

Virtuous Shirking: Social Identity, Military Recruitment, and Unwillingness to Repress

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Introduction:

Loyalty shifts in the armed forces are rare, but in the context of domestic political conflict the consequences of the military withdrawing its support for the regime are dramatic (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 46-52; D'Anieri 2006; Russell 1974). This makes it important to know the conditions under which security forces can be expected to carry out orders to repress the populace when called upon to do so. In this paper, I theorize about how the design of the state's military in terms of ethnic-based recruitment affects the ability of the regime to violently repress its opponents. I propose that the extent to which officers and soldiers perceive the populace as being more like themselves affects their willingness to carry out orders to repress that populace.¹

Most studies of repression have overlooked the agents of repression themselves, assuming that the state and its security forces work as a unitary actor. This assumption needs to be relaxed if we are to understand the success of revolutions that have taken place in the last several decades, including most recently the Arab Spring. In these cases, the role of military agency became obvious as defections and disobedience within the military caused the state's ability to put down opposition protests to crumble (e.g., Barany 2011, 2013; Droz-Vincent 2011; Lutterbeck 2013; Nepstad 2011). This paper follows the call by Davenport and Moore (2012, 708) to disaggregate state-side actors to be able to understand state-dissident interactions better. I model the relationship between the state and its security forces using a principal-agent framework. Specifically, I explore the key role that divergent interests between principal and agent play in allowing for military disobedience to take place. In addition, I apply this framework in a novel way. A few studies of security forces' role in human rights violations have used principal-agent logic, but to my knowledge, this paper is only the second to apply it to a context where agency loss equates to fewer, instead of more, human rights violations – an application that I term *virtuous shirking*. This paper is the first to approach

¹Normally, quashing dissent is the role of the police or paramilitaries, but the military is the force of last resort in when the protests are large enough to overwhelm the internal security forces (Droz-Vincent 2011; Svolik forthcoming, 2-3). The decision to limit the analysis to the military is mainly due to data limitations. While data for identity-relevant characteristics of militaries are sparse and require extensive collection – detailed below – data for these characteristics are even harder to obtain for internal security forces.

the question of virtuous shirking from a social-psychological basis.

I assume that social distance between soldiers and the populace they are assigned to repress is the main factor that affects their willingness to repress that populace. Ethnic-based recruitment influences the extent to which protesters and soldiers share a common identity, based on shared ethnicity, and soldiers' willingness to harm protesters decreases when those soldiers perceive the protesters to be more like themselves. After outlining the theory and deriving testable hypotheses, I describe an original, ongoing effort to collect data on the ethnic composition of security forces in order to test this theory.

Principals, Agents, and Repression:

Traditionally, the repression literature has paid little attention to the process of how repression is actually applied or to the actors charged with applying it. Most studies assume implicitly, and a few assume explicitly (e.g., Carey 2006, 2009; Gartner and Regan 1996), that the state is a unitary actor in its decision to repress and in carrying out that repression. When an occasional repression study goes beyond this assumption and disaggregates the state, it is nearly always to model the decision of whether to repress, not to analyze the process of carrying out repression. For instance, Shellman (2006*a,b*) models the state as comprising two separate actors, the leader and the domestic audience, to consider how audience costs affect the decision to repress. Similarly, Davenport (1995*a,b*) hypothesizes that since violence is the tactic that the military is most comfortable in using, that greater military influence within the government should cause the state to decide to resort to repression more often.

Principal-agent models have long proven useful in other research areas that analyze security-force obedience, such as civil-military relations (e.g., Feaver 1998, 2003) and management of rebel movements during civil wars (e.g., Gates 2002; Gates and Nordås 2010; Weinstein 2007, ch. 4). In this section, I describe how this framework, originally developed for economic applications, has been applied successfully to security-related settings within political science. I then review

the few studies within the repression literature that use principal-agent logic, dividing them into three approaches, based on which actor they focus on as rationally self-interested in causing human rights violations: the principal, the agent, or both.

