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Repression and International Conflict

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Repression and International Conflict

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Abstract

Repression and International Conflict

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Scholars suspect that violence at home is linked to violence abroad but few studies theorize or test any relationship between them. Under what conditions does repression lead to international conflict? I extend the logic of why leaders repress to suggest that repression can alter states' power internationally. I argue that leaders can repress to prepare for a possible international conflict, but the act of repressing alters their international bargaining power through a signaling mechanism. The argument implies that governments continue to use repression because it can increase their power vis-a-vis both domestic and international opponents. With a global dataset on torture, death, disappearance, arbitrary arrests and international conflict, I find that - even after controlling for regime type, civil war, and military capabilities - states that repress are more likely to initiate conflict the following year than states that respect basic human rights. Simultaneously, engaging in extreme repression virtually guarantees that no state will target the repressor.

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1 Introduction

During the 20th century, states killed over 170 million of their own citizens, several times the 38 million combined battle deaths from interstate and civil war (Rummel, 1998). Scholars have long suspected that violence at home is linked to violence abroad (Carr, 2001; Herbst, 1990; Rummel, 1998; Tilly, 1992), and repressive, belligerent regimes like Iran and North Korea certainly suggest a connection between repression and international conflict. Despite these suspicions, few studies suggest or test any relationship between them. On the other hand, numerous studies find that leaders repress to retain power in the face of domestic dissent (Davenport, 2007a; Earl, Soule, & McCarthy, 2003; Earl, 2011; Lichbach, 1987; Moore, 1998; Ritter, 2013). Does repression affect international power? Under what conditions does repression lead to international conflict? I extend the logic of why leaders repress to suggest that repression can alter states' power internationally.

I argue that repression signals a state's willingness to use force while simultaneously revealing that the state is preparing for conflict. Leaders can repress to prepare for a possible international conflict, but the act of repressing alters their international bargaining power through a signaling mechanism. Where the signal is clear and credible, potential adversaries become much less interested in at-

tacking the repressor. However, after brutally containing dissent, the repressor is more prepared for conflict than before and may threaten or attack other countries. Those familiar with bargaining theories will recognize the signaling mechanism and process from general models of conflict (Fearon, 1997; Filson & Werner, 2002; Powell, 2006; Slantchev, 2005). I suggest that on the ground, repression is a common strategy that works through the models' mechanisms.

These arguments imply that governments continue to use repression because it can increase their power vis-a-vis both domestic and international opponents. This could partially explain why the dramatic increase in international agreements condemning and punishing repression have decreased abuses only at the margins (Hafner-Burton, 2005; Simmons, 2009; Vreeland, 2008a). In order to deter repression, these agreements would need to address or prevent the military benefit that governments seek through repression.

In the following section, I discuss what causes international conflict and repression as well as the theoretical links between them. In the third section, I develop the signaling function and international effects of domestic repression and describe how these can lead to conflict through a risk-return tradeoff. I derive testable hypotheses from this discussion, specifically, that repression decreases the likelihood of being a target in an international conflict while increasing the likelihood of initiating one. I contrast these hypotheses against the possibility that repression attracts intervention or opportunistic attacks, which would falsify

the theory. In the fourth section, I evaluate these hypotheses with logistic regressions on a multiply imputed global dataset on torture, death, disappearance, arbitrary arrests and international conflict. I find that - even after controlling for regime type, civil war, and military capabilities - states that repress are more likely to engage in conflict the following year than states that respect basic human rights. Simultaneously, engaging in extreme repression virtually guarantees that no state will target the repressor. I illustrate the theory and results with conflict vignettes in the fifth section. I conclude with implications for the logic that drives repression, efforts to reduce human rights violations, and future research.

2   What Do We Know about Repression and Conflict?

2.1   *International conflict*

In international relations scholarship, bargaining theories of war have subsumed most other explanations for international conflict by explaining more stages of conflict and demonstrating that past explanations were logically incomplete (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 1999; Wagner, 2010). Insofar as war is inefficient, the bargaining framework offers an increasingly detailed and unified explanation for conflict deterrence, initiation, duration, expansion, intervention and resolution (Filson & Werner, 2002; Powell, 2006; Slantchev, 2005; Werner & Yuen, 2005; Wolford, Reiter, & Carrubba, 2011). The basic bargaining model demonstrates that conflict is inefficient for states compared to peaceful deals âĂŞ both sides benefit more from reaching a deal without military conflict - but uncertainty along with incentives to misrepresent and commitment problems can still lead to conflict (Fearon, 1995).

An information problem is where one side has private information that could change the other side's behavior and there are incentives not to reveal that information (Fearon, 1995). This happens in crisis bargaining, where each side wants the other to believe that their intelligence, generals' strategies, and resolve are superior (Powell, 2004). Sides can engage in diplomatic or other talks, which can be informative but can also lead to bluffing (Kydd, 2005; Sartori, 2002; Trager,

2010). One way actors resolve this problem is by sending a costly signal, which means doing something they might not do if they were bluffing, like making public threats or mobilizing troops (Fearon, 1995, 1997; Lake & Powell, 1999). A commitment problem occurs where one side has incentives to defect later on an agreement that it would like to commit to today (Powell, 2006). Commitment problems lead to conflict when an actor faces an adversary it would rather fight now than accommodate later.

