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Conquering and coercing: Nonviolent anti-regime protests and the pathways to democracy

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Abstract

Recent research finds an association between nonviolent protests and democratic transitions. However, existing scholarship either does not specify the pathways through which nonviolent protests bring about democratization or conduct systematic empirical analyses demonstrating that the specified pathways are operative. This article proposes four pathways through which nonviolent anti-regime protests encourage democratic transitions, emphasizing their ability to directly conquer or indirectly coerce such transitions. Most simply, they can conquer democratic reforms by directly overthrowing authoritarian regimes and installing democracies. They can also coerce democratic reforms through three additional pathways. Nonviolent anti-regime protests can coerce incumbent elites into democratic reforms by threatening the survival of authoritarian regimes. They also increase the likelihood of elite splits, which promote negotiated democratic reforms. Finally, they encourage leadership change within the existing authoritarian regime. Following leadership change, nonviolent movements remain mobilized and are able to coerce democratic concessions from the regime's new leaders. Our within-regime analyses provide robust empirical support for each pathway. We show that nonviolent anti-regime protests conquer democratic reforms by ousting autocratic regimes and replacing them with democracies. Nonviolent anti-regime protests also coerce elites into democratic reforms by threatening regime and leader survival. These findings highlight the importance of protest goals and tactics and also that nonviolent anti-regime protests have both direct and indirect effects on democratization.

Keywords

civil conflict, democracy, democratization, nonviolence, protests

While mass protests often accompany democratic transitions, their role in producing democratic transitions remains open for debate. For example, elite-based theories, while recognizing the limited role of protests at the beginning of the transition process, emphasize the role of elite negotiations (e.g. Huntington, 1993; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Recent studies have placed greater emphasis on mass protests, particularly those using nonviolent tactics, finding that they often trigger political liberalization and the installation of democracy (Bermeo,1997; Bratton & van de Walle, 1992; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; della Porta, 2014). However, scholars continue to debate the relationship between protest tactics and democratization, with some finding that violent tactics also bring about democratic transitions (e.g. Brancati, 2016; Wood, 2000). The superiority of nonviolence has also been questioned because of problems with data quality, measurement, and omitted variables

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(e.g. Lehoucq, 2016). Moreover, the literature still lacks a systematic account of the pathways through which protests influence democratization.[1]

This article builds on this debate by focusing on the goals and tactics of mass protests as well as the pathways connecting protests to democratization. We distinguish between cases of violent and nonviolent anti-regime protests and direct action[2] and argue that only nonviolent tactics increase the likelihood of democratic transitions.[3] Furthermore, we propose four pathways connecting nonviolent anti-regime protests to democratic transitions. Most simply, they can conquer democratic reforms by directly overthrowing authoritarian regimes and installing democracies. They can also coerce democratic reforms through three additional pathways. Nonviolent anti-regime protests can coerce incumbent elites into democratic reforms by threatening the survival of authoritarian regimes. They also increase the likelihood of elite splits, which promote negotiated democratic reforms. Finally, they encourage leadership change within the existing authoritarian regime. Following leadership change, nonviolent movements remain mobilized and are able to coerce democratic concessions from the regime's new leaders.

We test our hypotheses by conducting within-regime analyses on all authoritarian regimes from 1950 to 2007. Unlike recent studies (e.g. Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013), our within-regime analyses control for time-invariant differences between autocratic regimes that may influence both protests and democratic transitions. Following Geddes, Wright & Franz (2014), we define regimes according to the group of individuals that influences policy and leadership selection. This allows us to analyze democratic transitions as a two-step process, estimating the effect of anti-regime protests on both authoritarian regime breakdown and subsequent democratic transitions. Finally, we address concerns of selection bias arising from the endogenous nature of anti-regime protests in several ways and show that selection bias is unlikely to drive our main results.

Consistent with our expectations, we find that anti-regime protests increase the likelihood of authoritarian regime breakdown as well as subsequent transitions to democracy and autocracy. However, we demonstrate the importance of tactics by showing that only nonviolent anti-regime protests systematically increase the likelihood of democratic transitions and only violent anti-regime protests systematically increase the likelihood of autocratic transitions.[4] These results are robust to alternative measures and modeling strategies as well as assessments of selection bias. Finally, in addition to conquering democratic reforms, we show that nonviolent anti-regime protests coerce reforms by threatening regime and leader survival.

This study improves our understanding of democratic transitions in several ways by bringing together the literatures on democratization, protests, and coups. Our pathway analyses reinforce existing findings that nonviolent anti-regime protests directly affect democratic transitions by ousting authoritarian regimes and installing democracies (e.g. Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; della Porta, 2014), but also highlight the less appreciated indirect effects by showing that even elite-driven democratic transitions can be influenced by nonviolent anti-regime protests. We also advance the work of Marinov & Goemans (2014) and Thyne & Powell (2016), who call for a better understanding of the causes and consequences of coups, by explaining the connection between anti-regime protests, coups, and democratization. Finally, we present additional evidence that the goals and tactics of protests matter: only nonviolent anti-regime protests systematically increase the likelihood of democratic transitions and only violent anti-regime protests systematically increase the likelihood of autocratic transitions.

Literature review

Theories of democratization often emphasize structural factors such as economic development (Lipset, 1959), inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), natural resources (Ross, 2001), globalization (Eichengreen & Leblang, 2008), and democratic diffusion (Gleditsch & Ward, 2006) to explain democratic transitions. These theories give causal primacy to structural factors rather than individual agency. In contrast, the transitologist approach stresses that democratic transitions are often driven by strategic behavior among incumbent regime elites (Huntington, 1993; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Elite-based theories emphasize the importance of divisions among ruling elites, particularly those

[1] Huntington (1993) and Geddes, Wright & Frantz (2014) do, however, explain different modes of democratization broadly.

[2] We follow Celestino & Gleditsch (2013) by examining both protests and direct action, which includes civil wars, but go further by focusing on the goals of these movements.

[3] Our analysis excludes smaller-scale, narrowly economic protests analyzed by scholars like Lorentzen (2013).

[4] This is not to say that democratization never follows violent protests and direct action.

between hard-liners and soft-liners, in precipitating democratization. For instance, O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986: 19) famously argue that 'there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime'. These divisions increase the likelihood of successful negotiation between regime soft-liners and opposition moderates, with popular mobilization playing an important, but limited, role in increasing the bargaining power of opposition moderates (Przeworski, 1991).

Other scholarship addresses the lack of focus on agency by explaining how the mobilization of a diverse array of actors, including church groups, human rights networks, cultural groups, and labor movements, among others, has been instrumental in democratic transitions (Bermeo, 1997; Brancati, 2016; Bratton & van de Walle, 1992; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; della Porta, 2014). While contentious collective action is not the greatest threat facing authoritarian leaders (see Svolik, 2012), Ulfelder (2005) finds that it undermines single-party and military regimes, and may undermine personalist regimes when it imposes significant economic costs. Scholars find that nonviolent protests increase the likelihood of democratic transitions (Teorell, 2010), particularly when they occur in countries with democratic neighbors (Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). However, these studies do not explain the specific pathways connecting protests to democratic transitions. Also, empirical analyses of this relationship rarely account for country- and regime-level unobserved confounders. We address these issues theoretically and empirically below.