The principal-agent “problem” describes a situation where a principal delegates work to an agent, but the agent may not do the work in the way that the principal wants it done. The terms classically used for the agent’s actions on the job are *working*, which means doing the job the way the principal wants, and *shirking*, which means doing the job any other way or not at all. Situations characterized by agency loss arise due to two main factors: divergent interests and private information. Private information, the factor that most people associate with principal-agent problems, is typically the reason why agents can get away with shirking in economic applications. However, agency loss can arise even in situations where the principal knows what the agent is up to all times. The real *sine qua non* of principal-agent problems is divergence of interests. Without this condition, agents would behave as the principal intended, because it would be entirely within their interest to do so. Economic applications under-emphasize this factor, because it is simply a given in most employer-employee relationships: the employer wants more work for less pay, and the employee wants more pay for less work, so their interests necessarily diverge. Consequently, monitoring and reporting are the two mechanisms most discussed in the economic literature. In political applications, though, alignment of interests is at least as important as private information, if not much more important.²

One key mechanism for resolving any principal-agent problem is the possibility of punishment for shirking. If the agent goes against the principal’s wishes, the principal must be able to discipline or remove the agent, or both. Store owners fire clerks whom they catch pilfering the cash register and prosecute them as a deterrent to other clerks who might consider stealing. Citizens remove representatives and parties from power who do not meet their expectations, but this process only operates in democracies where competition is allowed to flourish. Without the possibility of pun-

²To provide one (non-security-related) example from political science, campaigns for public office are a vetting process where citizens attempt to ensure that candidates hold the same beliefs as the citizens on the issues most important to those citizens (Downs 1957). The institution of campaigning in democracies is deliberately designed to ensure that the interests of the representative be aligned with the interests of the constituents.

ishment, principals cannot hold agents accountable. In the context of repression, the principal's ability to punish shirking takes on a special theoretical significance, *because security forces are themselves the agents of enforcement*. If a police officer goes beserk, the government sends other police officers to arrest the renegade.³ If one force launches a *coup d'etat*, the government defends itself using another force (e.g., Belkin and Schofer 2005). However, if the entire military defects, there is no one left, or no force large enough, to punish defectors. This is analogous to the trust that citizens place in their elected leaders in a democracy: the citizenry, as principal, runs the risk that elected agents will collude to sever the dependency on the principal entirely (Lane 2008).

Civilian leaders put enormous trust in the security forces by giving them the means and the sole responsibility to defend the state and the regime. This degree of dependence cannot be overstated. The really remarkable thing is that the security forces usually remain subordinate; in other words, that "those with guns obey those without guns" (Svolik forthcoming, 2). This unique role of the security forces as both agent and enforcer heightens the importance to the state's leaders of making sure that the interests of the agent be aligned with the interests of the principal. Convergence of interests, not monitoring, is the key factor in making sure security forces remain loyal to the state and the regime. "When the principal cannot get rid of the agent, it may not matter much that the principal can monitor the agent" (Lane 2008, 10).

Three Applications:

I now describe three categories of applications of principal-agent logic to repression. The first of these assumes that agents are the ones who are motivated to repress. Similar to the approach taken by economists who assume virtuous employers and lazy employees, the policy application of the work is summed up with the question: *how can we reduce repression by bringing bad agents back under control?* In order to explain this phenomenon, these authors treat the soldiers, police, and militia members making up the state's security forces as agents with their own interests that may

³For a recent example: "Dorner Manhunt Stretches from L.A. to Mexico and Beyond," LA Times, 12 February, 2013.