States try to establish key information like the other side's willingness to use force, costs, and military power through bargaining and then reach an agreement that reflects the distribution of power (Filson & Werner, 2002; Wagner, 2000; Werner & Yuen, 2005). Imperfect information can lead to conflict through a risk-return tradeoff where, without knowing what deals an adversary will accept or reject, an actor makes an offer that runs some risk of conflict (Leventoglu & Tarar, 2008; Powell, 2006). Actors do this because offering a deal any adversary would accept keeps peace but concedes too much.

Fearon (1995), Powell (1999) and Filson and Werner's (2002) basic bargaining models have two unitary actors. Other scholars have relaxed the unitary actor assumption to look at competing groups within a state and found that individuals or groups within the state may benefit more from conflict than from a peaceful deal (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011; Powell, 2006; Putnam, 1988; Snyder, 1991). Some scholars use this finding to argue that leaders may start international

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conflicts to divert their constituents' attention from domestic problems (Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997; Oakes, 2006). While a few isolated cases could be interpreted as diversionary, scholars have found no statistical support and many have questioned the logic of diversionary theories (Chiozza & Goemans, 2003, 2004, 2011; Dassel & Reinhardt, 1999; K. S. Gleditsch, Salehyan, & Schultz, 2008).

In a well-constructed study of diversionary hypotheses, Enterline and Gleditsch (2000) model repression and international conflict as two possible choices for leaders facing domestic instability and find that repression increases with domestic threats but that repression and international conflict are two independent choices. This finding is an alternative explanation and effectively a null hypothesis for the present study: an increase in repression does not increase the likelihood of international conflict. While Enterline and Gleditsch look at repression and international conflict as two simultaneous choices, I suggest that repression is temporally and in some cases causally prior to international conflict. Additionally, I suggest that the decision to repress, like the decision to initiate a conflict, does not exist in an international vacuum.

2.2 *Repression*

The concept of repression encompasses a wide range of actions, and all governments engage in repression to some degree (Davenport, 2007a; Earl, 2011). For this project, I use the Political Terror Scale's restricted definition: extrajudi-

cial killing, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment by state agents (Wood & Gibney, 2010, p. 369). States strategically use tactics such as standard arrests, confiscation, and the targeted denial of basic rights, goods and services to intimidate and control and many scholars count these activities as repression (Davenport, 2007a; Earl, 2003, 2011; Oliver, 2008). In this study, I do not include these forms because there is no reliable global data on them and because the theory rests on the similarities between violent repression and military force in international conflict.

Term	Definition
International conflict.	A disagreement between countries where at least one country takes a militarized action, such as threatening to use force or sending troops to a disputed border.
Repression	Extrajudicial killing, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment by state agents (Wood & Gibney, 2010, p. 369)
Signal	An action designed to reveal information to another actor.
Initiator	The first state(s) to take a militarized action in a disagreement between at least two countries.
Target	The recipient(s) of an initial military action in a disagreement between two or more countries.
Uncertainty/Information problem	Where an actor has private information that could change another actor's behavior and there are incentives not to reveal that information (Fearon, 1995)
Willingness/Resolve to use force	A state's commitment to use violence to settle disagreements, after accounting for material capability.

Table 1: Project Definitions

Government repression has an endogenous relationship with dissent: when authorities perceive dissent as threatening, they repress, which often leads to more or different types of protest and then more punishment (Davenport, Soule,

& Armstrong, 2011; Davenport, 2007b; Earl et al., 2003; Earl, 2011; Lichbach, 1987; Moore, 1998; Ritter, 2013). Governments can end protest with massive repression, if they have the means (Tilly & Goldstone, 2001, pp. 190-191). Thus, repression is an effective form of social control in many situations but it is costly in terms of legitimacy, risk of backfire, and security forces' salaries. Institutions like elections and autonomous courts increase authorities' costs of repression, but contrary to popular belief (Poe & Tate, 1994; Rummel, 1998), all governments repress to some degree and only some democratic institutions reduce repression (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Davenport, 2007b; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004).

Theories of repression offer alternative explanations that link repression and international conflict. First, many studies suggest that war causes simultaneous or future repression (Davenport, 2007b; Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009; Poe & Tate, 1994; Rummel, 1998). I partially address this explanation in the empirical model by evaluating repression that is temporally prior to conflict and accounting for time since past conflict. I do not dispute that war causes some simultaneous repression, particularly when war suspends institutions that check repression and when heightened nationalism involves minority scapegoating (Davenport, 2007b; Kalyvas, 2003). I supplement this relationship by suggesting that in many cases, repression is an important cause of international conflict.

Second, many studies theorize repression as a signal of domestic instability or weakness (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Goodwin, 2001; Vreeland, 2008a; Young,

2013). Bargaining theories imply that international and domestic opponents will try to extract concessions from a weakening regime (Ritter, 2013). Additionally, governments frequently and publicly condemn other states' repression, threaten repressive states, and in extreme cases like genocide have signed treaties that require intervention to stop it (Hafner-Burton, 2005; Simmons, 2009). Following this line of reasoning, we should expect an increase in repression to increase the likelihood that the repressor is a target in international conflict. If repression signals regime weakness and attracts international adversaries, then repression cannot also be a signal of resolve. I assess both hypotheses with the empirical model; support for the repression as weakness hypothesis would falsify the theory.