Four pathways to democracy

We explain four pathways through which anti-regime protests influence democratic transitions. We argue that anti-regime protests can conquer democratic reforms by ousting authoritarian regimes and coerce democratic reforms by extracting concessions from incumbent elites, creating elite splits that produce democratic reforms through negotiations between regime soft-liners and the opposition, and encouraging elites to oust the incumbent leader and offer political concessions within the existing regime. While focusing on anti-regime protests, our approach incorporates the role of elites in democratic transitions. We also recognize that democratic transitions can occur without strong pressures for reform from social movements. Some democratic transitions are primarily elite-driven affairs resulting from international pressure for political liberalization or elite judgments that their interests are best protected under more inclusive political institutions (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a). Therefore, we explain how anti-regime protests influence democratic transitions without assuming that they are a necessary condition.

The first pathway through which anti-regime protests influence democratic transitions is by ousting authoritarian regimes (della Porta, 2014), or what Huntington (1993) refers to as 'replacement'. Anti-regime protests encourage the breakdown of authoritarian regimes in several ways. First, they challenge the incumbent regime and undermine its legitimacy, particularly when protests mobilize large numbers of citizens (Sharp, 1973). Second, anti-regime protests provide clear signals that barriers to anti-regime mobilization can be overcome and also facilitate organizational coordination (Kuran, 1991). In this sense, 'protests campaigns are eventful, as they produce new relations and resources that favor mobilization' (della Porta, 2014: 32). Third, regime breakdown can occur because of difficulties that arise when repressing anti-regime protests. While dictators often repress anti-regime protests, repression may increase solidarity among protesters, encouraging further mobilization against the regime (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Teorell, 2010). Repression also risks international condemnation and sanctions (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Furthermore, security service members may balk at repression orders based on moral apprehension, fears of international prosecution, or concerns about public retribution – concerns that were critical in military defections during the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring (Beissinger, 2007; Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015; Nepstad, 2013).

While we expect anti-regime protests to increase the probability of regime breakdown, only nonviolent anti-regime protests are expected to increase the probability of democratic transitions. As Slater & Wong (2013) emphasize, mass mobilization succeeded in overthrowing long-serving dictators like Suharto in Indonesia and Mubarak in Egypt, but democratization must ultimately take place through reforms made by politicians. The goals and organizational structure of nonviolent movements are more likely to facilitate this process than those of violent movements. Nonviolent movements with the goals of regime change and democratization have broader appeal across societal groups and among regime elites than violent movements (Gleditsch, Olar & Radean, 2015). As illustrated by Figure A5 of the Online appendix, the organizational structures found in nonviolent movements also tend to be more horizontally oriented, which promotes power-sharing, compromise, and openness (see also Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Wantchekon

& Garcia-Ponce, 2016). Furthermore, protests mobilized for regime change and democratization do not totally disband, facilitating continued mobilization against authoritarian legacies (della Porta, 2014).

Conversely, we expect violent anti-regime protests and direct action to be systematically associated only with autocratic transitions. Violent movements tend to be hierarchical organizations that seek to eliminate rivals upon capturing state power, with leaders extending government access only to those that fought against the former regime (Wantchekon & Garcia-Ponce, 2016). Violent revolutions also tend to bring leaders into power that are particularly aggressive against other states (Colgan & Weeks, 2015) and their own citizens (Kim, 2018). Moreover, even violent movements that fail in ousting the incumbent regime directly may encourage regime change by insiders. For example, autocrats often mobilize the military to repress violent movements, providing the military with greater resources and political influence. While reducing threats from violent movements, military mobilization makes it easier for disaffected military officers to overthrow the regime (Aksoy, Carter & Wright, 2015; Svolik, 2013). Therefore, we expect violent anti-regime protests and direct action to encourage only autocratic transitions, both directly and indirectly.

Additionally, the characteristics of nonviolent anti-regime protests raise the difficulty of repression, which increases their likelihood of ousting authoritarian regimes. Nonviolence reduces the costs of participation for citizens, often resulting in the mobilization of more citizens than violent movements (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Schock, 2005). Also, large nonviolent protests often occur in urban areas, allowing them to attract a more diverse group of participants (see Figures A6–A7 and Table A2). As the size and diversity of nonviolent movements grow, so does their perceived legitimacy, making it more difficult for the regime to respond with violent repression (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Nepstad, 2013; Schock, 2005). Conversely, violent movements have higher barriers to participation and often mobilize smaller numbers of citizens in peripheral areas. This makes violent movements easier to repress, and repression orders are more likely to be followed by security forces that exist to combat violent threats.

This sequence of events is seen in the democratic transitions of the Philippines in 1986 and Bangladesh in 1991. In the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos was forced out of office in February 1986 after facing over two years of sustained nonviolent protests which began after the assassination of opposition figure Benigno Aquino in 1983. After a fraudulent election in 1985, opposition presidential candidate Corazón Aquino called on protesters to redouble their popular non-compliance campaign. However, this campaign would never begin, as a failed coup was launched against Marcos. Nonviolent protesters, led by nuns and priests, then foiled attempts by the military to put down the coup, placing themselves between the coup plotters and approaching tanks. As this occurred, military members began defecting en masse and Marcos quickly fled the Philippines, ushering in a quick transition to democracy (Schock, 2005). Similar events unfolded in Bangladesh in 1990 when General H.M. Ershad resigned after violent repression of student-led anti-regime protests led to broader mobilization from groups including civil servants and businessmen. In a process similar to the Philippines, the withdrawal of political support for Ershad by members of the military facilitated the installation of an interim government that paved the way for multiparty elections (Haggard, Kaufman & Teo, 2012).

Second, anti-regime protests can coerce democratic reforms by threatening regime survival (Bratton & van de Walle, 1992; della Porta, 2014; Przeworski, 2009; Wood, 2000).[5] In these instances, democratic transitions undermine the positions of elites but leave them better off than if they had resisted reforms and been overthrown. Empirical support for this trade-off is provided by Debs (2016) and Kim (2017), who show that leaders exiting power after losing competitive elections face better post-tenure fates than leaders who are ousted via irregular means. Thus, even if incumbents lose power, doing so through competitive elections can produce a better post-tenure fate than resisting reform and being overthrown (Kim, 2017).[6] Additionally, where incumbents are confident in their ability to win competitive elections, democratizing provides an opportunity to remain in control while enhancing legitimacy (Slater & Wong, 2013).

Third, anti-regime protests create opportunities for democratic reform by producing elite splits among regime hard-liners and soft-liners. This pathway coincides with what Huntington (1993) referred to as 'transformation'. As O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986: 16) argue, soft-liners distinguish themselves from hard-liners by their 'increasing awareness that the regime they

[5] Przeworski (2009) refers to the same transitions as 'conquered' and transitions that are strictly elite-driven as 'granted'.

[6] However, certain leaders face higher exit costs than others. Leaders that were pervasive human rights abusers or exceptionally corrupt may be more likely to face post-tenure retaliation.

helped to implant, and in which they usually occupy important positions, will have to make use, in the foreseeable future, of some degree or some form of electoral legitimation'. Along this pathway, anti-regime protests need not pose an imminent threat to the regime to coerce democratic reforms. By signaling that the regime is not invincible and that its popularity and legitimacy are declining, anti-regime protests can induce soft-liners to initiate democratic reforms as a longer-term strategy to maintain power. Therefore, even when regime elites do not face an imminent threat of removal via anti-regime protests, such protests can encourage elite splits that produce democratic reforms.