diverge from the state's interests and who do not always operate with immediate supervision by the state's leaders. These studies show how the application of repression policy may differ, for the worse, from what state leaders intended when they set the policy. For instance, prison guards often have greater faith than their civilian superiors in the utility of torture for extracting information useful for national security, and in the absence of monitoring and clear rules about which techniques are permissible, may resort to torture more than their civilian superiors would want (Conrad and Moore 2010; Mastroianni and Reed 2011). Police and peacekeepers on the street who have discretion as to how to deal with dissenters may use heavier-handed tactics than the civilian leaders had wanted, which may prevent the state from sending the signal that it had intended to the dissenters (Cunningham and Beaulieu 2010). Third, given the possibility that out-of-control security forces may use sexual violence as a source of private gain, instituting monitoring and the screening out of antisocial recruits appear to decrease sexual violence against civilians (Butler, Gluch, and Mitchell 2007).

While studies in the first vein seek to explain why human rights abuses that security forces commit may exceed what the state leaders had wanted, the second group of studies acknowledges that *both* the principal and the agent may be rationally self-interested in repression. Initially suggested by Kowalewski (1982) but not well developed until Mitchell (2004, 2012), these studies recognize that leaders attempt to have their cake (appear virtuous) and eat it, too (repress dissenters violently) by deliberately setting themselves up for agency loss.⁴ Like the first group of studies, this approach recognizes that the individuals who staff the security forces, including soldiers, police officers, and militia members, may have a personal psychological or physiological interest in repressing people and violating rights. This interest can encompass murder, pillage, and rape, especially when “bad apples” are deliberately recruited into the forces. Here, we have a confluence of interests: a leader who wants to terrorize a populace into surrender or flight only needs to not get in the way of his forces' enthusiasm, although a little tacit encouragement may be (and frequently is) useful. Employing pro-regime gangs of thugs additionally allows leaders

⁴The irony in calling these rights violations “agency loss” is that while they constitute a public bad for society, they constitute a private good for the leader.

to maintaining deniability while taking advantage of agency loss (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2012*a,b*; Kowalewski 1982; Mitchell, Carey, and Butler 2012). As opposed to the “can’t control” phenomenon that the previous application focuses on, this application of principal-agent logic is aptly described as “won’t control” (Mitchell 2004).

The third approach, the one that this paper adopts, asks the question of what causes agents to shirk by repressing *less* than desired? In this case, the definition of shirking is closer to its original meaning from economics – choosing to not to do the work requested by the principal – but with a normative twist, since here, *shirking is virtuous*. In this case, the principal is the one motivated to abuse human rights, but the agent may take advantage of delegation to not carry out that abuse. There is only one study within the repression literature that I am aware of that takes this approach: DeMeritt (forthcoming) focuses on how variation in the costs of repression for the individual soldier, in the form of legal reprisal resulting from foreign intervention, affect the soldier’s willingness to follow orders to kill civilians. DeMeritt’s study focuses on how institutions like humanitarian interventions alter the cost-benefit calculation by introducing anticipation of punishment by foreign interveners. In contrast, the present study focuses on the role of a very different factor, self-identification, in explaining disobedience to orders to repress.

Self-identification and Crimes of Obedience:

I theorize that social distance, based on shared ethnicity, is the main cause of security forces refusing to obey orders to repress. I define ethnicity broadly (for a justification, see Enloe 1980, 9-10), to include race, religion, language, and tribe. The dimension of ethnicity that is expected to matter for this study is the dimension along which the country in question is most severely divided. For example, in the US or South Africa in the mid-20th century, the strongest cleavage was race, with competition between whites and blacks, so we would assume in those contexts that individuals would identify themselves primarily in terms of race. In countries most strongly divided by sect, such as Syria in its current civil war, we would expect individuals to identify themselves in terms

of their religion.

In the context of protest policing, selecting agents that are both capable and reliable for the job involves staffing the force or forces that will be responsible for repressing threats to the regime with individuals willing to do so. Common or divergent ethnic identity is expected to affect how those recruits will perceive the protestors against whom they may be required to use force.

