"Smart" Repression

Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz

Repression by authorities against challengers has become an increasingly common subject of study among scholars of social movements. Most of us are familiar with newspaper photos and videos of protesters being attacked with water hoses, dogs, or chemicals, or beaten by helmeted baton-wielding police officers, or even shot by riot-gear-clad law enforcement. Indeed, many of the most iconic pictures of social movements capture moments of shocking repression. Vicious attacks on demonstrators often backfire, however, if the repression is seen as unjust or disproportionate, bringing shame on the regime and increased support for the movement (Smithey and Kurtz 1999).

It is not only scholars of social movements who have become increasingly aware of this paradox of repression, but also some authorities who are confronting social movements in ways that attempt to avoid the backfire that so often accompanies repression. In this chapter, we turn our attention to that phenomenon: the increasing use by elites of what we call *"smart" repression*—that is, the use of tactics by authorities that are deliberately crafted to demobilize movements while mitigating or eliminating a backfire effect. Some may initially find the concept of smart repression confounding or even unsettling. The term is meant to invoke the same paradox that one finds in references to technology, such as "smart" bombs (precision-guided munitions), which military experts argue reduce collateral damage and make warfare more effective strategically and acceptable politically. Authorities use smart repression to frame or even forestall dramatic

confrontations that might undermine their legitimacy. By modulating away from the most heavy-handed tactics, such methods attempt to make popular mobilization less likely, either by making repression incrementally less outrageous or by invoking familiar norms (such as law and order) to make resistance literally unthinkable or unpalatable. In both cases, the ability of authorities to maintain legitimacy is paramount.

Sometimes the repression of dissidents by the state—even if violent—is considered legitimate because of the state's unique institutional role. German sociologist Max Weber ([1920] 1978) famously asserted that what distinguishes the state is its claim to the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. His dictum seems to have become more prevalent as the preservation of law and order becomes increasingly militarized. As police officers adopt the clothing, protective gear, and weapons of soldiers, they look and respond less and less like the "peace officers" they were once considered to be (see Birmingham and Vitale 2011).

Christian Davenport (1995) looked at the question of when regimes decide to use negative sanctions against social movements, examining fifty-three states in a time series analysis from 1948 to 1993. He concluded that the decision by political leaders to repress dissent was related not so much to the frequency of challenges as to the variety of strategies used by dissidents to challenge governmental authority and whether the regime was democratic (democracies being less likely to impose negative sanctions). Davenport (1995, 702) found that "regimes are more inclined to respond repressively to deviance from the cultural norm and multiple strategies of mass political behavior. In these situations, the regime has to confront conflict that is in violation of its code of acceptable dissent as well as confront different strategies of political conflict, each with its own method of recruitment and impact upon the domestic political economy." What Davenport (2007) calls the "punishment puzzle" is not easily answered: why do "governments respond to behavioral threats with some form of repression despite lack of evidence that repressive behavior is effective at quelling dissent" (Davenport and Inman 2012, 630)? This question is not our

focus here, but it is relevant because to counter repression or its effects it is helpful to know what causes the repression. It might be, some suggest, that authorities have to act but have limited options in their repertoire (Davenport and Inman 2012; Kalyvas 2003; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay 2004; Ackerman and DuVall 2000).

However, regimes are not held in place simply by brute force, as Gandhi (1999) observed, but by the cooperation of their subjects (forced or otherwise). In recent years, we have observed both increased violent repression (and technologies of repression) but also an increase in smart repression, which includes the modulation of tactical responses by authorities to maximize their ability to demobilize social movements while avoiding the public outrage that violence can evoke.

Authorities sometimes focus on low-risk tactics, just as dissidents do. Moreover, in the classic carrot-stick tension, regimes reward cooperation while they sanction dissidence. As nonviolent civil resistance becomes a major force in contemporary geopolitics, however, a number of regimes have searched for new techniques of repression in an effort to outsmart nonviolent dissidents, who are those most likely to create conditions fertile for the backfire effect.

Such elite strategies increasingly involve intelligence gathering about movement organizations that resembles Foucault's ([1975] 2012, 221) concept of "disciplinary techniques" in which the "traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power . . . fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection." Indeed, the original French title of Foucault's 1975 book was *Surveiller et Punier: Naissance de la Prison*, literally "to watch and punish," which implies the same kind of rational investigative approach to resistance campaigns—as opposed to raw repression—that we address later in this chapter.

Smart repression is not limited to political regimes but can also be found in the corporate world—as evidenced by public relations specialist Denise Deegan's (2001) handbook *Managing Activism: A Guide to Dealing with Activists and Pressure Groups*, written to help organizations plan for—and mitigate the effects of—"activist attacks." Her introduction begins by bemoaning the negative impact of activists

on corporations like Shell, which was forced to spend £38.5 million extra on disposing of a sea rig because of Greenpeace's campaigns, and McDonald's, which was compelled to spend 10 million pounds in court costs suing activists accusing the company of animal rights abuse and exploitation of workers. Deegan advises not to counter with force, but to prepare for and respond to activists intelligently: "if dealt with in the right manner, activists have been shown to change their approach from aggressively confrontational to cooperative" (2–3). She argues that, by understanding and negotiating with activists, it is possible to both influence their strategies and demobilize them.