Nonviolent anti-regime protests are particularly likely to produce coerced concessions along the second and third pathways. Nonviolent campaigns are more likely to facilitate bargaining with regime elites and encourage elite splits that produce democratic reforms since they are perceived as less threatening to elites than violent campaigns (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). At the same time, nonviolent anti-regime protests can impose significant governance costs on incumbent autocracies by threatening the state's economic viability (Gleditsch, Olar & Radean, 2015). Nonviolent protests operating through popular non-compliance tend to mobilize large numbers of people in urban areas, particularly in capital cities (Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). By contrast, violent protests and direct action are often confined to rural areas and have narrower bases of support (see Tables A1–A2 in the Online appendix), making their economic impact limited. Additionally, urban riots pose a lesser threat than nonviolent protests because of their limited size (see Figure A7 in the Online appendix). Supporting this claim, Table A5 of the Online appendix shows that nonviolent anti-regime protests are associated with an immediate 1.7% decline in economic growth while the effect of violent anti-regime protests is smaller and not statistically significant.[7]

The democratic transitions that took place in South Korea (1988) and Nigeria (1999) follow the second and third pathways, respectively. Broad pro-democracy protests against the regime of President Chun Doo Hwan, which became particularly large following the death of a tortured student and the suspension of debate over direct presidential elections in 1987, succeeded in coercing democratic concessions by threatening the regime's survival and the post-tenure fates of its leaders. Further mass mobilization produced negotiations between the regime and opposition that culminated in constitutional reforms introducing presidential and legislative elections in 1988 (Haggard, Kaufman & Teo, 2012). In Nigeria, Sani Abacha's successor Abdulsalami Abubakar initiated political reforms in response to domestic and international pressure that had been building against the military regime throughout the 1990s. While former Abacha allies resisted reforms, anti-regime protests following the death of imprisoned opposition leader Chief M.K.O. Abiola in July 1998 led to the establishment of the National Election Council which organized elections in May 1999 (Haggard, Kaufman & Teo, 2012).

Fourth, anti-regime protests can encourage leadership change within the existing regime and coerce democratic concessions from the new leader. Protests provide disaffected elites who see gains from democratic reform with the opportunity to restructure the regime in their favor (Aksoy, Carter & Wright, 2015; Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a; Johnson & Thyne, 2018). This takes place primarily via coups, which nonviolent anti-regime protests encourage in several ways. First, although a significant number of regime insiders may oppose the dictator at any given time, insiders often lack information on the discontent of others. Mass protests provide public signals of discontent with the regime and also the leader's ability to withstand a coup (Casper & Tyson, 2014). This eases coordination problems and, thus, the ability to oust the incumbent. Mass protests are particularly likely to ease coordination problems among military members. As Aksoy et al. (2015: 433) state, military mobilization in response to mass protests provides 'enhanced coordination capacity to well-placed individuals with guns'. Therefore, by revealing public discontent with the regime and mobilizing the military, protests reduce the barriers facing elites who are considering ousting the incumbent. Second, anti-regime protests decrease the possibility of civilian resistance after a coup. This encourages coups because coup leaders are able to legitimize their actions through public opinion. By declaring their actions a democratic coup, coup leaders can undermine enforcement of anti-coup measures put in place by states and international organizations (Johnson & Thyne, 2018). When facing mass protests, regime elites 'are more likely to attempt a coup in a bid to preserve their current privileges and improve their position in the postcoup regime' than rally behind the incumbent (Wig & Rød, 2016: 9).

[7] These results only suggest correlations given the possibility of reverse causality. However, we see no reason to believe that reverse causality operates only from economic performance to nonviolent protests, and not to violent protests.

Moreover, nonviolent protests have a stronger effect on coup attempts than violent protests (Johnson & Thyne, 2018).[8] Nonviolent protests encourage broad participation and increase the costs of repression compared to violent protests and direct action, leaving leaders more vulnerable to ouster. Also, the international community is less likely to criticize a coup amid nonviolent protests, while condemnation is likely to follow the repression of nonviolent protests. Taken together, nonviolent anti-regime protests are more likely to produce this path to democracy than violent anti-regime protests.

Transitions in Bulgaria in 1990 and Mali in 1992 followed this pathway. Communists intent on reforms responded to protests by civil society groups in 1989 by ousting the 35-year incumbent Todor Zhivkov in a coup. National roundtable talks convened in early 1990 instituted democratic reforms and allowed communist reformers to win subsequent elections, albeit under a different name – the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Haggard, Kaufman & Teo, 2012). Similar events unfolded in Mali in 1991 when 22-year incumbent Moussa Traore was ousted by the leader of his presidential guard, Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, following mass anti-regime protests. A transitional government drafted a new constitution and instituted elections won by the Alliance for Democracy in Mali candidate Alpha Oumar Konare in 1992.

This discussion leads to several hypotheses. The first pathway suggests that anti-regime protests increase the probability of authoritarian regime breakdown, and that only nonviolent anti-regime protests raise the probability of democratic transitions. Thus, our primary hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Anti-regime protests increase the probability of autocratic regime breakdown.

H2: Nonviolent anti-regime protests increase the probability of democratic transitions while violent anti-regime protests increase the probability of autocratic transitions.

Since we are also interested in the mechanisms through which nonviolent anti-regime protests influence democratic transitions, we test several additional hypotheses. The pathways described above claim that nonviolent anti-regime protests can produce both mass-driven and elite-driven democratic transitions.

H3: Nonviolent anti-regime protests increase both the probability of mass-driven democratic transitions and elite-driven democratic transitions, including democratic transitions accompanying coups.

Data and method

We examine the relationship between anti-regime protests and democratic transitions in all authoritarian regimes from 1950 to 2007. Following previous studies (Houle, Kayser & Xiang, 2016; Wright, Frantz & Geddes, 2015), we decompose democratic transitions into two parts: (1) autocratic regime collapse, and (2) the subsequent installation of a democratic regime. Our empirical analysis consists of three parts: (1) testing the effect of anti-regime protests on autocratic regime collapses and transitions to democracy, (2) testing the four pathways from anti-regime protests to democratic transitions, and (3) testing the intervening mechanisms linking the two variables. Our main sample covers around 3,200 observations on 233 authoritarian regimes between 1950 and 2007, subject to data availability.

Dependent variables

To measure autocratic regime breakdown, we rely on the dataset of Geddes, Wright & Frantz (2014) (hereafter GWF). GWF (2014: 314) define regimes as a set of 'rules that identify the group from which leaders can come and determine who influences leadership choice and policy'. Regime change occurs when there are significant changes in leadership and the set of formal and informal rules for choosing leaders and policies. As GWF emphasize, this definition has two important implications: (1) the removal of a dictator does not necessarily coincide with regime change, and (2) autocratic breakdown includes autocracy-to-autocracy transitions as well as democratic transitions. This allows us to examine the impact of violent and nonviolent anti-regime protests on both democratic and autocratic transitions.

