Disruptive Democratization

Disruptive Democratization: Contentious Events and Liberalizing Outcomes Globally, 1990–2004

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Does contentious collective action matter? Whereas most social movement literature has addressed this question in the US context for policy change outcomes, this paper takes a different approach by bringing the question to a global context and examines democratization as a structural outcome. Accordingly, we test several hypotheses about the ephemeral, positive, and negative influences of contentious collective action on the democratization process in a given country, as well as the cross-border effect of the contention. To go beyond the limitations of previous studies, this paper uses a monthly time-series, cross-national model to examine potential liberalizing or deliberalizing effects of protest activities. Using data from 103 non-democratic countries from 1990 to 2004, we find that protests and riots increase the probability that a country will liberalize in a given month. We find that while contentious events in other countries do not directly increase the risk of liberalization, external contentious events, especially those that lead to political liberalization, increase the count of contentious events, thus indirectly boosting liberalization. We find no evidence that protest significantly increases the chances of deliberalization. Together, our findings show a key role for non-elite political actors to influence political liberalization.

When in June 2009 hundreds of thousands of Iranians peacefully marched in the streets of Tehran in the largest protest event since the 1979 revolution, many observers and participants optimistically anticipated that such a tremendous popular presence would push the autocracy back and make a significant democratic breakthrough. Nevertheless, Tehran's government managed to suppress the uprising in the next few months. The political situation in Iran deteriorated over the next four years as a result of this wave of repression. About a year after the last protest event, riots erupted in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. Pictures of Sidi Bouzid showed the pavement covered by stones that protestors had thrown at the police and government cars set on fire.[1] The turmoil in Sidi Bouzid reached the capital, Tunis, and within a month the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali had stepped down after a quarter-century in power. The successful protests in Tunisia inspired activists in Egypt, who organized a protest event in Cairo two weeks

after the fall of the Tunisian dictator. The scenes in Cairo also were disturbing. Protestors were attacked by police and thugs, and in turn attacked government buildings and security forces. More than three hundred people were killed in protests that brought down Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. The departure of Mubarak, though, was not the end. Two years later, massive protests against then President Mohammad Morsi opened the way for a military coup against the elected government, which reasserted the military's anti-democratic privileges in Egyptian politics.

What is the impact of such contentious collective actions on the prospect of democratization in authoritarian countries? Scholarship on popular mobilization and democratization brings out three different answers: contentious collective action is ephemeral in the face of the elite negotiations and pacts; pressure from below may backfire and enhance dictatorship; and finally, mass uprisings create momentum for democratic breakthroughs.

In this paper, we develop and test several hypotheses related to political liberalization processes. For the first time in the literature, this paper uses monthly time-series, cross-national data for protest and liberalization to accurately capture the pacing of reforms. We employ multinomial logistic regression models to examine the potential liberalizing or deliberalizing effects of protest activities. Using data from 103 non-democratic countries from 1990 to 2004, our models show that protests and riots increase the probability that a country will liberalize in a given month. We find that while contentious events in other countries do not directly increase the risk of liberalization, external contentious events, especially those that lead to political liberalization, increase the count of contentious events, thus boosting liberalization indirectly. We find no evidence that protest significantly increases the chances of deliberalization. Together, our findings indicate that non-elite political actors can play a key role in influencing political liberalization.

Political Outcomes of Social Movements

Studies of social movement outcome are a major area of research in the contentious politics literature. Organizational infrastructure (Andrews 1997, 2001, 2004; Ganz 2000), strategy (Gamson 1990; McCammon et al. 2008; Piven and Cloward 1979), framing (Cress and Snow 2000), and the political context (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005) are thought to be the primary factors that shape the political outcome of social movements.

These findings are drawn mostly from case studies of social movements in the United States and in a few other studies of non-US democracies in other parts of the world. In a recent review of the state-related outcomes of social movements, only five of the forty-two included cases outside the United States, and only two included non-democratic countries (Amenta et al. 2010). More than 90 percent of the research in this area looked at policy changes with democracies, with only three studies investigating structural political change induced by social movements. The concentration of these studies in the American democratic polity and their focus on the political impact of movements at the level of policy change pose important questions regarding whether these findings also apply to movements

in non-democratic polities, and what their political impacts are at a more structural level, meaning democratization or dedemocratization.

Democratization is considered one of the most important outcomes that social movements can bring about. Democratization does not just change policies, but also provides more access and leverage for citizens to change future policies (Amenta et al. 2010). Yet, democratization is also one of the "broader processes" neglected by the dominant social movement theory (Tarrow 2012, 21). To address this issue in the literature, we extend social movement studies of the political outcome to an investigation of the contentious collective action influence on the democratization process in non-democratic polities.