In an intriguing and escalating contest, both regimes and dissidents often seek to outsmart the other with regard to repression. How do regimes and other elites (like corporate officers) try to *prevent* the backfire effect with smart repression, and how do resisters try to anticipate such measures in order to cultivate defections and support for the movement?

Brute Force versus Smart Repression

Here we find an interesting divergence: even as authorities continue to use physical force and violence, ranging from massive police efforts to herd and sweep up protesters to the use of live ammunition, we also perceive a growing awareness of authorities regarding the limitations of such tactics. Regimes have come a long way since the British Raj was caught off guard by Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. Authorities seem to be increasingly conscious of the thresholds across which physical force repression may backfire. Perhaps they always have been, but there is little research that reveals in any qualitative way how authorities make difficult decisions about the use of repression. The literature on repression focuses on instances of physical force or intimidation by security forces but tends to ignore deliberate efforts by authorities to avoid provoking backfire.

Although students of movements usually focus on the protester perspective, the other crucial side of the contest has been addressed by some scholars. Goldstone and Tilly (2001), for example, argue that authorities seek to combine repression and concession in ways that are

most likely to pacify an opposition movement. Tarrow (2003, 149) says that regimes can use a strategy of "selective facilitation and repression" to drive wedges between moderates and radicals, what Haines (1984) calls the "radical flank" question (cf. Schock and Chenoweth 2010). This narrative that labels one group of insurgents as radical and the other moderate is a common tactic of elites (see Alridge 2006), who have a clear preference for dealing with one group rather than the other, which is why President Johnson would invite Dr. King, but not Malcolm X, to the White House. Mistrust sometimes emerges within a resistance movement as moderates are seen to have sold out to the powers that be. Examining cases from the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) data set comparing violent and nonviolent campaigns (see Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Stephan and Chenoweth 2008), Schock and Chenoweth (2010) found that, when a radical flank existed, nonviolent campaigns were less likely to succeed. Radicals, freed from the moderating influence of their former comrades, are more likely to use violence and create a plausible excuse for further repression of all dissent by the authorities. In this way, authorities sometimes can shift the thresholds of public outrage to avoid the paradox of repression. This clever use of selective facilitation and repression suggests authorities can be quite aware of the risks of overt repression and appreciate the important subjective dimensions of repression and protest within which the fundamental battle over legitimacy is waged.

A Continuum of Demobilization

If we are to understand the paradox of repression, we also need to explore how elites sometimes attempt to avoid triggering it. There is some evidence—although it is obviously difficult to get accurate information—that intelligence and military agencies are attempting to construct tactics of smart repression.[1] This chapter represents our

1. Not all of these efforts are covert, however—in fact, Eric L. Nelson (2013) has explored "the intentional subversion of social movements by agents of the

initial foray into a deeper consideration of repression and whether the paradoxical dynamic that is often called backfire operates in the same way across a variety of forms of repression, a topic taken up fruitfully by Jennifer Earl (2003, 47), who suggested looking at "three key theoretical dimensions of repression . . . (1) the identity of the repressive agent; (2) the character of the repressive action; and (3) whether the repressive action is observable."

Keeping those elements in mind but focusing on the second and third, we suggest, as a point of departure, that a continuum of demobilization (Table 8.1) ranges from the most violent forms that rely on inducing fear among challengers and potential movement participants, on the one hand, to intentional attempts to encourage people to internalize a regime's legitimacy, on the other. We expect the type of repression used to affect the dynamics of a conflict and the probability of its backfiring on the regime. As one moves to the right of the continuum in Table 8.1, one encounters less direct threat, violence, and intimidation and a diminishing likelihood of public outrage and mobilization.

We propose that this continuum represents a range of attempts employed by movement opponents to demobilize protest. Nodes to the left of the continuum align more strongly with traditional ideas about repression, while nodes toward the right represent attempts to induce self censorship among would-be activists by disseminating privileged narratives that favor authorities and become internalized in the general populace (see Gramsci 1998). Whether these activities should always be defined as repression remains unclear.

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organization upon which the social movement is trying to force change" (163). He reviews "thirteen tested and theoretical methods of subversion . . . [that] were designed to induce petit or grand failure into targeted social movements" (172), some of which we discuss below. It is interesting to note that Nelson explicitly avoids discussing the morality or appropriateness of these types of deliberate subversion of a movement, concluding with a warning that "organizational attorneys should be consulted before any subversive program is implemented" (172).

