**From Rallies to Riots: Why Some Protests Become Violent**

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**Summary**

While past studies have examined the escalation tactics of social movements over an extended period of time, the author focuses on the mechanisms that lead individual nonviolent protests into violence. The driving research question for this study is *given the detrimental effects of violence and its high costs, what explains why some individual protests escalate into violence*? The focus of the article is to explain the relationship between the relative cost of violence and the level of organization within a social movement and how it effects the likelihood of violence. Relative cost of violence refers to the cost of engaging in violence (arrest, torture, death) versus the costs of remaining peaceful. Further, the level of organization refers to whether there is a command hierarchy or density of relationships between protesters within the individual movement. The author additionally presents the following three hypotheses: 1. Protests are more likely to escalate into violence when repression has been recently used, 2. Protests are more likely to escalate into violence when they are unorganized rather than organized, and 3. The effect of recent repression is conditional on protest organization type. Recent repression will have a larger effect on escalation likelihood among unorganized protests compared to organized protests.

**Methods**

To test their hypotheses, the author draws from the SCAD, a database containing event-level protest information from 1990 to 2015 across Africa. SCAD includes data regarding political violence, terror, and violent riots, however, the author only includes the events that began nonviolent and escalated into violence. The sample set used for the study contains 6,036 protest events across forty-eight countries. To calculate the relative cost of violence, the study includes a logged count of the number of days since the last instance of protest repression. To measure the level of organization for each protest event, the authors exhibit a dichotomous measure of whether the event was organized (0) or spontaneous (1). Additionally, covariates that may affect escalation into violence are incorporated into the study, including regime type, character of the protest, and whether the protest was related to an election.

**Results**

Findings from the study reveal robust support towards the hypotheses one and two, but do not confirm hypothesis three. The results indicate that the measure for the log of time since the last event of government repression is statistically significant in its relationship to protest violence, meaning that protests are more likely to escalate to violence if recent protests were repressed. Additionally, the findings suggest that spontaneous events are more likely to turn violent than organized protests. However, the results demonstrate that organized protests do not have higher escalation rates when introduced to recent repression compared to unorganized protests. The reasoning behind this finding is that a repressive environment can raise the fear for one’s life, resulting in violence being seen necessary for survival. Therefore, violent and nonviolent individuals may react similarly when faced with repression.

**Implications**

This study provides insight to the underlying causes to escalation in social movements for both scholars and policymakers. For scholars specifically, the article concentrates on protest events as a unit of analysis, providing understanding into how nonstrategic violence may occur. For policymakers, the study allows for creating safe, nonviolent social movements by opening opportunities for organized gatherings under the protection of law enforcement. Additionally, for the policymakers encouraging citizens to participate in politics, the findings from the study provide insight into identifying the best ways to carry out a protest without violence. However, further research is needed for future event-level analysis, specifically to clarify the relationship between initial protests and the development of larger social campaigns.

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