We also test the effect of anti-regime protests along different pathways to democracy by distinguishing mass-driven transitions from other types of transitions. GWF's dataset provides information on how autocratic regimes collapse (e.g. ousted by coup, mostly unarmed popular uprising, armed conflict, or electoral loss). We code breakdowns due to either popular uprising or armed conflict as *Mass-driven transitions*, and remaining breakdowns including rule changes made by insiders, overthrows via coups, or election losses as *Other transitions*. However, we cannot further divide *Other transitions* into our second and third transition types – that is, coerced

[8] See Table A6 of the Online appendix.

transitions in response to protests and transitions via elite splits – since they are analytically distinct but empirically ambiguous. We instead disaggregate *Other transitions* by differentiating between regime transitions coinciding with a coup and those not coinciding with a coup.

One important issue is that GWF focus narrowly on whether an autocratic regime was ousted by popular uprising without fully considering the role of mass protests in transitions. Consequently, GWF identify 26 democratic transitions via popular uprising for the 1950–2007 period.[9] Haggard & Kaufman (2016b) take a broader view by considering whether protests ousted authoritarian leaders or posed significant threats to ruling elites, differentiating between mass-led and elite-led transitions. Haggard and Kaufman identify around 40 mass-led transitions for the 1980–2008 period. Thus, we use Haggard and Kaufman's alternative coding of democratic transitions as a robustness check. The results remain similar (see Section A7 of the Online appendix).

Independent variable

To measure large-scale anti-regime protests, we use the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013). It provides information on 250 campaigns, from 1945 to 2006, defined as 'a series of observable, continuous, purposive mass tactics or events in pursuit of a political objective' (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013: 416). NAVCO is well suited for testing our hypotheses for several reasons. First, it measures only large-scale campaigns with at least 1,000 observed participants and discernible leadership. Second, NAVCO includes only campaigns that at one time claimed 'maximalist' goals of removing the existing regime, expelling foreign occupations, or achieving self-determination. This allows us to distinguish anti-regime protests from protests driven by other goals. Third, our theory suggests that the type of transition encouraged by anti-regime protests depends upon the tactics and structure of protest movements. NAVCO examines both tactics and structure, coding whether campaigns use predominately violent or nonviolent tactics and whether campaigns have a consensual or hierarchical structure.

We create the variable *Anti-regime protests*, which includes only campaigns whose goals are related to either 'regime change' or 'significant institutional reform'. *Anti-regime protests* is a binary indicator of anti-regime campaigns in the previous year. We also construct *Other protests* to include all remaining campaigns pursuing the goals of 'territorial secession', 'greater autonomy', 'anti-occupation', or 'policy change'. Last, we differentiate primarily nonviolent from violent campaigns and create *Nonviolent anti-regime protests* and *Violent anti-regime protests*.

Control variables

We control for several potential confounding variables. First, domestic political conditions might affect both popular protests and regime changes. Since some regimes allow for greater anti-regime collective action than others, the *Anti-regime protests* estimate might simply represent the effect of the prior level of political liberalization. To ensure against this, we include two indices of the strength of civil society, taken from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (Coppedge et al., 2016): the Core Civil Society Index measuring civil society robustness and the Civil Society Participation Index capturing the degree of civil society participation in the political process. We also control for a binary indicator of national multiparty elections in the current or past year using the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde & Marinov, 2012). The existence of multiparty elections may imply that ruling elites already allow a certain level of political competition and popular mobilization. Additionally, elections may alleviate collective-action problems faced by the opposition by serving as coordination devices (Fearon, 2011).

Similarly, the regime's coercive capacity may discourage opposition mobilization and organization, enhancing the regime's survival and dampening prospects for political liberalization (Levitsky & Way, 2010). We include the variable *Military size*, which measures the number of military personnel per capita taken from the Correlates of War Project, as a proxy for coercive capacity. We log-transform this variable after adding 1 to each value since it is right-skewed.

Next, as modernization theory suggests, economic development may generate greater domestic pressure for multiparty elections as well as increase the likelihood of protests. Conversely, short-term economic growth may have the opposite effect on regime changes. Therefore, our model includes GDP per capita and the annual percentage change in GDP per capita taken from Maddison (2010).

[9] The number of elite-led democratic transitions without coups is 64, while there are seven elite-led democratic transitions accompanying coups. There are 25 autocratic transitions via popular uprising, 70 elite-led autocratic transitions accompanying coups, and 11 elite-led autocratic transitions without coups.

Additionally, studies find strong spatial diffusion in democratic transitions (e.g. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). We thus include the regional average of the Polity score (excluding the country itself). Last, we include the natural log of authoritarian regime duration to control for duration dependence.

Empirical model

We use a discrete event history model to estimate the relationship between anti-regime protests and the hazard rate of regime change. A regime i leaves the risk set in year t when the authoritarian regime at year $t-1$ is replaced by a democratic regime or by another autocratic regime in year t. Thus, we treat each competing event as right-censored: transitions to a subsequent dictatorship are right-censored in the democratic transition model and democratization is right-censored in the autocratic transition model.

One challenge is that autocratic regimes that experience anti-regime protests are likely to differ from those that do not. To control for time-invariant regime-specific confounders, we examine the variation across time within each authoritarian regime, measuring whether the occurrence of anti-regime protests in an autocratic regime increases its risk of collapse. This enables us to control for both country-specific characteristics and regime-specific factors that remain constant over a regime's lifespan, such as the regime's entry mode, regime type, divided social identities, colonial history, and state birth legacy, that may influence both anti-regime protests and autocratic regime breakdown.

Accordingly, we estimate a correlated random effects (CRE) probit model (Wooldridge, 2010: 610–619) that includes the regime-level means for time-varying explanatory variables in a random effects probit model. The regime-specific means of the time-varying variables $\bar{x}_i$ control for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity, like fixed effects do, and pick up the correlation between the regime unit effects, μ_i, and the covariates. This also allows for the inclusion of time-invariant covariates, c_i, just as in a traditional random-effects model. By the same logic, we are able to include regimes experiencing no autocratic breakdown. Accordingly, the CRE approach, reconciling the fixed and random-effects estimators, is appropriate here.

Specifically, we estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned}&\Pr(y_{it}=1 \lfloor y_{it-1}=0, x_{it}) \\ &\quad = \Phi(\beta_1(x_{it}-\bar{x}_i)+\beta_2 c_i+\beta_3 \bar{x}_i+\mu_i)\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where y_{it} is a binary variable indicating democracy in the democratic transition model (and another autocracy in the autocratic transition model), c_i a variable that varies only between regimes, μ_i the random intercept, $\bar{x}_i$ the regime-specific mean, and $x_{it}-\bar{x}_i$ the deviations from the regime-specific means. Here, β_1 gives the within-regime (fixed-effects) estimate and β_3 gives the between-regime estimate of x_{it}. To control for common time shocks, we include decade fixed effects.

To ensure robustness, we also estimate a linear probability model with regime fixed effects. Given the flexibility of the linear probability model, we also include region-specific year fixed effects instead of decade fixed effects to absorb unobservable common time-varying factors that similarly affect countries within each region. The estimates from the linear probability model are similar to those from the CRE probit model, and are presented fully in the Online appendix.

Another concern is that mass protests may be seen more as a symptom than a cause of transition processes (della Porta, 2014: 8). Protesters are likely to choose their goals, tactics, and targets strategically based on the existing political environment (see Lehoucq, 2016). Accordingly, anti-regime protests may be more likely where a regime is weak or allows for greater levels of citizen mobilization, and the same regime may be most likely to democratize. Similarly, where regimes respond to mass mobilization with harsh repression, protesters might be more likely to adopt violent tactics to challenge the regime, calling into question the importance of nonviolent movements.