3   Repression as a Costly Signal

States have choices about how and to what extent they control dissent and lethal repression is an exceedingly expensive option. It requires that states invest in their security forces, privilege security goals and personnel over others, and lose legitimacy. Moderate or slow increases in repression tend to spark more dissent; only massive, brutal repression quashes it (Tilly & Goldstone, 2001, pp. 190-191). This level of repression demands considerable resources and political power, and in many cases dramatically alters domestic politics and civil society for decades; it is not an easy or expedient option (Green, 1994; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Taussig, 2004; Tilly & Goldstone, 2001). I posit that the immediate and enduring domestic consequences of unleashing massive repression make it a costly and credible signal that a regime is resolved to use force against threats. I argue that the action is realized domestically but can signal resolve to use force internationally. Extreme repression works as a signal first by simply exercising force: if a state uses force against its own citizens, it may be more willing than less repressive states to use force to counter international threats.

Second, by restricting dissent and mobilizing some unit of the security apparatus, extreme repression can reveal that a state is preparing for international conflict. Like military mobilization more generally, this demonstrates that the state is increasing investments in security, developing people and things that it can use in conflicts and removing potential obstacles. Dissent before and during

conflict can present a variety of problems for governments, both by increasing the domestic political costs of engagement and by publicly airing problems that an international adversary can seize on at the bargaining table. Quashing dissent and sowing fear through extreme repression curtails this, and studies have documented many governments imprisoning, murdering, and otherwise silencing real and perceived dissidents before and during conflict for what appears to be this reason (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011; Connell, 2005; Davenport, 2007b). For example, the U.S. government arrested, sentenced, and executed Industrial Workers of the World members before and during the First World War, blunting the organization's ability to orchestrate general strikes. Similarly, in crisis bargaining, a state may want to demonstrate that it is not bluffing by revealing military mobilization. However, it may not want to reveal key aspects of mobilization - new weapons, intelligence activities, and planned troop movements - that lose strategic value when revealed. I posit that lethal repression, like amassing troops at the border, reveals that a state has competent intelligence networks, forces, and planning without revealing strategic secrets.

3.1 *Initiation*

Fearon (1997) sets out two ideal-type signals: sunk costs, where an actor spends resources purely to show that it is serious, and hand-tying, where an actor establishes a punishment for backing down while raising the probability

of success if it does not. Repression, like military mobilization generally, is a hybrid signal: the state spends resources today to demonstrate its resolve to use force in the future, but by mobilizing forces, it invests in its security apparatus which then raises the likelihood of victory. A higher probability of victory makes conflict relatively more attractive to the repressor than before (Slantchev, 2005). Additionally, more resolved states are more likely to threaten (Trager, 2010). Thus, we should observe that:

> H1: An increase in repression increases the likelihood of initiating an international conflict.

Repression is an extremely costly strategy that has deep and lasting domestic consequences. Once a government has repressed, it is hard to undo the effects (Davenport, 2007b; Green, 1994; Lambert & Nickson, 1997). Once on this path, we should expect governments to threaten international adversaries more often, even as signaling through repression successfully deters many adversaries from attacking the repressor.

3.2 *Targets*

If repression works as a costly and credible signal of resolve, it should deter international adversaries. The signal works to deter in two ways: first, by revealing important information about the repressor's willingness to use force and preparations for conflict, the adversary has more information about the state it

faces and can therefore make offers in routine diplomatic talks or crisis bargaining that the repressor is more likely to accept, averting or ending conflict. Second, as previously discussed, repression is a hybrid signal: the state spends resources now to demonstrate its resolve but those resources are an investment in its security apparatus, which raises the repressor's likelihood of victory. That increase makes the repressor relatively more interested in conflict, but it also makes adversaries relatively less interested in attacking a now more formidable opponent (Slantchev, 2005). Thus, if repression works as a hybrid signal, we should observe that:

> H2: An increase in repression decreases the likelihood of being a target in an international conflict.

A costly signal that demonstrates resolve while increasing a state's likelihood of victory cannot, by definition, sabotage a state's ability to fight. Thus, if this theory is correct, extreme repression cannot signal that the regime is exceptionally weak or distracted, that it is diverting resources from external defense, or that its security forces are devoted to repressing citizens and cannot fight foreign soldiers. Many theories suggest that repression is a sign of a weakening regime too beset by domestic problems to attend to much else (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Goodwin, 2001; Vreeland, 2008a; Young, 2013). These expectations would imply that:

> H3: An increase in repression leads to an increase in the likelihood of being a target in international conflict.

There are certainly normative reasons for this expectation: repression is abhorrent and it would be easier to eradicate if it conferred no benefit to the perpetrators. Unfortunately, it seems more plausible that we observe repression in so many places because it brings some benefit to some perpetrators at some level. Repression scholars have found that repression can strengthen a regime's hold on domestic power and I build on this finding to hypothesize that it also strengthens a regime's international bargaining position. Evidence to the contrary – like support for hypothesis 3 – would falsify the theory. Support for hypothesis 3 would specifically refute the proposed signaling mechanism because an action cannot decrease a state's ability to fight and be a credible signal of resolve. [1]

