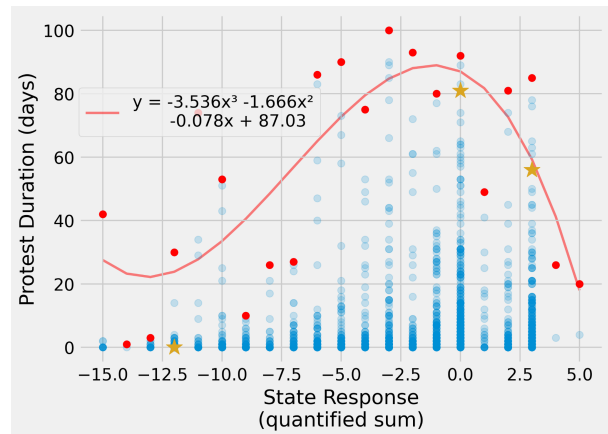


Fig. 3: Protest Duration by State Response

The shape of the polynomial could be the result of how state response influence protests either to end due to severe violence or accommodation, or continue due to no response. A few examples are provided below, with a star on their corresponding data point.

One of the protests that was less than a day long and was met with violence happened in South Africa, 1991. Hundreds of white pro-apartheid protesters were trying to prevent President FW de Klerk, who eventually ended the apartheid in South Africa, from giving a speech. They were met with police armed with guns and tear gas, ending in 54 wounded and 2 dead. It was the first time the South African security used lethal force against right-wing white protesters since 1948. Although not technically a battle, this event was later coined

the “Battle of Ventersdorp”. [7] The severe state response likely discouraged its continuation and others similar to it.

In contrast, a 56-day-long protest in 1990 Canada ended after the state accommodated the protesters’ demands. A suburb of Montreal planned to extend a golf course into Mohawk ancestral land. In response to protests, the land was acquired by the Canadian federal government. Although it was not recognized as indigenous ancestral territory, federal action blocked the golf course extension. This example points to a more general idea that protests have reason to end once the state accommodates their demands.

In between these two examples is one of the longest protests that took place in Azerbaijan in 2016, lasting 81 days, which the state did not respond to. They were protesting against President Ilham Aliyev, who failed to diversify the economy from heavy reliance on oil exports as the former Soviet Republic imposed a 20% tax on exporting foreign currency. In the case where a protest is met with neither violence nor accommodation, the protest is most likely to drag on the longest.

### Protester Demands

Examining how the state responds to protests based on the cause for protest, there is not much variability except for protests against police brutality, which is the only demand with a median state response score of -1 as opposed to 0. Unlike most of the demands where 75% of the protests were met with state responses no worse than crowd dispersal, protests related to police brutality were both accommodated to a greater degree but also met with much more aggressive

violence, evidenced by a more severe lower bound going down to a score of 7.

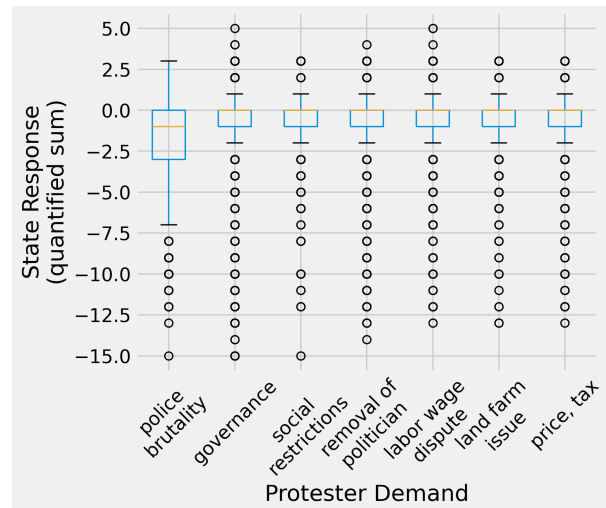


Fig. 4: State Response by Protester Demand

Protests regarding political behaviors or processes, which we renamed governance, has always been the top demand. Overall, there was a slight decrease in total demands in the early 1990s, an increase from 2009 to 2019, and a sharp decrease in 2020. Note that in this dataset some protests were tagged with more than one demand, so the total number of demands outnumbered the total number of protests per year.

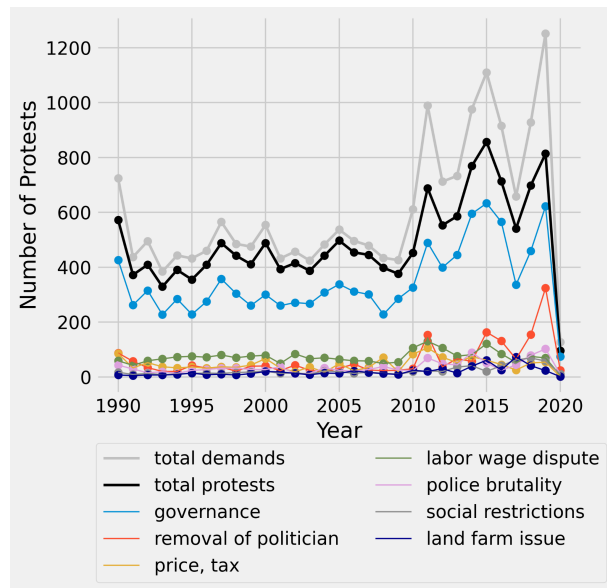


Fig 5. Protester Demands by Year

To create this graph, we summed the number of demands recorded for each year, so the sharp decrease in 2020 could be accounted for by the start of CoVID-19. A few events that could have contributed to the decrease in the early 1990s are: the end of the Cold War, Nelson Mandela's freedom, and South Africa's overturn of apartheid laws. [7] The increase in protests from 2009 to 2019 has been widely noted and studied. One report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies proposed slowing global economic growth, increasing effects of climate change, and foreign meddling with internal politics as factors for this increase. The report also gave three potential catalysts: the use of technology, regimes shifting between democracy and autocracy, and the need for responsive governments. [8]

In 2011 there were multiple political downfalls that could be attributed to the uptick in protests regarding the removal of politicians. In February of that year, Egypt's president of 30 years, Hosni Mubarak, was removed from office following almost 3 weeks of protesting. Then Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was forced into

retirement later that year, following multiple controversies during his time in office. [9] There was a greater increase in 2019, which the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan think tank, coined "The Year of Protests." In February, protesting in Algeria led to a political overhaul, and Sudanese protesters pushed their president Omar Hassan al-Bashir out of office. [10]

## Conclusion

In final analysis, there are a variety of trends present in the Mass Mobilization Project. We mostly focused on relations between our quantified state response score with location, the personal freedom index, duration, and protester demand, to find that minimum personal freedom indices correlated positively with the score and an interesting polynomial for duration.

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