TABLE 8.1 A Continuum of Demobilization

Overt Violence	*"Less-lethal" Methods*	*Intimidation*	*Manipulation*	*Soft Repression*	*Hegemony*
Executions	Pepper spray	Indirect threats	Co-optation	Framing contests	Latent repression
Shooting unarmed demonstrators	Active Denial System	Harassment	Selective facilitation	Ridicule	Spontaneous consensus
Assassinations	Laser and acoustic devices	Surveillance	Dilemma actions	Stigmatization	Self censorship
Beatings	"Non-lethal" munitions	Intrapsychic wounding	Resource depletion	Defamation	Election fraud
Torture	Tasers		Information suppression	Silencing	
Arrests			Thwart recruiting efforts	Diversions	
			Disinformation	Media manipulation	
			Making faux concessions	Arranged counterprotest	
			Divisive disruption		
			Censorship		

Source: Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz

Overt Violence

The most dramatic forms of repression that attract the bulk of media and popular attention include instances of public physical force: assassinations and executions, baton charges and beatings, arrests, water jets, dogs, and the iconic example of live fire injuring or even killing demonstrators. Overt violence can have the functional effect of removing protesters from the streets as they are incapacitated or arrested and removed to detention facilities. However, its primary effect is *deterrence*—it lies in provoking fear and making an example of a few in order to inhibit the participation of others in protest. Although this is the most likely type of repression to provoke backfire, it can also sometimes actually demobilize or even extinguish a movement that is unable to manage the repression effectively, as did the June 4, 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, which effectively shut down the Chinese movement at that time. Movement leaders slipped underground or into exile, and demonstrators learned to self censor for fear of harsh repercussions.

Authorities who anticipate using overt violence to demobilize a movement may prepare for the use of force in order to mitigate its negative effects. Here we may see something like a macro-level use of what social psychologist Albert Bandura (1999) identifies as "mechanisms of moral disengagement" that individuals use to justify to themselves the prospect of harming others, and to avoid self-sanctioning for engaging in behavior people know is morally wrong. In this case, it is not so much the belief that violent repression is wrong, although that may be part of the thinking of at least some law enforcement, security, or military personnel. What is most significant is their wish to avoid the stigma of engaging in behavior that may be defined as unjust or disproportionate on the part of significant segments of the public, or even elites or other members of the security forces. The psychological consequences of the use of violent repression by authorities and their agents—what Rachel MacNair (2002) refers to as Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS)—may also inhibit elites' use of violent repression (see chapter 4 in this volume).

Authorities may therefore try to deflect criticism before, during, or after the use of violence by dehumanizing its targets, using euphemisms or advantageous comparisons (if we do not do this, something even worse will happen), blaming the victim, or otherwise discounting the negative consequences of violence (Martin 2007, 134–35). Much of this repression management (see Smithey and Kurtz 2010) may be carried out through statements to the press about the danger potentially faced by dissidents if they are not demobilized. They may be marginalized or even dehumanized, stigmatized, labeled, and referred to in derogatory terms, tactics we will discuss in more detail below.

Studies of violence by Stanley Milgram (1974) and Grossman and Siddle (2008) show that it is easier to harm others when one is physically or psychologically removed from the victim and operating under instructions from authorities. Sometimes the targeting of more vulnerable groups in a society by law enforcement (either deliberately or as a result of systematic discrimination and the makeup of the police force) may sustain a greater degree of ongoing control over those populations. That may also backfire, however, as the wave of protests starting in 2014 against the killing of African Americans by US police officers demonstrates. Smart tactics of repression will take these kinds of dynamics into account.

"Less-lethal" Methods

Interestingly, many military and domestic police forces are increasingly interested in what the US military calls "non-lethal" or "less-lethal" methods for controlling dissidents, including plastic bullets and baton rounds, tasers, pepper spray, and ways of moving individuals or crowds of people. This may be especially helpful to authorities in democratic countries where their actions are under more effective scrutiny, and even more so when an independent press can disseminate information about repression and potentially cultivate what Gamson (1992) calls an "injustice frame" (see Benford and Snow 2000).

Perhaps, in part, because of the dangers of PITS, as well as a consciousness of the bad press generated by lethal methods, soldiers

have generated a demand for less-lethal options that can help reduce instances of civilian casualties. The US Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate in Quantico, Virginia, oversees the US military's research and development in the field. According to the program's website, the "Department of Defense defines non-lethal weapons as weapons, devices, and munitions that are explicitly designed and primarily employed to incapacitate targeted personnel or materiel immediately, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel, and undesired damage to property in the target area or environment. Non-lethal weapons are intended to have reversible effects on personnel and materiel" (Non-Lethal Weapons Program, US Department of Defense 2013).

Military contractors have developed an "Active Denial System," a device that emits electromagnetic energy that creates a painful sensation in a human target but allegedly does no lasting physical harm. The "Mobility Denial System" involves a nearly frictionless viscous fluid that makes it virtually impossible to walk or drive. Conversely, another method involves a sticky gluelike substance that can be dispersed to impede targets' mobility. Other devices fire rubber pellets, sponge projectiles, or plasma energy to repel or deter their targets (Mihm 2004).