3.3 *Conflict in the risk-return tradeoff*

States face a risk-return tradeoff if they are bargaining over agreements, territory, or other important issues, do not have key pieces of information, and if conflict is an option. If both states had all relevant information and no commitment problem, they could peacefully reach an agreement because each would know the point at which the other is indifferent between conflict and peace. In a risk-return tradeoff (Fearon, 1995; Leventoglu & Tarar, 2008; Powell, 1999, 2004, 2006), a state can make an offer that any adversary would accept, but it then con-

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[1]If an action decreases a state's ability to fight, it decreases its probability of victory, which makes that state less interested in fighting and makes its adversary more interested in attacking. There is no reason to use such an action as a signal – in fact, there is every reason to conceal it – and states have other possible costly and credible signals to use if they are truly resolved.

cedes more than it must to keep the peace. Instead, the state may make an offer that a weak adversary will accept but stronger adversaries will reject in favor of fighting. The stronger the adversary, the more likely it is to reject an offer as too low. Adversaries can the make a counteroffer or escalate, starting or deepening a militarized conflict. Counteroffers and fighting then reveal information about the adversary. Thus, if repression strengthens the repressor's bargaining position, it could simultaneously result in better offers from other states and more conflict, as the repressor becomes more likely to reject low offers in favor of escalation. For example, Iraq demanded $10 billion from Kuwait on the eve of the first Gulf War. Kuwait offered $9 billion, which Iraq rejected by immediately launching an invasion.

The risk-return tradeoff suggests that not every increase in repression should lead to conflict. If the theory is correct, strong signals often deter adversaries. In other cases, the theory expects that an adversary makes an accommodating offer that the repressor accepts, averting conflict. In those cases, we would observe repression but no international conflict. Governments may also repress to consolidate domestic power with little concern for international consequences and we would also observe repression but no conflict.[2] In other instances, an offer may not be high enough and the repressor may escalate into conflict. In

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[2]Note that in these cases, the theory suggests that repression still sends a credible signal to other countries and the act of repressing still invests in security forces and increases a state's chance of victory in future conflicts âĂŞ but there is no looming conflict to leverage that in. In the sample, these cases should underestimate the effect of repression on initiation.

those cases, we observe repression and international conflict. Thus, in looking at the empirical record, no single case of repression followed by conflict or peace roundly proves or disproves the theory. Instead, the trends in a collection of cases can provide evidence for or against it.

In sum, the theory suggests that increasing repression improves a state's international bargaining position and a regime's ability to stay in power. The signaling effect implies that states use repression because it deters opponents internationally and domestically, but bargaining can still lead to conflict through a risk-return tradeoff. Past studies have shown that repression often does consolidate state power domestically and contain dissent, but that the effect is uneven (Davenport, 2007a; Earl, 2011; Lichbach, 1987; Moore, 1998; Tilly, 1978). When scholars look at the effect of domestic repression on international outcomes, they largely focus on human rights agreements. This study adds that domestic repression could affect international security politics as well. In fact, domestic state violence may have a larger impact on international security than on international law. States may use repression in spite of domestic uncertainty, international norms and legal sanctions because it could deter attacks from other states. Thus, this increase in power comes at a high cost to the country as a whole and the international community because it increases both internal and external violence. In the following section, I will evaluate these hypotheses with an empirical model.

4 Research Design

I combined data from Correlates of War (COW) and the Political Terror Scale (PTS) for the main models and measures from Polity IV, the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project, the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data project, Joseph Young's job insecurity dataset, and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) for controls and robustness checks (Bremer, Palmer, & Ghosn, 2004; N. P. Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg, & Strand, 2002; Marshall & Jaggers, 2002; Sarkees & Wayman, 2010; Singer, Bremer, & Stuckey, 1972; Stinnett, Tir, Diehl, Schafer, & Gochman, 2002; Young, 2008). The resulting dataset takes country-year observations as the unit of analysis. I use Militarized International Disputes (MIDs) to construct the main dependent variables, the PTS index as the main independent variable, and adjusted XPolity scores, COW civil wars, COW geographic contiguity, and the COW composite index of national capability (CINC), which includes population and national production components, as the controls. The dependent variables are binary – did a country enter, initiate or become a target of a crisis in a given year – and I therefore use a logistic (from here, logit) regression to estimate the independent variables' influence.

4.1 *Sample*

I use country-year observations[3] from nearly every country in existence between 1976 and 2004 Ideally, the sample would cover all modern states over all years that a given state has existed, but I am limited by data availability. Activists began collecting reliable repression data on a global scale in the 1970s and XPolity data stops at 2004. Likewise, the sample does not include all states because Polity does not code states with less than 500,000 citizens; I dropped those 33 micro-states from the dataset.[4]

There is considerable missing data in the original dataset: 54% of the observations do not have information for at least one variable. This presents a problem, because regression requires complete observations. The default solution to missingness is list-wise deletion, which excludes every observation with missing information. Instead, I used a multiple imputation technique that builds a multivariate normal distribution of all of the relevant variables and then fills in missing data with simulated draws from the distribution (Yuan, 2011). This generates a number of datasets – in this case 40, in line with Graham et al.'s (2007, p. 212) guidelines – and calculates the standard errors using the variance within and between the imputed datasets (Rubin, 1987). The multiple imputation approach to missing data generates considerably less biased estimates than list-wise dele-

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[3]For country-years in which multiple crises occurred, creating multiple entries for MIDs and ICB data, I kept the crisis that reached the highest hostility level.