Social identity research deals with how individuals see themselves vis-a-vis social groups (e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1986). We expect individuals to act favorably toward groups to which they perceive themselves as belonging (“in-groups”) compared with groups to which they do not see themselves as belonging (“out-groups”). Psychologists have long studied what makes normal individuals willing to obey orders that would normally be considered immoral or unjust (e.g., Kelman and Hamilton 1989; Milgram 1974). Milgram’s (1974) famous obedience experiments studied subject willingness to administer what they perceived as harmful levels of electric shocks to a victim when ordered to do so by an experimenter. One factor that made a significant difference, among others that he analyzed, was the physical distance between subject and victim. Subjects who were physically closer to the victim apparently could not help but empathize with the victim’s suffering. Experimental follow-ups to Milgram have extended this line of reasoning to *social* distance. This concept represents how similar to himself or herself one individual perceives another individual to be. These experiments suggest that greater social distance between the victim and the subject allows the subject to overcome internal restraints against harming the victim more easily. In other words, people appear to be more willing to harm other people whom they see as “not like me.” To illustrate this pattern, I summarize the design and the conclusions of several obedience experiments that each incorporated social distance as an explanatory variable.

In the first, using an all-white sample of subjects, Youssef (1968) tested the effect of victim race on the level of painful shocks that subjects would be willing to administer. As with Milgram’s experiments (1974), the experiment was purported to be a test of the effect of electric shocks in helping victims with learning exercises. In one of Youssef’s experimental conditions, the factor that divided the treatment group from the control group was victim race, measuring the willingness

of white subjects to harm white victims versus black victims. As predicted, black victims received a large and significantly higher mean shock level.

In the next, using an all-white subject pool, and further removed from the racial tensions of the Civil Rights era, Brant (1980) showed that the effect of social distance could apply along a continuum from very similar to very dissimilar. He employed four different idealized types for the victim, designed to fit four different group-based stereotypes: a white and black victim each who appeared as normal undergraduate students, as well as another white and black victim – actually, the same two graduate-student confederates – representing social extremes. In the black social-extreme case, the victim “spoke in a black English dialect, shuffled when he walked, wore ‘loud’ clothing, and spoke slowly, attempting to appear low in intelligence” (231). In the white social-extreme case, the victim also acted according to a certain stereotype: he was “attired in wrinkled dirty clothing, wore a torn leather hat, spoke in a ‘hippie’ vernacular and appeared to be in a ‘spaced out’ condition, and also spoke in a slow manner” (231). Subject willingness to administer increasingly painful electric shocks increased as the social distance vis-à-vis the victim and the (white) subject increased. Compared to the mean highest shock score that the normal white victim received,⁵ the hippie-stereotyped white victim’s mean punishment was 21% higher, the normal black victim’s mean punishment was 80% higher, and the stereotyped black victim’s was an alarming 221% higher.

In the only modern replication attempt that I have been able to find, and this time taking place at a French university, Dambrun and Vatiné (2010) used the closest experimental setup to Milgram’s study that could pass an institutional review board. They employed an “immersive video environment” where subjects were asked to administer electric shocks that they knew were not real to a victim whom they knew was an actor on a pre-recorded interactive video. The intent was not to deceive the subject but rather to make the experience sufficiently life-like that the subjects would experience similar sorts of stress as if the experience were real.⁶ All subjects were

⁵88.96 V/sec, measured as voltage times duration.