Non- or less-lethal methods are presumably attractive to security forces because they spare the user from the traumatic psychological effects of committing violence and help minimize the public relations fallout associated with more violent methods. That said, the impact of non-lethal methods on public perception may vary from context to context, including the extent to which a movement is able to frame the use of these methods and the way they are portrayed in the media. The use of non-lethal weapons like pepper spray and tear gas, along with nighttime raids to clear encampments, backfired in the case of the Occupy movement. Images of pepper-spraying officers went viral on the Internet, and TV commentator Keith Olbermann unleashed a satirical diatribe against New York Mayor Bloomberg, comparing him and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly with other historical and ruthless US officials, such as Governor Wallace, who used tactical

police violence in attempts to shut down civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s (Olbermann 2011).

Intimidation

Intimidation often amounts to the *threat* of direct violence, which may be physical, verbal, or written, but also includes such tactics as harassment, surveillance, tax investigations, and other subtle efforts to demobilize activists without the use of direct violence. While clinging to the option of violence under a claim of legitimacy (manufactured or not), security officials are also at least roughly aware of the costs of using direct violence. Most would prefer to deter popular resistance without actually using violence.[2] Consequently, they project strength through deploying superior numbers, displaying weapons, and wearing body armor. Nevertheless, walking the line between effective repression and repression that backfires requires a fine calibration of threat, and thus activities that fall toward the right end of our continuum (Table 8.1) become important in providing a wider range of options to facilitate repression management by authorities.

Nelson (2013, 170) suggests that intimidation can involve either overt actions (which, of course, run the risk of backfire) or "less overt acts such as threats to sue, arrest, and evict. It can also be more subtle, with implications left to the target's imagination." He identifies more subtle forms of intimidation or even overt surveillance. Sometimes community or civil relations officers in more familiar uniforms are deployed to mitigate or modulate intimidatory measures. Nelson notes that "vehicles with agents parked in front of a target's residence, or place of work, and publicly following that person can be unnerving" (170). Authorities can also attempt to avoid the paradox of repression by short-circuiting the confrontations they feel call for repression through *indirect* threat and redirection. If few people

2. This is a ubiquitous preference in warfare and violent conflict (Grossman and Siddle 2008; Collins 2008; Waal 2000). Individual combatants often "posture" to avoid or at least postpone actual violence.

attend contentious events, the popularity of the movement is diminished, protesters appear increasingly marginal and out-of-step with the public, and there may be fewer witnesses to direct repression when it occurs (depending on how well the media covers the event).

On three specific days in December 2011, Russian authorities required schools to hold exams in a poorly veiled attempt to discourage young people from joining protests demanding fair elections. This case provides an opportunity to illustrate the category of indirect threat in our continuum (Table 8.1). Besides the advantages of redirecting students, teachers, and parents away from protest, the indirect use of educational institutions meant that the regime could disguise its social control and leverage indirect threats. Missing exams (taking them or giving them) could result in professional reprimand, failing grades, and the possibility of poor future prospects. Potential movement activists must weigh the costs of their participation, which are not limited to confrontations with the police. If, however, such subterfuge remains concealed, authorities can spread repression and their culpability across various institutions, thus minimizing the dangerous attribution of repression at the top of the regime that might produce backfire.

Nelson (2013, 170) notes the effectiveness of what he calls "intrapsychic wounding," citing Emile Durkheim's concept of the collective consciousness. Intrapsychic wounding involves inflicting trauma that undermines the "beliefs, hopes, values, and thought characteristics of a group." Nelson observes that "the Middle East countries roiled by the Arab Spring had been controlled, for decades, by dictators who stifled dissent through small scale, individualized actions. People were frequently arrested, beaten, falsely convicted, penalized and punished, fired from jobs, prohibited from attending school, or raped" (171). In the final analysis, Nelson contends, "analytically, aggregate-induced wounding, rather than large scale/single massive event wounding, is probably the more efficient and less risky form of intrapsychic subversion" (171).

Brian Martin and Truda Gray (2005, 157) note that "defamation actions often serve as a form of legal intimidation, suppressing free speech"; these actions are therefore also a form of smart repression.

Moreover, they note, "threats of defamation suits are more frequent than suits themselves, and can have the same effect. In Australia, where defamation laws are quite favourable to plaintiffs, defamation law is an especially powerful tool against free speech (Pullan 1994)." Targets of defamation have tactics at their disposal to counter defamation suits or their threats, which Martin and Gray identify as exposing the action, validating the target, interpreting it as censorship, avoiding or discrediting the courts, and resisting intimidation and bribery. Unless activists are prepared to counter defamation, they might be subtly subverted by it.[3]

All of these intimidation tactics are designed to demobilize insurgent or dissident campaigns without the use of overt violence, thus mitigating the possibility of repression backfiring. Even more subtle than intimidation, however, are efforts to manipulate groups or their individual members, often covertly.

Manipulation

Another set of demobilization techniques involves manipulating dissidents and their organizations through such tactics as co-optation, facilitations, "demonstration elections" (including election fraud), information suppression, suppressing recruiting efforts, and engaging in dilemma actions (creating a situation that gives individuals or groups a choice between two negative options). Manipulations involve attempts to undermine, divide, divert, or distract social movement organizations or their pool of potential recruits.