[4]These states tended to have sparse or no data from other sources as well. I also dropped country-year observations for years in which a country did not exist or existed under a different name (and used entries under that other name).

tion and facilitates appropriate comparison between models by maintaining the sample size across analyses (King, Honaker, Joseph, & Scheve, 2001; Little, 2002).

4.2 *Dependent variables*

I use the MID dataset to construct three dependent variables. The dataset is one of the main datasets in the international conflict literature and it tracks military crises that escalated to war as well as the many more conflicts that states settle short of war. For this study, I recoded MID variables into three binary variables: crisis, initiation, and target. For the crisis variable, the countries that did not enter a crisis in a given year received a 0 for that year while countries that did received a 1. For the initiation variable, a country that initiated a crisis in a given year received a 1 and all others received a 0; for the target variable, a country that was the target of a crisis in a given year received a 1 while all others received a 0.

To address the autocorrelation between yearly observations for the same country, I created peace years, peace years squared, and peace years cubed variables for each country and included them as regressors. This procedure inserts a third order Taylor series approximation to the hazard into the logit (Carter & Signorino, 2010). Carter and Signorino (2010) introduced this simple method as an efficient and equivalent alternative to more complicated approaches for analyzing time in cross sectional data with limited dependent variables, like splines

and fixed effects (Beck, Katz, & Tucker, 1998; Wilson & Butler, 2007). This cubic polynomial approach outperforms fixed effects and performs in line with splines. Unlike splines, it is nonparametric and does not require the researcher to specify or assume big changes at any point in time. The cubic polynomial approach is the most appropriate and efficient option for this dataset because the autocorrelation plots differ significantly across countries.

4.3 *Independent variables*

I use the PTS index to construct the main independent variable. PTS defines state terror as violations of physical or personal integrity rights carried out by a state or its agents, such as extrajudicial killing, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment (Wood & Gibney, 2010, p. 369). PTS averages Amnesty International and U.S. State Department data to place countries on a 1 to 5 scale. One means that a country respects personal integrity rights: rule of law exists, people are not imprisoned for their beliefs, and torture and political murder is virtually nonexistent. A score of 5 means that all citizens risk imprisonment, torture or death by state agents (Wood & Gibney, 2010, p. 373).[5] Most regimes that we reflexively consider repressive (Iran, Syria, North Korea) score a 4 or 5 in a given year while most we consider free (Switzerland, Costa Rica) score a 1 or 2. Three includes transitional countries, great powers, and autocrats that rely

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[5]Confusingly, the CIRI scale goes in the opposite direction.

on fear from past repression, like Brazil, the U.S., and Russia. Thus, the main independent variable is a categorical variable ranging from 1 to 5.

I lag the repression index one year. As stipulated by the hypotheses, a short lag is the most theoretically appropriate: if repression works as a signal, states should opt to use it before and during crisis bargaining. A monthly lag may be more theoretically appropriate, but repression indexes are annual and a year lag controls for conflict causing simultaneous repression. To check the one year lag, I examined autocorrelation plots for several of the most belligerent countries and several of the least. The plots indicated that autocorrelation decreased over time but did not point to an ideal lag for all countries. I ran the main model with one through five year lags and selected the one year lag because it had the lowest AIC score and the significance of the lag and fit of the model decrease markedly for lags of two or more years. Thus, a one year lag is both theoretically and empirically appropriate for this model.

For the first control variable, I recoded the COW civil war data[6] into a binary variable indicating if a country was in a civil war (1) or not (0) in a given year. This control addresses the robust finding that repression increases dramatically during civil war and ensures that the findings are not driven by an increase

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[6]I use the COW civil war data instead of the UCDP data because the 25 deaths threshold in the UCDP data means that many events often regarded as repressive âĂŞ such as marches that government forces open fire on âĂŞ are recorded as civil conflict. For example, the protests following the Iranian elections in 2009 are coded as a civil conflict. Thus, there is too much overlap between the UCDP data and this study's concept and measure of repression. Even with that caveat, the repression remains significant in models with the UCDP measure as a control, but the magnitude of the effect is low.

in all state violence (Daxecker, 2011; Findley, 2013; K. S. Gleditsch et al., 2008; Kalyvas, 2003; Young, 2013). Additionally, I use CINC scores to control for observable capabilities. This addresses the concern that an increase in capabilities could simultaneously increase a state's capacity to repress its citizens and engage in conflict. CINC includes population and three measures of production highly associated with conflict and using CINC instead of population and GNP did not significantly affect the estimates of any of the other independent variables. To ensure that repression is not simply an alternative way to measure autocracy, I use adjusted Polity scores to control for regime. As Vreeland (2008b) established, some Polity criteria use instability, civil war and repression in coding, thus, I use XPolity scores, which remove that criteria. Finally, I use measures of leader job insecurity developed by Joseph Young (2008) to control for the increasingly common finding that a leader's security drives high-level conflict decisions (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011; Ritter, 2013; Wolford, 2007). I include these measures in robustness checks but not the main models because the data end in 2001, the measure was rarely significant, and including it barely moved the other variables.

4.4 *Model*

I use a logit to estimate the effects of repression and the control variables on whether a country engages in a crisis in a given year or not. With a binary outcome like crisis outbreak or initiation, a logit model is the most appropriate.