While we agree that these endogeneity concerns may be problematic and incorporate them into our empirical analyses, protests cannot simply be viewed as responses to broader societal conditions. As della Porta (2014: 300) claims, 'social movements and protest waves can also develop when few resources and opportunities are available, or when these are declining rather than expanding'. Repressive regimes can be vulnerable to mass protests since 'regimes that rely primarily on repression to close off avenues of political contestation leave few alternatives between quiescence and taking opposition to the streets' (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a: 64). Furthermore, Slater & Wong (2013) show that authoritarian regimes can concede to political liberalization from both positions of strength and weakness. Last, Gleditsch, Olar & Radean (2015: 3) argue that 'non-violent dissent is more likely to occur in states that look "stronger" by traditional measures of state capacity'. Thus, the direction of selection bias is not clearcut.

Nevertheless, we address this concern in several ways. First, we control for time-invariant regime characteristics and several confounders influencing anti-regime

Table I. CRE probit models of autocratic regime breakdown, by transition outcomes

	Autocratic breakdown		*Transition to democracy*		*Transition to autocracy*	
Dependent variable:	*(1)*	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	*(6)*
Anti-regime protests	2.606**	1.994**	3.336**	2.177**	1.916**	1.589*
	(0.629)	(0.507)	(0.934)	(0.787)	(0.676)	(0.671)
Other protests	0.130	–0.025	0.046	0.624	0.488	0.389
	(0.865)	(0.637)	(1.198)	(0.705)	(1.054)	(0.939)
Ln Regime duration	15.884**	9.525**	18.794**	5.290 *	12.068**	10.294**
	(3.654)	(2.197)	(5.082)	(2.330)	(2.701)	(2.850)
Civil society participation index		0.594		–0.325		1.513
		(2.399)		(2.669)		(3.263)
Core civil society index		3.904†		5.921*		–2.772
		(2.145)		(2.740)		(3.246)
Election		0.432		0.897**		–0.193
		(0.267)		(0.309)		(0.385)
Ln GDP per capita		0.491		0.940		–0.479
		(0.805)		(0.929)		(1.171)
Economic growth		–0.043*		–0.034		–0.048*
		(0.018)		(0.025)		(0.022)
Military size per capita		1.179		1.101		2.110
		(1.084)		(1.347)		(1.514)
Regional Polity		4.283*		5.668†		–0.194
		(1.693)		(2.987)		(2.553)
Regime RE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regime-specific means	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Decade FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regimes	230	230	221	221	220	220
Observations	3,327	3,327	3,229	3,229	3,138	3,138
Log-Likelihood	–404.35	–357.51	–226.25	–168.08	–255.06	–231.49

Standard errors are clustered by country (reported in parentheses): $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$.

protests, their tactics, and regime breakdowns. Second, we split the sample into three groups according to the level of democracy or human rights practices and compare the effects of anti-regime protests on regime change across the different samples. Third, we adopt a matching technique to facilitate comparison of treated (nonviolent anti-regime protests) and control units (no nonviolent anti-regime protests) which are similar in terms of their observable characteristics. Last, we apply the sensitivity test suggested in Altonji, Elder & Taber (2005) to evaluate the likelihood that selection bias due to unobservables is driving the results.

Results

Table I presents the CRE probit models of autocratic breakdown to explore whether mass protests against an autocratic incumbent regime affect the likelihood of autocratic regime survival (H1 and H2). Likelihood-ratio tests indicate that there is significant unobserved heterogeneity at regime level, confirming the need to account for regime-specific unobserved heterogeneity. Meanwhile, Wald tests for the equality of the coefficients reject the null hypothesis that the between- and within-regime effects are equal, demonstrating the presence of heterogeneity bias and the need to estimate the CRE models. Although we report only within-regime estimates, the full results including between-regime estimates are available in the Online appendix.

Columns 1 and 2 examine all autocratic regime breakdowns. The next four models separately estimate transitions to democracy (Columns 3–4) and transitions to subsequent dictatorship (Columns 5–6). Odd-numbered models include only measures of mass protests and a natural log of regime duration since we are concerned about the potential threats to inference associated with including many control variables. Meanwhile, to ensure that the estimate of *Anti-regime protests* is not simply a proxy for the regime's instability or weakness, even-numbered models add control variables that might influence both anti-regime protests and regime changes.