Selective facilitation is one strategy often used to manipulate movements, playing more radical and more moderate groups off of each other with "the selective facilitation of some groups' claims and the selective repression of others" (Tarrow 2011, 209). The problem

3. The utility of defamation in this section revolves around the ability of authorities to provoke fear among activists. In a later section on soft repression we note how defamation or stigmatization may help authorities win framing battles where the target is the general public.

for governments using this tactic is that it can "push radicals into more sectarian forms of organization and more violent forms of action," especially if there is a "decline in mass support and polarization inside the movement" (209). When combined with partial demobilization, it can even produce terrorism (della Porta 1995).

Authorities may attempt to divert or co-opt human resources and leadership away from social movement organizations by offering attractive alternative pathways, such as career moves, to address their social concerns *within* the halls of power, where power is traditionally believed to reside. Activists may be invited to serve on policy-making commissions or establish new government-funded programs. Coy and Hedeen (2005) explain: "Channeling refers to efforts by the dominant group to undermine and redirect the challenging movement's leadership and power base away from substantive challenges to the dominant groups or system and toward more modest reforms" (416). Once a sense of progress through institutional channels has been established, continued access, credibility, and participation can become movement goals in and of themselves, a process that Coy and Hedeen call "the paradox of collaboration" (417). Furthermore, the movement's former sense of urgency can dissipate, since the business is being taken care of within official institutions.

Co-optation is a frequent strategy authorities use to diffuse dissent. Goldstone and Tilly (2001) explore how people in power combine repression and concession simultaneously or alternately in order to raise the cost of dissidence and increase the rewards for collaborating with the status quo for activists or potential resisters. Of course, this carrot-and-stick approach has a long tradition that is a well-worn strategy of smart repression. The Arab states—especially Saudi Arabia—used this combination to diffuse protest after the eruption of protests in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. Mehran Kamrava (2012, 97) argues that "at the same time as GCC states have resorted to heightened levels of repression to ensure their political survival, they have also sought to strengthen their rule by pumping massive amounts of money into the economy." The Saudis spent $130 billion to give civil servants two months' extra salaries, built half a million additional

units of low-income housing, and increased their financial support for religious organization (cf. MacFarquhar 2011).

Nelson (2013, 168) identifies another manipulation tactic against social movements as "resource depletion," which is the opposite of what movement scholars call resource mobilization. This, Nelson says, can take the form of:

- targeting the money, machines, and mobility of a group;
- seizing assets or property (e.g., by filing civil litigation that requires a group to spend limited resources defending themselves);
- introducing computer viruses; or
- "accidentally" blocking a car to prevent transportation to an event, creating what Nelson calls a "*petit* failure" of the movement.

Authorities will often suppress information flow among insurgents, especially by blocking access to the Internet or cell phones. Dubai hosts an annual TeleStrategies conference where American and European companies show their latest technologies for blocking websites and targeting web traffic (Nelson 2013, 164–65). Authorities can also "suppress recruiting efforts," according to Nelson (165), by identifying situations in which potential recruits become vulnerable to movement recruitment, such as life turning points like divorce and unemployment. This tactic is enhanced with subversion methods like reducing recruiting opportunities: authorities can reduce contact between activists and potential recruits by physically removing opportunities for them to meet, through house arrest, communications blockages, or actually relocating them, if possible (165–66). Of course, this type of repression can move well beyond simple manipulation into intimidation or even milder forms of direct violence (like arrests).

"Dilemma actions" are tactics that set up one's opponents so that they are forced to choose between two unattractive alternatives. Long a favorite of movement activists, these tactics were conceptualized by Lakey (1973, 103–8; cf. Lakey 1987) as early as 1968, when he described a dilemma action deployed by activists campaigning against chemical weapons who repeatedly tried to plant a pine tree at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. Each time the military authorities arrested activists and their tree, they violated norms about the value of life and nature

and highlighted the activists' framing of the arsenal as place of death and destruction. After several confrontations, the military authorities chose to allow a tree to be planted, consenting to the permanent presence of the activists' frame. As Lakey (1973, 107) explains, "in symbol language, when the tree said life, all Edgewood could say back was death, no matter how daintily it picked its phrases."

Though Lakey introduced the concept of dilemma demonstration, it was not until Sørensen and Martin's (2014) article that it received systematic treatment. They devoted attention to how movement activists can choreograph dilemma actions, but their approach is instructive as to how such dilemmas can be set up by authorities as well. Authorities may, for example, place nonviolent activists in a dilemma by calling for civility and calm. To the extent that methods of nonviolent disruption are used, the activists may become vulnerable to charges of having violated their own principles. If they abandon their strategy, they potentially lessen their impact and lose momentum, and the authorities will have successfully demobilized the movement.

Another manipulative technique identified by Nelson (2013, 169) is what he calls "divisive disruption," which may involve using *agent provocateurs* who infiltrate the movement and foment violent actions, or attack "the trust among a group's leaders, perhaps through rumor, a planted letter (or e-mail), or even a photoshopped picture placing one or more in compromising circumstances."