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Additionally, a logit is flexible enough to take categorical and continuous independent variables. Furthermore, the coefficients can be easily transformed into odds ratios for intuitive interpretation. The number reported as an odds ratio indicates that for every unit increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable is that many times as likely to occur. For example, an odds ratio of 3.3 means that a dependent variable is 3.3 times or 330% as likely with every increase in the independent variable. Any number below 1 signifies that the likelihood decreases with every unit increase in the independent variable. For example, an odds ratio of .9 means that with every unit increase, the likelihood of the dependent variable decreases by 10%. In other words, an odds ratio below 1 means the same thing as a negative sign for a standard coefficient.

4.5 *Summary statistics*

In the 28 year sample, there are 166 distinct countries and 4482 unique country-year observations. Countries engage in a MID in 1365 of the country-years; in other words, 30% of the observations include a MID. Of those 1365, 1212 of them initiated the conflict and 154 are targets (countries join together in formal and temporary alliances to attack targets, leading to lopsided initiation numbers). This makes for a sample where 27% of the observations are of a MID initiator and but only 3% are targets. Simultaneously, 447 observations or 10% were during a civil war. Most countries during most years generally respected human rights:

2488 or 55% of the sample scored less than a 3 on the PTS scale. However, 1119 or 25% scored between 3 and 4 and 672 or 15% scored 4 or more, signaling extreme repression (202 observations had missing repression data and were imputed for the analysis). Governments with a lagged score of 4 or higher started 299 conflicts – 25% of all conflicts in the sample. In summary, the sample includes a large number of MIDs and a small number of years of extreme repression, after which a disproportional number of MIDs occurred.

5 Results and Discussion

Repression has a significant effect on whether a country engages in international conflict the following year or not. At every point in the PTS index, a one point increase in repression had a significant effect on crisis participation. Material capability and number of borders were consistently significant as well. Regime type was not significant in any model specification; this is not surprising given that Davenport and Armstrong (2004) find that democracy decreases repression at only the highest levels and that I use monadic data while the democratic peace finding is dyadic (Leeds, 1999; Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 1999). Civil war had a positive influence but was not significant in all models. Many scholars argue that repression can lead to civil war and that extensive repression occurs during civil war (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Goodwin, 2001; Kalyvas, 2006; Young, 2013); thus, civil war variables could be picking up effects that are actually driven by repression or repression and civil war measures could overlap.

Table **??** presents estimates on MID initiation from a sparse model, a model with the empirically and theoretically strongest controls, and with full controls. The table shows that for every additional point on the repression scale, a country becomes 20% more likely to initiate a conflict the following year than a country that does not increase repression. Over the 28 years analyzed, 29 countries scored a 5 and then initiated a conflict in the following year, often more than once, for a total of 83 conflicts initiated after extreme repression. This result

presents strong evidence for hypothesis 1, that repression makes conflict initiation relatively more attractive.

	Models		
	1	2	3
Repression	1.2***	1.23***	1.18***
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Material capabilities		2.70E+07***	1.91E+07***
		(6.67E+07)	(4.78E+07)
Borders		1.07***	1.06***
		(.01)	(.01)
Civil war			1.56***
			(.18)
XPolity			.99
			(.01)

N = 4482
Carter & Signorino time adjustment coefficients suppressed.
Standard errors in parentheses below odds ratios. All tests are two-tailed.
$*p \leq .05;$ $**p \leq .01;$ $***p \leq .001$

Table 2: Logistic regressions of repression on MID initiation, 1976-2004

When we look at the targeting results in Table **??**, we see a statistically and substantively strong effect in the opposite direction, supporting hypothesis 2. Repression significantly decreases a country's chance of becoming a target in an international conflict, lending support to hypothesis 2 over hypothesis 3. The odds ratio of .48 means that a country that increases repression by one point on the PTS scale is 62% less likely than a country that does not to be targeted in a conflict the following year. The summary statistics paint an even starker picture: over the 28 years analyzed, states targeted only one country that scored a 5 for extreme repression the year before: Uganda in 1977. During the same period, there

were 153 other conflicts with less repressive targets. In contrast to popular belief and hypothesis 3, extreme repression does not appear to lead to intervention[7] or opportunistic targeting. In fact, an increase in repression drastically reduces the likelihood that other countries will target the repressor.

	Models		
	1	2	3
Repression	.53***	.51***	.48***
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
Material capabilities		.68	.7
		(2.3)	(2.35)
Borders		1.1***	1.1***
		(.03)	(.03)
Civil war			1.43
			(.42)
XPolity			.99
			(.02)

N = 4482
Carter & Signorino time adjustment coefficients suppressed.
Standard errors in parentheses below odds ratios. All tests are two-tailed.
*$p \leq .05$;   **$p \leq .01$;   ***$p \leq .001$

Table 3: Logistic regressions of repression on MID targets, 1976-2004

Instead of washing out, Table **??** shows that the increase in initiation and decrease in targeting combine to produce a net increase in international conflict participation. Specifically, increasing repression is associated with a 10% jump in the chance that a country will participate in a conflict the following year, although the increase is not statistically significant at the .05 level in all models.[8] This find-

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[7]Note that the dataset addresses state intervention, not international organization intervention. For example, the MID dataset includes state interventions authorized by the UN Security Council but not UN peacekeeping missions.