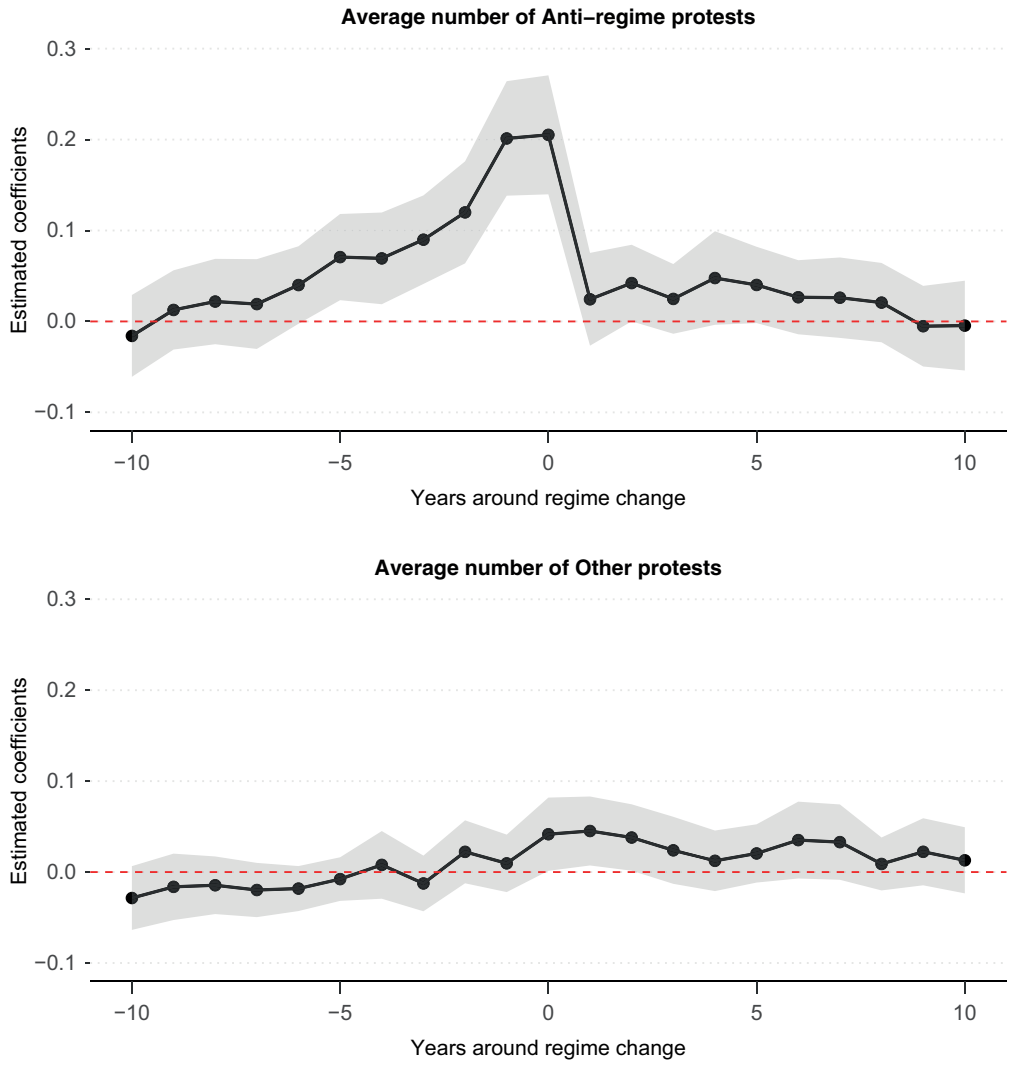

Figure 1. Protests around democratization

Year 0 corresponds to the year of transition. We regress the number of each type of protest on 21 binary indicators of years around a transition to electoral authoritarianism, $\{t-10, t-9, \ldots, t+9, t+10\}$. All other autocratic country-years are set to zero. We plot the estimated coefficients of these 21 dummy variables (line) and 95% confidence intervals (shaded area).

The results show that *Anti-regime protests* are associated with an increased likelihood of both types of autocratic breakdown, indicating that anti-regime protests precipitate both democratic and autocratic transitions. The relationship between *Anti-regime protests* and autocratic breakdown is robust to the inclusion of potential confounders. In contrast, *Other protests* are not significantly associated with autocratic breakdown, indicating that it is not social and political unrest in general but popular demands for democratic reform that drive this relationship.

We further examine whether the temporal pattern of events conforms to the sequence postulated in the theory. The top panel of Figure 1 shows that the average number of *Anti-regime protests* sharply increases in the years leading up to the transition and sharply decreases immediately afterward. This pattern of events shows that anti-regime protests precede regime transitions. However, as displayed in the bottom panel, little evidence suggests that the number of *Other protests* changes systematically before the transition year.

Columns 1–4 of Table II separate *Anti-regime protests* into violent and nonviolent types and re-estimate the same model specifications used in Table I. We find that only nonviolent anti-regime protests are associated with a heightened likelihood of democratic transition, while only violent anti-regime protests are associated with an increased likelihood of autocratic transition. As Figure 2

Table II. Differentiating between nonviolent and violent protests and direct action

Estimator:	*CRE probit*				*Heckman probit*	
Dependent variable:	*Transitions to dem.*		*Transitions to auto.*		Transitions to dem.	*Auth. breakdown*
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	
Nonviolent anti-regime protests	3.335**	2.008**	1.082	0.910	2.053**	1.138**
	(0.832)	(0.710)	(0.931)	(0.835)	(0.392)	(0.170)
Violent anti-regime protests	–1.776	–0.305	5.000**	2.833**	0.048	0.459**
	(1.397)	(0.702)	(1.713)	(1.043)	(0.304)	(0.127)
Regime RE	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Regime-specific means	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Decade FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls		✓		✓	✓	
Regimes	221	221	220	220	233	
Observations	3,229	3,229	3,138	3,138	3,390	
Log-Likelihood	–215.68	–160.02	–248.86	–228.00	666.19	

Columns 5–6 estimate Heckman probit models where the first stage models autocratic breakdown, and the second stage models the establishment of a democracy. Standard errors are clustered by country (reported in parentheses): $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$.

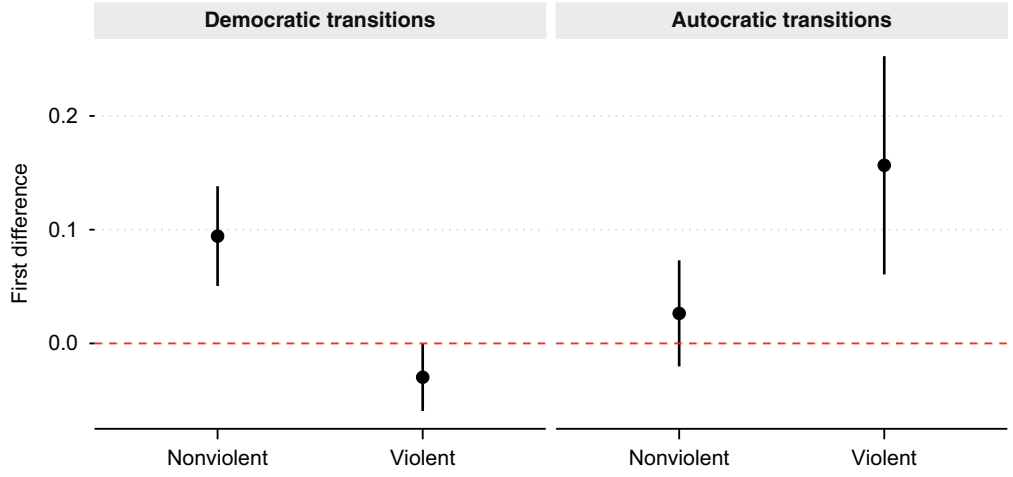

Figure 2. Substantive impact of anti-regime protests on the probability of autocratic collapse

Dots display first differences, and vertical lines present the 95% confidence intervals. First difference is defined as $Pr(\text{Transition} = 1|\textit{Protest} = 1) - Pr(\text{Transition} = 1|\textit{Protest} = 0)$. All other covariates are set to the observed values to obtain average effects.

illustrates, the occurrence of nonviolent anti-regime protests in an autocratic regime is associated with an increase of ten percentage points in the probability of a democratic transition (from 6% to 16%). Similarly, the occurrence of violent anti-regime protests in an autocratic regime is correlated with an increased probability of a transition to subsequent autocracy (8% to 23%). Last, following Houle, Kayser & Xiang (2016), Columns 5–6 report the estimates of Heckman probit models where the first stage models autocratic breakdown, and the second stage models the establishment of a democracy. Results show that nonviolent anti-regime protests affect both authoritarian breakdown and the installation of a democratic regime after authoritarian breakdown. In sum, both types of anti-regime protests undermine autocratic regimes, but only nonviolent anti-regime protests increase the likelihood of democratic transitions.

These findings fit well with others' cross-national quantitative findings (Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Teorell, 2010).[10] Haggard & Kaufman's (2016b) qualitative

[10] However, they neither distinguish anti-regime protests from other protests nor control for time-invariant regime-specific factors.