⁶The simulation was realistic enough that under some experimental conditions, the authors observed a large, significant difference in both the number of fully obedient subjects and in the mean maximum voltage level that subjects employed. In other words, for many students the experience was really too much to handle, even though they knew it

French nationals, and one of the experimental conditions the authors varied was victim ethnicity, with the cue for this condition indicating either a French or North African name for the victim, representing the prevailing ethnic cleavage in France. Although variation in actual punishment levels in this condition did not reach statistical significance, what the authors *did* find speaks directly to the mechanism theorized to be at work here: subjects' self-reported anxiety levels differed strongly and significantly between those assigned to shock the French victim (the one like themselves) and those assigned to shock the North African victim (the dissimilar "other"). Anxiety was significantly lower for subjects ordered to shock the victim who was ethnically dissimilar from themselves, meaning that it was physiologically easier to go through the motions of pretending to cause harm to someone who is unlike oneself. Given the weakness of the ethnicity cue – only the name differed, not the subject's appearance⁷ – and given the complete lack of deception in this experimental setup, obtaining this result was remarkable; this experiment provides direct evidence that the human physiological response differs when being asked to harm someone like oneself versus someone perceived as very different.

One more study is worth summarizing here, even though it differs from the others in that it did not rely on ethnicity. In a follow-up to Milgram's obedience study, Batson et al. (1981) analyzed the causes of pro-social, rather than anti-social, behavior by exploring the conditions under which subjects – from an all-female subject pool – would be willing to volunteer to trade places and receive painful shocks on behalf of the original victim, a female confederate dubbed "Elaine." They also operationalized social distance using a much more shallow basis and still obtained the same result as the other studies summarized above. Using a cue reminiscent of the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel 1970), social distance was operationalized as similarity of preferences on a "personal values and interest" questionnaire,⁸ where Elaine's answers were forged so as to be nearly identical or not at all close to the subject's answers, respectively, in the two groups. After a rigged

was only a simulation.

⁷The subject was chosen deliberately to have an ethnically ambiguous appearance, with a "suntanned complexion [and] a week's beard growth" (763).

⁸The authors provide examples of questions such as, "If you had a choice, would you prefer living in a rural or an urban setting?" and "What is your favorite magazine?" (294).

drawing to determine whether the subject or the confederate would take the place as victim, and after being allowed to privately compare her own survey answers with Elaine's answers, the subject was stationed to watch Elaine go through 10 stages of increasingly painful electric-shock treatments. The subject could volunteer at any time to switch places with Elaine after observing that Elaine was reacting unusually poorly to the treatment. The authors of this study found that subjects who perceived low social distance between themselves and Elaine, based on grounds as flimsy as similar preferences, were much more likely to volunteer to take Elaine's place than those who perceived higher social distance, despite anticipating that the shocks really would hurt, and even when they were provided with the option of exiting instead of having to watch the remaining shock treatments. That the study found this effect, and on the basis of such a shallow measure of social distance, provides strong evidence that pro-social behavior can be motivated by decreasing social distance (see also Stürmer and Snyder 2010).

The real-world analog to all of these experiments is the decision of whether to carry out orders to repress, a point that Milgram (1974, ch. 1, 15) himself made clear. The importance of social distance in producing the results of these experiments is also partially corroborated by two studies of real-world repression. The first, Davenport 2005, concerns covert – as well as invasive and illegal – forms of repression employed in neighborhoods in Detroit in the 1960s and 70s. Government intelligence and police organizations, including the FBI, used electronic and physical surveillance in a campaign against a Black Nationalist organization, the Republic of New Africa (RNA). Using the geographic neighborhood as unit of analysis, the study found that in predominantly white and higher-income neighborhoods the state only targeted known RNA members residing there, while in majority-black and lower-income neighborhoods, the state employed surveillance indiscriminately. Interestingly, the magnitude of covert repression that the government used responded much more to neighborhood demographics in terms of race and income than to actual RNA activity within the neighborhood, for which the author controls.