[8]The p value for repression in Model 3 is .09.

ing is worrying because it implies that increasing violence domestically not only makes regimes more secure, it also makes them more belligerent internationally.

	Models		
	1	2	3
Repression	1.08**	1.1**	1.06
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Material capabilities		1.90E+09***	1.48E+09***
		(5.83E+09)	(4.64E+09)
Borders		1.09***	1.09***
		(.01)	(.01)
Civil war			1.65***
			(.19)
XPolity			1
			(.01)

N = 4482
Carter & Signorino time adjustment coefficients suppressed.
Standard errors in parentheses below odds ratios. All tests are two-tailed.
*$p \leq .05$;   **$p \leq .01$;   ***$p \leq .001$

Table 4: Logistic regressions of repression on MID involvement, 1976-2004

To summarize, the analyses suggest that the previous year's repression score has a substantive and statistically significant relationship with international conflict the next year. Regime type does not have a significant effect on this behavior. States that increase repression now are more likely to engage in international conflict next year, and they are especially more likely to initiate international conflict. At the same time, states that repress today are much less likely to become targets in international conflicts tomorrow. A quick look at key cases confirms this pattern: North Korea initiated conflicts nearly every year between 1976 and 2004 but was a target of none, and Eritrea, probably the most repressive country

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without nuclear capabilities, has initiated over 20 crises since independence in 1993 and was targeted once by Ethiopia.

5.1 *Robustness*

The models presented here are the main models with the most theoretically appropriate lags and errors. I ran these models adding control variables in one at a time, with and without errors clustered by country – on unimputed data; the imputed data uses Rubin's (1987) error formula – and with different lags and time controls. The results are robust to different model specifications; the significance and magnitude barely change as controls are added or subtracted. Additionally, the results are generally robust to alternative measures of each of the variables, including the CIRI index, the UCDP civil conflict data, four measures of job insecurity, ICB crises, and change in repression score.[9] The results from the original dataset with significant missing data were also similar to the results presented here.

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[9]Out of several dozen models run with alternative measures, repression was insignificant in one model with an ICB dependent variable and one measure of change in repression score. Robustness checks are in the .do file. The model that used ICB crises as the dependent variable was sensitive to specification – for example, using a different constellation of controls or a CIRI score instead of a PTS score generated significant results. The models that used change were insignificant, but the results became larger than those presented here and highly significant when I disaggregated change and looked at increases to a 4 or 5. This is additional support for the theory, which would expect only large and externally obvious increases in repression to generate a clear signal.

6 Vignettes

6.1 *Iraq: Executions as signals*

Iraq used publicized and half-concealed repression as it prepared to invade Iran and then Kuwait. Before and during the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq used highly-publicized arrests and executions to prevent civilians and soldiers from expressing dissent. In 1980, three months before invading Iran, the regime trumpeted the execution of the country's top Shi'a cleric, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and his sister (Aziz, 1993). During the war, the regime publicly executed the families of Kurdish activists and fighter pilots who had missed targets (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, n.d.).

Prior to invading Kuwait, the regime opted for targeted political executions. In one widely-reported case, Iraqi authorities arrested Farzad Bazoft, an Iranian-born journalist working for a British newspaper. The British government attempted to intercede; interviews in 2003 revealed that the Iraqis knew he was not a spy (Vulliamy, 2003). Secret recordings of Iraqi foreign relations discussions released in 2009 reveal that Saddam Hussein ordered him executed as soon as possible as a signal to the British ("Meeting between Saddam and Senior Iraqi Officials discussing the execution of British Journalist Farzad Bazoft," n.d., p. 2). In the recording, Saddam says to several ministers,

> "I say we execute him in Ramadan, and this will be the punishment
> for Margaret Thatcher... Are they underestimating us? After all the

damages we've suffered and sacrifices that we have made over the last eight years, the British still do not know us well!"

Bazoft was executed in March 1990, five months before the invasion of Kuwait (Gordon, 2011).

6.2   *Eritrea: Disappearances and border disputes*

Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1993 and has since become one of the most repressive and belligerent countries in the world (Connell, 2005, 2011). In 1993, Eritrea emerged from years of rebellion against Ethiopia as an unusually cohesive and optimistic country (Connell, 1993, 1995; Kidane Mengisteab. & Yohannes, 2005). However, in 1998, Eritrea invaded Ethiopia, launching an extremely destructive war that ended in 2000.

As Eritrea rebuilt in 2001, high-ranking generals and bureaucrats began to ask for the implementation of the 1997 constitution (Kidane Mengisteab & Yohannes, 2005). For several months and supported by a nascent press, citizens experienced political debate (Connell, 2005). Then in late 2001 and 2002, Isaias Afwerki's government arrested or disappeared all critical military officers, ministers, and students, and all of the country's journalists (Connell, 2011). In the next wave, it arrested parents and community elders that protested the arrests or tried to mediate. Over ten years later, none of the critics have been released and many have died in prison (ibid).

Eritrea did not start any international conflicts in 2000 or 2001. After the

crackdown in 2001, the regime maintained an extremely repressive atmosphere: universal national service came to mean open-ended conscription for all men over 18 and under 40 and women without children, and summary execution for dissent or desertion are common (Connell, 2011). Since 2002, Eritrea has initiated border conflicts with its neighbors every year (Gettleman, 2007). Out of over 20 military conflicts with larger powers since independence, Eritrea initiated all but one, a small border clash with similarly repressive Ethiopia in 2012 (Smith & Johannesburg, 2012).[10] Repression and broad conscription has enabled the country of 6 million to repeatedly take on its larger - up to 20 times more populous - and richer neighbors (Gettleman, 2008).