Table III. Distinguishing different types of democratization

	(1)		(2)		
Dependent variable:	*Mass-driven*	*Others*	*Mass-driven*	*Others (no coup)*	*Others (via coup)*
Nonviolent anti-regime protests	3.026**	2.328**	3.024**	2.992*	2.254**
	(0.694)	(0.447)	(0.694)	(1.188)	(0.464)
Violent anti-regime protests	–0.608	–0.090	–0.611	–11.738**	–0.064
	(1.483)	(0.495)	(1.484)	(0.714)	(0.530)
Civil society participation index	–0.931	2.080†	–0.885	–1.488	2.424†
	(1.773)	(1.246)	(1.765)	(3.328)	(1.328)
Core civil society index	0.850	1.357	0.827	4.064	1.077
	(1.597)	(1.170)	(1.592)	(3.496)	(1.249)
Election	1.142†	2.859**	1.167†	0.771	3.152**
	(0.655)	(0.337)	(0.651)	(1.186)	(0.384)
Ln GDP per capita	–0.367	0.166	–0.372	0.464	0.207
	(0.456)	(0.234)	(0.456)	(0.755)	(0.263)
Economic growth	–0.074†	0.019	–0.074†	0.068**	0.009
	(0.039)	(0.025)	(0.039)	(0.021)	(0.027)
Military size per capita	0.069	0.477	0.078	0.672	0.267
	(0.945)	(0.765)	(0.943)	(1.176)	(0.900)
Regional Polity	7.497**	10.820**	7.608**	1.842	11.759**
	(1.623)	(2.355)	(1.663)	(4.290)	(2.669)
Ln Regime duration	–0.168	–0.613**	–0.169	–0.269	–0.697**
	(0.253)	(0.157)	(0.252)	(0.460)	(0.166)
Constant	–2.734	–7.762**	–2.736	–11.137	–8.104**
	(3.036)	(1.795)	(3.023)	(9.183)	(1.744)
Observations	3,226		3,226		
Log-likelihood	–251.30		–256.77		

Multinomial logit estimates. Standard errors are clustered by country (reported in parentheses): †$p < 0.1$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

analysis of democratic transitions between 1980 and 2008 also finds that violent protests including insurgency played a minor role in mass-driven democratic transitions; of 52 mass-driven transitions they identified, only ten cases include violent riots distinct from nonviolent protests.

We now evaluate the pathways from nonviolent protests to democratic transitions (H3). We posit that nonviolent anti-regime protests not only conquer democratic reforms by ousting authoritarian regimes but also coerce ruling elites into accepting democratic reforms. We test this claim in Columns 1–2 of Table III by differentiating between *Mass-driven transitions* and *Other transitions*. Results show that both mechanisms are operative with nonviolent anti-regime protests increasing prospects for both types of democratic transitions. Columns 3–5 further separate *Other transitions* into transitions coinciding with a coup and those not coinciding with a coup. We find that nonviolent anti-regime protests are positively associated with all the three types of democratic regime changes.

Finally, we provide supplementary evidence for the impact of nonviolent protests on democratization. First, Online appendix Table A7 explores how the level of democracy (V-Dem electoral and liberal democracy indices and the Polity score) changes in response to nonviolent anti-regime protests. The results show that even in autocracies, nonviolent anti-regime protests are associated with a significant increase in the level of democracy, particularly the electoral democracy index and Polity score. Contrarily, violent protests and direct action are associated with a much smaller increase in the level of democracy. This constitutes supporting evidence for the argument that nonviolent protests extract institutional concessions from ruling elites. Second, Table IV examines the within-regime effect of anti-regime protests on leadership turnover and coups.[11] Consistent with Johnson & Thyne (2018) and Gleditsch, Olar & Radean (2015), the result shows that nonviolent anti-regime protests are significantly associated with all types of leadership turnover and successful and failed coup attempts. This indicates that nonviolent anti-regime protests pose

[11] Full results are reported in Online appendix Table A6.

Table IV. Popular protests and leadership survival

Dependent variable:	*(1)* *Regular*	*(2)* *Irregular from below*	*(3)* *Irregular from above*	*(4)* *Any coup*	*(5)* *Successful coup*	*(6)* *Failed coup*
Nonviolent anti-regime uprisings	0.524*	1.347**	0.742*	0.886**	0.780**	0.891**
	(0.210)	(0.498)	(0.291)	(0.257)	(0.300)	(0.312)
Violent anti-regime uprisings	0.138	1.245**	0.560*	0.256	0.329	0.263
	(0.236)	(0.450)	(0.261)	(0.202)	(0.267)	(0.241)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regime RE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Decade FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,161	2,987	3,090	3,296	3,188	3,296
Log-Likelihood	–631.38	–115.36	–466.40	–735.60	–443.15	–466.00

CRE probit estimates. Standard errors are clustered by country (reported in parentheses): $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$.

significant threats to the incumbent leader, particularly because more than 80% of irregularly removed autocrats suffer exile, jail, or death (Debs, 2016; Kim, 2017). However, violent anti-regime movements are significant only in the models of irregular turnover, and their coefficients are smaller in magnitude than those of nonviolent movements.

Assessing potential selection bias

Despite showing that our results are robust to controlling for time-invariant and time-variant regime characteristics, we recognize that these controls cannot perfectly capture unobserved factors that may be correlated with anti-regime protests and regime transitions, potentially biasing our findings. Additionally, we cannot exclude the possibility that country-years with anti-regime protests are fundamentally different from those without anti-regime protests.

To mitigate these concerns, we adopt three strategies. First, we divide the sample of autocracies into terciles of high-, medium-, and low-'X' cases, where 'X' is V-Dem electoral democracy, V-Dem liberal democracy or a latent human rights variable estimated by Fariss (2014). If anti-regime protests are more likely to emerge in more liberalized and less repressive regimes, and such regimes are more likely to democratize, we should find systemic differences in the estimated effect of *Nonviolent anti-regime protests* across the different terciles. The bar graph in the top panel of Figure 3 presents the baseline probabilities of nonviolent anti-regime protests and democratic transition in each tercile of a democracy or human rights variable. The findings presented in the top panel of Figure 3 show that the relationship between political liberalization or repression, on the one hand, and nonviolent anti-regime protests, on the other, is not clear. Only when we examine the relationship between the level of electoral democracy and nonviolent anti-regime protests do we find a strong positive relationship. This is also consistent with other cross-national studies that fail to find a significant relationship between democracy level and nonviolent anti-regime protests (e.g. Butcher & Svensson, 2016; Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017).

The bottom panel displays the effect of nonviolent anti-regime protests on democratic transitions for each tercile of democracy or human rights variables. If political opportunities in the existing regime significantly influence the emergence and effectiveness of nonviolent protests for regime change, we should find systematic differences in the effects of nonviolent anti-regime protests across different levels of liberal democracy, electoral democracy, and human rights scores. Little evidence suggests systematic differences exist. However, we recognize that this analysis does not directly address the selection bias problem, and we cannot rule out the possibility that our measures of political opportunities are too crude to capture them.

Second, we use coarsened exact matching (Iacus, King & Porro, 2012) to pre-process the data to minimize any potential differences between cases with and without *Nonviolent anti-regime protests* or *Violent anti-regime protests* before conducting the parametric analysis. We match on *Military dictatorship*, *Civil society participation index*, *Core civil society index*, *Election*, *GDP per capita*, *Economic growth*, *Military size*, *Regional Polity*, and *Post-Cold War*. Tables A27–A28 show that this does not alter our central findings (tables with the label 'A' are in the Online appendix).