Contentious Collective Action and Democratization

In this paper, we adopt a minimal definition of democracy as a set of institutional arrangements: procedures and institutions through which citizens can effectively express their preferences about alternative policies and leaders, and institutionalized constraints on the exercise of executive power (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2011). These institutions and procedures are created or substantially reshaped through different historical episodes (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010). These historical episodes may lead to a liberalizing outcome (Howard and Roessler 2006) or deliberalizing setbacks. Democratization then could be achieved in a dynamic process as a result of these different episodes.

Despite being neglected in social movement studies, a major strand of scholarship in political sociology and political science has specialized in studying the process of democratization. These studies have specified endogenous and exogenous determinants of democratization. The scholarship focusing on endogenous factors has taken structuralist and agent-based approaches. In the structuralist research, again two types of studies can be identified: scholarship focusing on the socioeconomic conditions, such as economic development and the level of inequality and democratization (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005; Boix and Stokes 2003; Epstein et al. 2006; Lipset 1994; Przeworski and Limongi 1997), and studies that stress the role of political institutions and regime type in each country (Brownlee 2009; Geddes 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Important studies in comparative historical sociology, however, highlight the importance of contentious collective action in the process of democratization. Moore (1966) argued that democratization was historically the outcome of bourgeoisie revolutions. On the other hand, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) contend that collective struggles of the working class brought democracy in Western Europe and South America. In a comparative analysis of democratization in central America, Paige (1998) highlighted the insurgency of socialist groups as a replacement for the lack of democratic mobilization by the bourgeoisie or working class. Accordingly, studies of more recent instances of democratization in the agent-based approach have argued that contentious activities by collective actors have been consequential in pushing forward the democratization process through different mechanisms.[2]

Contentious collective action raises the costs of governance for autocrats. Dictators often lack the channels to be aware of societal demands, and when they

do have such channels, they tend to ignore them. Disruptive actions, then, might force dictators to hear the popular demands. In such scenarios, authoritarian rulers decide to make concessions or even relinquish power to avoid further uncertainties, which could include a full-scale revolution. Acemoglu and Robinson (2005, 27) observe that "most transitions to democracy, both in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and twentieth-century Latin America, took place amid significant social turmoil and revolutionary threats."

In such situations, third parties that have long allied with the government may switch sides and join the opposition. These shifts are detrimental to the regime when the regime is dependent on the cooperation of such third parties (Schock 2005). In El Salvador and South Africa, for instance, high costs of insurgency eventually convinced the economic elite that their interests would be better served in a democratic transition. Accordingly, they pressured the soft-liners in the regime for democratization (Wood 2000).

On many occasions, authoritarians have opted to show their iron fists and suppress uprisings through force. Nonetheless, as studies of repression and mobilization have indicated, repression often backfires and induces even more mobilization (Brockett 2005; Khawaja 1993; Rasler 1996). Crackdowns on protestors often benefit protestors at least in three ways. First, repression may polarize the situation and strengthen the solidarity of the resistance campaign (Hirsch 1990). Second, the moral outrage created by the regime's atrocities may erode external support for the regime. Third, in several situations, the ruling elite has been divided about resorting to violence to suppress protestors or to make concessions (Chenoweth and Stephan 2012; Teorell 2010). In 1990 in Nepal, after the brutal crackdown on several protest events, for example, the foreign minister resigned in opposition to the repression of unarmed protestors, exposing the divide among elites to the public (Schock 2005, 140).

In addition to delegitimizing the regime, successful initial mobilizations in authoritarian states allow the opposition to display their power in mobilizing the masses and challenge the regime's monopoly over public spaces (Swaminathan 1999). In Czechoslovakia, for instance, two new oppositional groups, Civic Forum and Public Against Violence, posited their mandate as being representative of the opposition after they organized a general strike. Their success in popular mobilization also strengthened their hand when bargaining with Communist officials and escalating their initial limited demands to resignation of the president and the end of the rule of the Communist party (Glenn 2003). Popular mobilization not only let the opposition have a rather equal capacity to bargain in the negotiations, but on some occasions it enabled the democratic opposition to dictate its demands on the autocratic elite (McFaul 2002).

> *Hypothesis 1: Democratization is more likely in the wake of popular mobilization.*

Two other hypotheses could be discerned in the elitist version of the agent-based approach. This version, also called Transitology, argues that structural factors are less important in moments of uncertainty, such as political transitions (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). In such moments, negotiating and pact-making between hard-liners and soft-liners in the regime and radicals and moderates in the

opposition shape the trajectory and fate of the transition (Higley and Burton 1989; Huntington 1991; Przeworski 1991).

Elitist studies take a mostly pessimistic view of the role of social pressure in bringing about democratization. The resurgence of the civil society has been counted as ephemeral or just a side effect of the divide between soft-liners and hard-liners in the regime or a potential threat to the success of the democratization process. According to these accounts, popular mobilization and radical demands by the masses scare hard-liners in the regime about the consequences of transition and push them toward aborting the whole transition process (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 70). A classic example of such a scenario is China's 1989 student movement, when following the escalation of protests, hard-liners in the Communist party leadership, such as Premier Li Ping, took the upper hand over soft-liners such as Secretary General Zhao Ziayang and ordered the brutal massacre of the movement (Brook 1998).