6.3 *Repressive targets: Civil wars and spillover*

Exceedingly few repressive countries have been targets of international conflict. The few in this category were either in civil war, experienced spillover from a neighbor's civil war, or were targeted by a similarly repressive government. For example, in 1977, Uganda – the only country in the sample to score a 5 and become an international target the following year – was one of six targets in a dispute initiated by three other repressive regimes, Cuba, Angola, and Zaire. The dispute involved Zaire's regime and rebels reportedly backed by Angola and Cuba and a series of coalition- and counter-coalition-building moves that exter-

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[10]This conflict is not listed in the previous section's summary statistics because it is outside of the sample's date range.

nalized Zaire's civil conflicts by sending small numbers of troops and militias clashing across shared borders ("Other African Nations See a Test of National Integrity in Zaire," n.d.).

Similarly, the MID dataset lists Angola, Chad and Burundi as targets in a 1998 dispute. These countries had PTS scores of 4 previous year and were roiled by their own civil wars. Furthermore, the initiators, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, each had the highest possible PTS score, 5, the previous year. The conflict involved troops, militias, and cross-border rebel groups clashing along extensive shared and poorly-controlled borders as the countries jockeyed for influence in the DRC and with each other ("Zimbabwe Troops Might Help Congo Fight Rebels," 1998).

For the most part, these repressive targets are exceptions that prove the rule. Countries in civil wars are significantly more likely than others to be involved in international conflicts. Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz (2008) demonstrate that many of these conflicts come from unintentional spillover as rebels and refugees cross poorly-marked borders and soldiers pursue them; in these cases, crisis bargaining is largely absent and signaling mechanisms are not at work. On the other hand, when repressive countries face other repressive countries, the theory predicts that both countries' domestic violence provides credible information about resolve, reducing the likelihood of conflict. The extremely low number of repressive targets supports the argument that repression is a strong and credible

signal. Furthermore, the relative increases in the probability of victory from security force mobilization should cancel out if the countries are equally repressive or favor the more repressive country if they are not. This prediction is supported by the 1998 case, where the two most repressive countries initiated a dispute with slightly less repressive neighbors.

7 Conclusion

The results and the theory paint a pessimistic picture. They suggest that we continue to observe so much state terror because it is an effective strategy: it contains dissent domestically while making leaders more secure vis-a-vis their foreign counterparts. States that increase repression seem to successfully deter attacks from other countries while increasing conflict internationally by initiating disputes more frequently than other states. I argue that this is because repression works as a credible and costly signal of a regime's resolve to use force. By deploying organized violence against its own citizens, repression reveals that a government is willing to use force to settle disputes and that it is preparing for conflict by quashing dissent and investing in its security apparatus. This signal makes the repressor's threats more credible than less repressive states. However, by investing in security forces and controlling dissent, the very act of repressing increases a state's likelihood of victory in a conflict, simultaneously making it more interested in threatening others and other states less interested in engaging with it.

If other states could perfectly observe each other, they would simply strike more favorable agreements as relative power shifted and we would observe no conflicts. However, states rarely have all of the relevant information and uncertainty leads states to make offers that engage a risk-return tradeoff, where without knowing exactly what an adversary will accept or reject, a state makes an

offer that runs some risk of conflict. If repression works through the theorized signaling mechanism, then repressors can receive better offers on average from adversaries but, because of the increased power, still reject more often in favor of escalation.

This study has implications for human rights agreements and suggests directions for future repression research. First, to understand and ultimately reduce repression, we must pay attention to its international effects. Leaders may use violence at one level to signal or secure power at another level. If so, naming and shaming tactics and human rights agreements without enforcement provisions have little effect because they do not reduce the large international security benefits that leaders receive for deploying violence domestically. These agreements need enforcement mechanisms that counter the security benefits of repression. International Criminal Court ratification addresses this by countering the domestic political security that leaders can get from repression, but because it does so directly, the worst offenders do not ratify it (Chapman & Chaudoin, 2013). Human rights clauses have been added to trade agreements with some success (Hafner-Burton, 2005); adding them to alliance, anti-terrorism or other security agreements could replace the security benefits of repression with a preferable strategy.

Second, future research should explore human rights agreements that directly address leaders' security in office and enforcement mechanisms that counter the international security benefits of repression. Additionally, this study raises

questions that could be answered with finer grained data. For example, in this theory, leaders can only improve their international bargaining position through repression if other states observe it. While some repression is intentionally very public, human rights observers note that governments keep some repression carefully hidden. Why and when do states want domestic and international audiences to know about violent acts or not? Does hidden repression undermine security when it is revealed? If so, why does some repression increase regime security while some decreases it? Likewise, future research should disaggregate repression into specific practices, including nonlethal forms of repression, to assess which practices have the most pronounced effects on citizens, leaders, and opposing states. Finally, future research can only assess these questions by devising creative ways to collect data that go beyond country-year databases and case studies. Large and coarse global datasets have revealed important trends, but we need finer-grained and more extensive qualitative or quantitative data to improve tests and better assess the troubling link between violence at home and violence abroad.

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