Finally, we evaluate the likelihood of selection bias due to unobservables that may be driving the results,

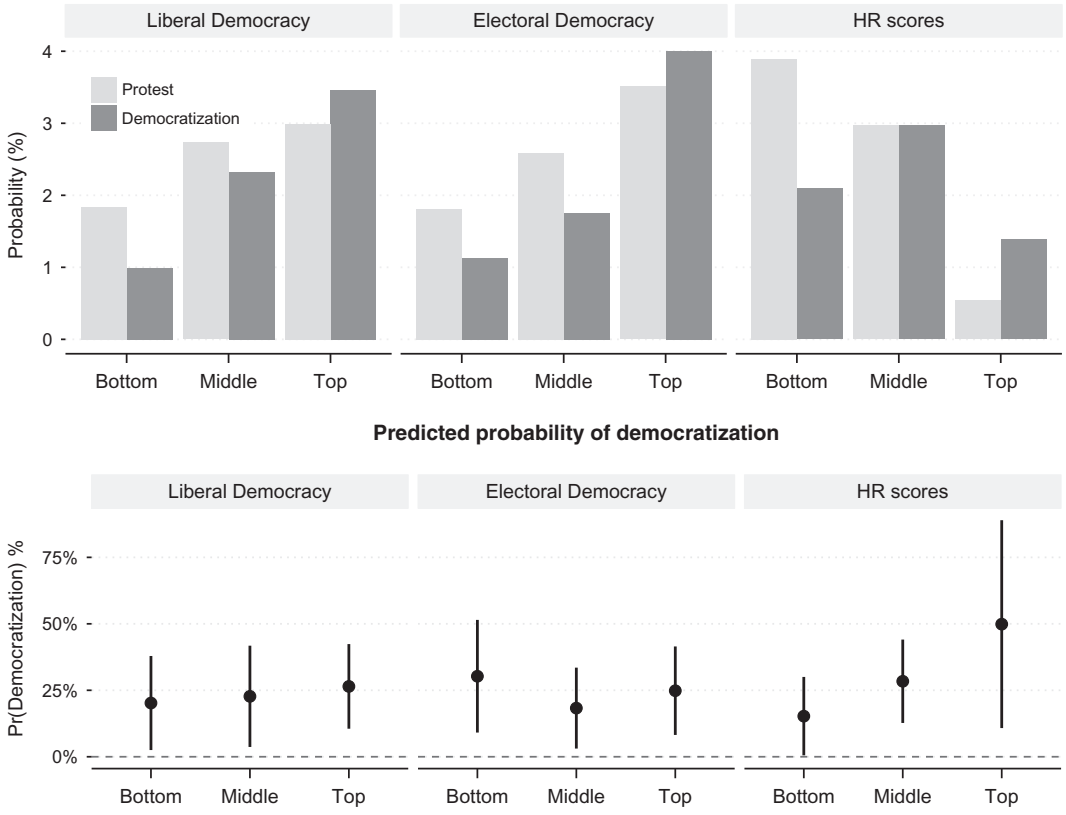

Figure 3. Probability of democratization

Baseline probability of nonviolent anti-regime protests and democratization (top panel) and the predicted probability of democratization following nonviolent anti-regime protests with 95% confidence intervals (bottom panel) across terciles of V-Dem democracy measures and latent human rights scores in our authoritarian regime sample.

using the strategy proposed by Altonji, Elder & Taber (2005). This strategy assesses how many times stronger selection on unobservables would have to be relative to selection on observables in our empirical model to explain away the estimated effect of *Anti-regime protests*. If unobserved factors left out of the model have only a weak effect, we can be more confident that selection bias does not drive the main result. To attribute the estimated effect of *Nonviolent anti-regime protests* in Column 2 of Table II to selection bias, unobserved factors would have to explain about 20 times more variation in the outcome than what the observed covariates explain (see Table A29). Given that we already control for several factors determining the onset of anti-regime protests, the large ratios suggest that it is unlikely that unobserved confounders are driving the central results.

Robustness checks

To ensure the robustness of our results, we perform several additional analyses and report the results in the Online appendix. First, to ensure that our results do not depend on the binary indicator for one-year lag of anti-regime protests, we either change the time window for protests to three years or the sum of protests in the previous year. The main results remain similar (Tables A8–A9). We also rely on the Social, Political, and Economic Event Database (SPEED) Project for an alternative measure of peaceful and violent protests. We still find that peaceful protests are associated with an increased likelihood of democratic transitions (Table A10).

Second, we show that our results stand even when we only count democracies that have remained democratic for more than five or ten years (Table A12). We also find similar results when using Haggard & Kaufman's (2016b) data on mass-led and elite-led democratic transitions (Table A13).

Third, we test the sensitivity of our results to alternative model specifications. Our results are robust to controlling for other characteristics of protests including levels of repression in response to the protest, whether there was media coverage of the protest, the size of the campaign, and whether a protest campaign has either

consensus-based structure or hierarchical command and control structure (Tables A14–A17). The same can be said of the inclusion of additional socio-economic variables: oil income per capita, aid dependence, trade openness, inequality, and inequalities among ethnic groups that may correlate with both anti-regime protests and democratic transitions (Tables A18–A19).

Fourth, we demonstrate that the main results do not hinge on the CRE probit models; our results hold when estimating either a linear fixed effects or random effects logit model (Tables A20–A21).

Last, we explore whether our main results are robust to the exclusion of a specific region – East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, as defined by the World Bank. We conduct restricted-sample tests by excluding each region individually (Tables A22–A23). Our findings remain similar and statistically significant regardless of which region is excluded from the analysis. Similarly, models restricted to the post-Cold War period yield similar results. Table A24 shows that there is no significant difference between the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods, although the number of authoritarian regimes significantly decreases in the post-Cold War period.

Conclusion

This article specifies and tests four pathways through which nonviolent anti-regime protests encourage democratic transitions. We argue that nonviolent anti-regime protests directly influence democratic transitions by ousting authoritarian regimes and encouraging democratization through their pro-democratic goals and organizational structures. The threat of regime breakdown through nonviolent anti-regime protests also indirectly influences democratic transitions by coercing regime elites into democratic reforms that provide the opportunity for regime survival or, at the very least, improved post-tenure fates following electoral defeat. These movements also indirectly affect democratic transitions by sending a signal to discontented elites that the overthrow of the incumbent dictator will not be contested. This gives insiders greater incentive and ability to overthrow the leader while the continued mobilization of nonviolent movements enables them to extort democratic reforms from the new leadership.

This research provides an important step toward assessing the complex and systematic effects of nonviolent anti-regime protests. Our empirical analyses corroborate existing findings that nonviolent movements increase the likelihood of democratic transitions while violent movements increase the likelihood of autocratic transitions (e.g. Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). More importantly, we find support that nonviolent anti-regime protests bring about democratic change through the direct and indirect means specified in our theory. Nonviolent anti-regime protests are associated with both transitions from below and transitions from above. These findings suggest that scholars focusing exclusively on the direct pathway from protests to democracy are likely to unduly assign a limited role to protests, missing important interactions between citizen and elite actors in democratic transitions.

Future study is necessary in several areas. First, scholars should explore the structural factors that enhance or weaken the effect of mass protests on democratic transitions. Although they are not well suited to explaining the short-run political and institutional dynamics during regime change (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a: 132), slowly moving structural factors may significantly shape the emergence and impact of anti-regime protests. Second, additional research is needed to more directly test the pathways through which nonviolent anti-regime protests influence democratization. Finally, while scholars have assembled several impressive cross-national datasets of protests and protest tactics, it is often difficult to classify protest tactics as simply violent or nonviolent. Future work is needed to focus on the coding of cases where protest tactics are ambiguous and how the coding of these cases influences existing findings.

Replication data

Replication material can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets, as well as the authors' website at https://sites.google.com/site/namkyu77.

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