In the second study, Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong (2011) analyzed a dataset of 15,000 protest events in the US, culled from the *New York Times*, to explore the causes of police presence

and activity at protests. Even after controlling for standard threat-based explanations for repressive outcomes, including size of protests, presence of counterdemonstrators, confrontational and violent protest tactics, and political claims-making against the government, the authors found that black protests were much more likely to draw a police presence than white protests, and once on the scene, police were much more likely to make arrests at black protests than at white protests.⁹

One important gap in our understanding that this previous research has not filled is what the effect would be if the ethnicity of the would-be repressor is varied, since the results from these studies of laboratory and real-world repression only varied the ethnicity of the victim. For the experimental studies, this is probably due to the limited availability of minority-ethnicity participants on the college campuses where each experiment took place. For the repression studies, we can assume that this was for lack of data on police and intelligence forces, although the authors do note that the security forces they studied were white-dominated agents of a white-dominated state. The present study addresses this gap by studying variation in the ethnicity of the forces assigned to repress.

Setting the Scene for Confrontation: A Three-Stage Process:

I now outline a model of repression that takes into account two prior stages – military design and strategic anticipation of whether orders to repress will be obeyed – as well as the actual decision to follow orders to repress. I describe the model in qualitative format, but I clearly outline the assumptions that I apply to each actor, including the state leader, military recruits, and the opposition. As the security force bearing the greatest responsibility for external defense, but also as the force of last resort against domestic threats,¹⁰ the military occupies a place at the nexus of internal and external security demands.

⁹The authors also find a temporal effect: their result is largely limited to years coinciding with the Civil Rights era. This finding constrains their attempt to speak to contemporary American protest dynamics, but does not work against the present study in any way, since the theory I present is expected to apply mainly in settings marked by severe ethnic divisions.

¹⁰As Lehrke (forthcoming, 3) puts it, “the last argument of kings (*ultimo ratio regum*) and their last defense against *regicides*” (internal quotes omitted, italics in original).

The first set of assumptions focus on the state leader:

- A1. State leaders want to maintain power and stay in office.
- A2. Staying in office requires defending against threats to the state (in the form of battle-field defeat by foreign militaries) and threats to the regime (in the form of dissent from the populace and *coups d'etat* by the military).
- A3. Leaders enter office with a pre-existing and fixed assessment of how loyal each ethnic group in the populace will be, following the concept of ethnic security maps (Enloe 1980).
- A4. Defending against threats requires a military large enough to be able, and loyal enough to be willing, to follow orders to counter these threats.
- A5. Leaders are able to change military recruitment policies as needed, although there is some lag in implementation of any new policies.

I also note a few important points that go along with this first set of assumptions. First, defending against foreign enemies, dissent, and coups includes preemptive deterrence, not just reactive defense. Second, as explained above, I define ethnicity broadly, to include race, religion, language, and tribe. In addition, defending against military coups necessitates increasing the cost of coups, which is a function of the likelihood and severity of punishment for coup attempts.

The next set of assumptions focuses on the individual military recruit, representing both rank-and-file soldiers and officers.

- A6. All recruits self-identify as a member of an ethnic group.
- A7. Recruits feel an affinity toward members of their own ethnic group (“co-ethnics”). Because of that affinity, they receive negative utility from the act of repressing co-ethnics.
- A8. Recruits receive negative utility when punished by the regime for disloyalty.
- A9. When faced with orders to repress co-ethnics, recruits weigh three different options: repress as ordered, disobey by doing nothing, or defect by actively fighting against the government. (The concept of defection includes both coup attempts and joining rebels in a civil-war context.)

The final three assumptions apply to political dissenters:

- A9. There is always some non-zero proportion of the populace (“dissenters”) dissatisfied with either the state’s policies, with political power arrangements, or both.
- A10. Dissenters gather to protest if they do not anticipate severe repression.
- A11. Dissenters’ anticipation of severe repression is based on three considerations: level of past repression used by the regime in protest policing, anticipated size of the protests, and anticipated sympathy from security forces.

Assumption 11 considers that dissenters are aware of the social-psychological logic described above, that their co-ethnics in the military will be less willing to follow through on orders to repress. This assumption also implies that dissenters are aware of the actual ethnic composition of the military.