Finally, censorship is another time-honored demobilization tactic. The Roman Catholic Church developed the most elaborate such institutional mechanism, the *Index of Forbidden Books*. The problem was that when a book was placed on the index, its sales soared! The backfire was so acute that, at one point, a cardinal even put the *Index of Forbidden Books* itself on the index!

Soft Repression

Repression includes hegemonic practices that undermine dissent through counterframing and propaganda. In a chapter on soft repression, Myra Marx Ferree (2005) identifies three forms of cultural

subversion by non-state targets of social movements: ridicule, stigma, and silencing. She usefully critiques a long tendency among social movement scholars to focus on states as the targets of social movements, and she distinguishes the strategies of state versus non-state actors (such as corporations), with the latter less likely to use the state's methods of physical force retaliation but nonetheless act against movements to defend their interests (cf. Linden and Klandermans 2006, 213–28).

Whereas hard repression involves the mobilization of force to control or crush oppositional action through the use or threat of violence, soft repression involves the mobilization of nonviolent means to silence or eradicate oppositional *ideas.* "The distinguishing criterion of soft repression," Marx Ferree (2005, 141) contends, "is the collective mobilization of power, albeit in nonviolent forms and often highly informal ways, to limit and exclude ideas and identities from the public forum." Our concept of smart repression is similar, and for our purposes, the nonviolent aspect of soft repression feeds into these methods' capacities to avoid backfire. Indeed, there has been increasing interest in what Joseph Nye (1990, 2004) dubbed "soft power," that is, "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (2004, x).

A parallel development emerged in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts under the direction of General David Petraeus, with a shift toward counterinsurgency intelligence (COIN) as a focus of US military operations, which a COIN strategist says is "75 percent hearts and minds, just 25 percent combat" (Kaplan 2014, 89). Recognizing the potential backfire of an intimidating and violent military presence countering an insurgency, the COIN approach measured success not by "how many enemy troops you kill but how many townspeople or villagers are spontaneously providing intelligence about where the enemy is, . . . how many community leaders openly support the government . . . and how much spontaneous economic activity is going on in a town (reflecting the sense that it's safe to go out on the streets)" (Kaplan 2014, 89).

Women's movements are demobilized, Marx Ferree (2004) notes, in three ways that raise the cost of becoming associated with identities

or groups that challenge the status quo. *Ridicule* occurs on an interpersonal level in daily life as individuals are mocked and degraded as the boundaries of privilege become reinscribed for all present. *Stigma* refers to a broader dynamic of devaluing groups via negative stereotypes that undermines attempts to maintain a movement and recruit new members. *Silencing* occurs as mass media outlets deliberately make biased decisions about what speech to allow and which to exclude. In the process, movement arguments become lost, and the urgency and salience of the movement declines in the eyes of potential participants.

The media constitute a particularly important platform where framing contests between the regime and the movement play out in public. The regime obviously has the upper hand in most instances, because officials usually have easier access to the media than do resisters. It is also, paradoxically, the space where resistance becomes visible precisely when the regime tries to crack down on protesters or the media itself. Without the media, the backfire effect would not take hold. Consequently, authorities may aim to choreograph protest events covered by the media in ways that silence or distract from dissent.

In 2002, the United States Office of Presidential Advance (2002) within the Bush administration released a *Presidential Advance Manual* with instructions on how to minimize any disruptions created by protesters, since the president had been hounded by them whenever he made public appearances. The version obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was heavily redacted, but it emphasized preventing demonstrators from coming near an event where the president might appear. "Rally squads," preorganized counterdemonstrators, would surround and drown out any demonstrators who managed to get through the elaborate screening system into the venue. Moreover, the manual emphasizes (in bold face): "Remember—*avoid physical contact with demonstrators!*" (35). Event organizers are advised that they should "not do anything or say anything that might result in physical harm to the demonstrators. Before taking action, the advance person must decide if the solution would cause more negative publicity than if the demonstrators were simply left alone" (35). The next thirty pages of the document are redacted and so do not appear in the version

released to the ACLU, perhaps to prevent readers from learning their smart antidemonstrator tactics.

The media also plays a key role in the construction and maintenance of hegemony, or latent repression, by repeating the images, ideas, and talking points provided by elites in order to construct what Gramsci calls "spontaneous consensus" (Gramsci 1992–1996). A striking example of this process was revealed in November 2011, when the MSNBC program *UP w/ Chris Hayes* obtained a memo from a lobbying firm, Clark Lytle Geduldig & Cranford (Geduldig et al. 2011), to the American Bankers Association. The unsolicited memo proposed that the firm assist the association by conducting "survey research and message testing, opposition research, targeted social media monitoring, coalition planning, and advertising creative and placement strategy development." The opposition research component was offered to "identify opportunities to construct fact-based negative narratives of the OWS [Occupy Wall Street] for high impact media placement to expose the backers behind this movement." The lobbyists surmised, "If we can show they have the same cynical motivation as a political opponent it will undermine their credibility in a profound way." In this case, negative media representations were intended to make the Occupy movement less palatable to Republican politicians, who might embrace it under pressure from the populist Tea Party movement. The ploy might fall neatly under Marx Ferree's (2005) "stigma" category of soft repression.