The model proceeds in three stages. In the first stage, which begins when the leader enters office, the leader sets military recruitment policy regarding which ethnic groups to target for recruitment and which to avoid recruiting from, with the goal of prolonging tenure. In the second stage, dissenters decide whether to protest, based on their anticipation of repression. In the third stage, which only begins if protest forms and the leader gives orders to repress the protesters, the military chooses between repression, disobedience, and defection. The assumptions above produce the following hypotheses:

- H1. Leaders recruit heavily from their own ethnic group and avoid recruiting from ethnic groups perceived as likely to be disloyal.
 - H1A. This effect is stronger regarding the composition of the officer corps than the composition of the rank-and-file of the military, since disobedience or defection by officers would constitute a greater threat to the regime.
 - H1B. This effect diminishes in response to higher levels of threat posed by foreign states’ military power, as the need to increase the size of the military outweighs the desire for selective recruitment.

- H2. When leaders increase the size of the military to balance against foreign threats, they also balance against their own military by increasing the size of the state's internal security forces.
- H3. Given orders to repress protesters, disobedience and defection are each more likely when the ethnic composition of the military more closely matches the ethnic composition of the dissenters.
- H4. The size and frequency of protests increases when the ethnic composition of the military more closely matches the ethnic composition of the dissenters, as protesters strategically anticipate unwillingness of the security forces to crack down on co-ethnics.

Hypothesis 2, regarding using internal security forces to balance against the military, follows a line of work on coup-proofing (e.g., Belkin 2005; Belkin and Schofer 2005) as well as from the principal-agent logic of hiring multiple agents to do the job of monitoring each other. Hypothesis 1B highlights the tension between two considerations, achieving external security through military size versus achieving internal security through military loyalty, with leaders theorized to recruit most heavily from the most loyal ethnic groups but also increasing their reliance on less loyal groups as the need for more manpower increases (Enloe 1980).

Last, as hypothesis 1A suggests, the theory presented here is expected to apply differently to the officer versus to the rank-and-file soldier. Rank-and-file soldiers unwilling to repress may still follow through with such orders because their officers are holding a gun to the enlisted men's heads – literally or through threat of subsequent court-martial. In this way, the executive may be able to compensate for lack of discretion in selection of foot-soldiers, at least to some extent. Note, however, that as the unwillingness of the rank-and-file soldiers to repress grows, both in magnitude of preference and in the number of individuals unwilling to follow orders, officers at some point become unable to push their units further and bow to the inevitable by refusing to pass on the order to repress. We can also extend this logic to the level of the force as a whole: commanders of a force who anticipate defections in the rank may not be willing to pass on orders to repress, either.

Gathering Data to Test the Theory:

As of right now, I am unable to test this theory, not having data on the ethnic composition of the military forces. In a separate project, I am currently involved in a collaborative attempt to gather these data from 1945 to the present for 23 states in the Middle East and North Africa. The theory that I have presented is meant to apply to any ethnically divided society in any region of the world. However, we choose for now to limit our focus to this region, making this effort a pilot project. Our main source for defining and listing ethnic groups in each country is the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009). Because – to our knowledge – no encyclopedic source on military ethnicity has ever been published, we rely on country-specific studies and historical reports, attempting to corroborate estimates by using multiple sources for each time period.

For this data collection effort, we avoid government reports and published estimates, since most states avoid releasing politically damaging evidence of ethnic favoritism; since leaders would often have an incentive to provide false counts; and since the only states we have seen so far that actually do report it are cases that do so in response to affirmative-action laws. Some sources provide interval-level estimates, such as the percentage of a specific military force that is of one ethnicity, but others provide only ordinal-level estimates, so we gather data in both formats. Our eventual finished product will be geared to the lowest common denominator by presenting ordinal-level data for each country and time period. Because of the sparsity of published estimates that we have to work with in the first place, and because ethnic composition of security forces changes very slowly (see Johnson 2013), we anticipate the finished product having the state-halfdecade as its unit of analysis.

Our coding rules are available on request.

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