A general reading of media coverage of the Occupy movement suggests other similar attempts to portray its participants as marginal and undesirable. In the context of standoffs between police and protesters in cities across the country, we believe this framing battle was related to the probability of repression backfiring as municipal authorities struggled to deal with encampments on public and private property. Reporting characterized Occupy activists as lazy, unhygienic, homeless, and strung out. Whether these portrayals can be traced to the governmental authorities who were under pressure to end protests and clear camps interests us, though as the lobbying firm's memo suggests, the source of negative representations in the media can be shadowy.

In some cases, authorities can simply exclude the media from important contentious events. For example, in a coordinated effort to demobilize the Occupy movement in November 2011, eighteen US mayors held a conference call with federal officials, according to Oakland Mayor Jean Quan ("Occupy Wall Street" 2011). A Justice Department official reportedly told a reporter that federal law enforcement officials advised US cities to use riot gear to intimidate the protesters, but Ellis claimed, "the FBI reportedly advised on press relations, with one presentation suggesting that any moves to evict protesters be coordinated for a time when the press was the least likely to be present" (Wells 2011). Under the FBI's advice, movement voices would, by design, be silenced and repression unreported.

Nelson (2013, 168) identifies "expertly directed, incessant proactive manipulation of media" as a key tactic for subverting a social movement. This may involve

- taking control of media away from the movement preemptively, using media experts;
- manipulating the media "to cast disparaging light on the movement" in order to damage its constructed public image, and alternatively portraying the protested organization as wholesome and worthwhile;
- denying protesters the legitimization provided by meetings with public or institutional officials (if you have to have meetings, "they must be off-camera, unannounced, and, if suspected, be neither confirmed or denied,");
- using subversion efforts that are both proactive and rapidly reactive.

The media can also be used to stigmatize dissident groups, their members, or their leadership. In his discussion of this tactic of stigmatization, Nelson (2013, 168–69) cites Erving Goffman's (2009) work on "spoiled identity" as providing clues as to how to discredit a movement by besmirching its public image.

We appreciate Marx Ferree's (2005) broadening of the study of repression, and we believe (as her article allows) that the strategies she

attributes to non-state actors are not exclusive of state authorities, who of course also wield security forces against social movement activists. The various framing strategies that soft repression represents may also be considered "smart" in our formulation because they can take place nonviolently in a range of contexts (e.g., press conferences, news outlets, schools, churches), away from the *sturm und drang* of street protest. More importantly, they can precede direct repression and make it seem better justified and thus less likely to backfire. Nelson (2013, 166) notes that authorities can "develop attractive alternatives" in order to divert potential recruits from movement participation to something less threatening to the status quo. One example Nelson puts forth is what he calls "reverse honeypots operations." Infiltrators in a movement can volunteer to set up websites that would then include tiny hyperlinks in the text that would go undetected but cause Google to link the pages to a movement organization, manipulating Google searches so that other sites would be more likely to show up in a search, diverting potential activists from the movement's site (166). Another tactic of movement subversion Nelson identifies is tempting members to leave a movement by making emotional appeals, for example, with an alternative that distracts people from movement participation, diverting them into other activities. To counter a radical animal rights group, for example, its members might be recruited to engage in rescuing orphaned puppies.

Nelson (2013, 166–67) calls a more aggressive version of this tactic "reverse recruiting," which exposes participants to demoralizing information such as "contradictory evidence or beliefs" to draw them away from the movement. Instead of simply blocking information flow, authorities can disseminate misinformation or disinformation. This tactic might also involve "disseminating believable disinformation" or misinformation that discredits movement leaders or weakens the group, thus increasing personal risks for, and costs of, participation.

Perhaps a more subtle manipulation is what Nelson (2013, 167) identifies as operationalizing "secure/*faux* concessions" that make it appear that the movement has succeeded when it has not. Nelson warns,

however (providing an example from Cornell University, whose alleged deception was discovered by protesters), that “the truth of things must remain a carefully guarded secret,” if this tactic is to succeed.

Hegemony

The most advantageous type of repression for a regime is that which does not look like repression at all, what we might call the “latent repression” of hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci (1992–1996) has described it. Overt repression of the sort that most often results in backfire is often a consequence of the failure of more “soft” or subtle means of repression. As Bates (1975, 353) notes, “to the extent that the intellectuals fail to create hegemony, the ruling class falls back on the state’s coercive apparatus which disciplines those who do not ‘consent,’” and which is “constructed for all society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command . . . when spontaneous consensus declines.”

In the previous subsection, we addressed how authorities and elites try to manage their own repression in the service of protecting their legitimacy that is often won through the manufacture of consent (Herman and Chomsky [1988] 2011). Postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault (1980) have revealed the subtle and nuanced ways in which elites wield power by instituting and privileging narratives that become so deeply internalized that they preempt alternative narratives and make the thinkable unthinkable or out of reach of critical thought (cf. Gaventa 1980).

Herbert Marcuse (1974, 94) makes a similar point in *Eros and Civilization*: society defends against threats with “a strengthening of controls not so much over the instincts as over consciousness, which, if left free, might recognize the work of repression in the bigger and better satisfaction of needs.” Dissent is co-opted, and people self censor their protest, channeling their discontent into consumerism; here, there is no need to send in the troops to quell demonstrations because potential insurgents are busy shopping, engaging in purchased leisure activities, or working to make the incomes required to “fulfill themselves” with purchases that reinforce the robustness of the very system that stirs their discontent. This may be the “smartest” form of

repression of all, the hegemony that we identify on the far right end of our spectrum of repression.

Regimes often rely on nationalism to connect political agendas with deeply held collective identities. The state becomes "father," "mother," "home," and to challenge it either seems incongruent or produces shame and guilt. Under the most effective hegemonic regimes, challenging authorities and elites rarely even occurs to enough people to mobilize resistance that would provoke resistance and backfire. Our focus has been on how authorities deal with those who publicly and nonviolently challenge the status quo, but we include hegemony in our continuum of demobilization (Table 8.1) because it represents the most insidious form of demobilization and is often a product of successful soft repression. Hegemonic power is established throughout a population, but it also presents challenges for activists, who are not immune to the seduction of going along to get along.

Conclusion

One of the keys to the success of a social movement campaign seems to be its ability to manage repression, trying to enhance the potential of its backfiring to the benefit of the movement. The challenge is always significant, as people in power who are trying to demobilize a movement usually have more resources, more access to the media, and sometimes even some legitimacy among the regular populace. They at least have the ability to make people fear them (see Popovic, Milivojevic, and Djinovic 2006), if not love them, as the policy Machiavelli advised the prince to follow suggests.

The task of repression management is even more daunting when the repression is "smart." If it is more subtle rather than overtly violent and brutal, or if the regime has sufficiently convinced others that it is legitimate and the dissenters unworthy, or that the cost of insurgency is simply too high, then managing it becomes more complicated. In our effort to untangle the paradox of repression, we have found smart repression to be particularly puzzling, and this has been a preliminary effort to understand how regimes might employ it and dissenters might counter it.

Some might argue that methods of demobilization toward the right end of our continuum (Table 8.1), such as media strategies and hegemony, do not amount to repression but rather constitute attempts to undermine and demobilize a movement before the need for repression arises. Alternatively, others, such as Marx Ferree, consider these more cultural strategies to be repression in a different sphere. Whether the police are trying to intimidate or beat protesters out of physical public space, or whether spokespersons are seeking to "exclude ideas and identities from the public forum," power is being wielded for social control and to resist challengers. The former position perhaps defines repression too narrowly, while under the latter all contention becomes either repression or resistance (cf. Goodwin and Jasper 2012).

Regardless of whether nonviolent attempts to undermine challengers amount to repression, such efforts still bear on more traditional understandings of repression. The framing battles in which authorities and social movements engage shape the cultural field of public expectations and legitimacy where backfire takes place. Each side wants to shift the threshold across which the paradox of repression is triggered. Authorities want to keep repression (physical or cultural) under the radar as much as possible and to portray challengers as illegitimate or in some way deserving of overt repression, if the latter becomes necessary. Social movement activists want to delegitimize authorities and reveal repression and injustices so that dramatic instances of repression are more likely to become tipping points at which backfire occurs. In short, each side wants to prepare the ground on which repression occurs.

Perhaps one of the reasons the study of repression has focused on physical acts of intimidation and violence by the state is because these are dramatic events that capture press attention and titillate popular audiences. Smart repression is "smart" because it aims to either head off confrontation by making mobilization more difficult through hegemonic strategies of silencing and reeducation or by making direct repression less outrageous and thus less likely to provoke movement organizing and nonviolent action. Either approach makes backfire

more complicated. In these framing contests, both authorities and activists seek to shift the threshold at which the paradox of repression is activated in their favor.

Understanding the concept of smart repression can help nonviolent activists reflect more clearly on the impulses and fears that deter them from taking action, and it can guide them in choreographing actions that highlight violations of civil liberties, even when they do not necessarily involve bodily repression. (For example, some activists cover their mouths with tape to focus public attention on ways in which some citizens and their concerns are silenced.) Maintaining nonviolent discipline remains paramount under conditions of smart repression in order to illustrate a clear contrast between the legitimacy of people power and authoritarian attempts to silence democratic voices. Not surprisingly, social movement activists have developed their own strategies for raising the likelihood of repression backfiring. Although the elite may have more resources at its command, it often lacks the creativity or the versatility of a nonviolent civil resistance. Nonviolent activists have shown a growing aptitude (perhaps bolstered by the increasing availability and use of social media and media production tools) for engaging in creative framing battles that make repression more likely to backfire on authorities.

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