> *Hypothesis 2: Democratization is less likely in the wake of popular mobilization.*
> *Hypothesis 3: Dedemocratization is more likely in the wake of popular mobilization.*

Contentious Diffusion of Democracy

External determinants of democratization have also been studied through the lens of diffusion theory. Diffusion occurs when information about innovation at one site is transmitted through certain channels to actors at a new site and these new actors adopt the innovation (Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Rogers 2003; Strang and Soule 1998). Quantitative studies of democratic diffusion have documented that democratic transitions are clustered in time and space and that geographic proximity to democracies and democratizers increases the likelihood of democratization (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Jaggers and Gurr 1995; Wejnert 2005). Two mechanisms explain this process. First, as the emulation theories of diffusion imply (Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007), the adoption of democratic institutions by neighbor autocratic countries convinces political leaders that they would be able to undertake political reform and hold on to political power. They would also be convinced that political reform would not impose economic costs on their countries. Since after the end of the Cold War democratic countries have had a better chance of allying with great powers, such as the United States, political leaders seek to promote democratic reform to stay competitive with their democratizing neighbors (Gleditsch and Ward 2008).

> *Hypothesis 4: The odds for democratization are higher when there are neighboring democratizers, regardless of popular mobilization for democratization.*

According to the second mechanism, the spread of democracy is the outcome of the diffusion of democratic protest waves. This mechanism has been documented in democratic protests in Europe in 1848, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist states, velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe, and the recent wave of

uprising in the Middle East (Weyland 2010; Beissinger 2002, 2007; Stokes 1993; Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Bellin 2012). The spread of democratic mobilization can affect the democratic outcome through replication, preemptive reforms, and repression (Weyland 2010). In the replication scenario, successful protest in one country ignites the fire of protest in neighbor countries, which in turn brings down more dictatorial regimes. The waves of democratic revolts in Eastern Europe and the Arab Spring fit this scenario.

> *Hypothesis 5: Successful popular mobilization in neighboring countries increases the odds of democratic mobilization in a country, and so indirectly increases the odds for democratization.*

In the reform scenario, incumbent rulers threatened by contentious regime change in their neighboring countries make preemptive concessions and initiate some democratic reforms to ease the opposition and secure their hold on power. In Morocco, after the fall of long-standing dictators in neighboring countries and following a wave of protest, King Muhammad VI proposed constitutional reforms in June 2011 that gave the prime minister and the parliament more authority.

> *Hypothesis 6: Successful democratic mobilization in neighboring countries directly increases the chance for democratization.*

In the repression scenario, rulers threatened by external signals escalate repression to prevent any replication effort by the opposition. President Lukashenka of Belarus, for example, concerned about the Orange Revolution of neighboring Ukraine, purged his regime from potential dissenters and introduced new laws that permitted the use of firearms against protestors on orders from the president.

> *Hypothesis 7: Successful democratic mobilization in neighboring countries increases the odds of dedemocratization.*

This paper presents the first quantitative test of these three scenarios.

Building on the advantages of comparative historical analyses (Brady and Collier 2010; George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2006; Goertz and Mahoney 2012; Ragin 1989), qualitative studies have specified the mechanisms through which contentious collective action pushes democratization forward. Nonetheless, such studies are not able to test the generalizability of the impact of contention on democratization. Quantitative tests are needed to evaluate the generalizability of this relationship. While important preliminary steps have been taken in quantitative analyses of popular mobilization and democratization (Alemán and Yang 2011; Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993; Teorell 2010; Ulfelder 2005), these studies have certain limitations.

First, these studies have measured democratization either as passing a threshold or as experiencing a big jump in the democracy score. Democratization is an incremental process, and taking such approaches runs the risk of ignoring smaller moves that advance the democratization process over the long run. Second, these studies have all used annual data with a one-year lag for their independent variable to make sure the explanatory measures temporally preceded the outcomes of interest. This large lag, however, misses key aspects of the actual pacing of

democraticization. For example, with the exception of Tunisia, a one-year lag model would miss all the important protest events that led to the collapse of the dictatorial regimes during the Arab Spring, as the eruption of protests and the fall of the dictator ruler or concessions by the incumbents all happened within one calendar year. In the exemplary case of Egypt, the protest wave took off in January and Hosni Mubarak stepped down in February (Holmes 2012).

Much prior quantitative work has also been limited by their measures of civil unrest., These studies have relied on coded *New York Times* news stories for their data about protest events (Banks and Wilson 2013). Because of the newsworthiness of protest events during transitional times, it is very likely that the *Times* has given more coverage to protest events during times of upheavals and ignored protest activities at other times. In addition to *New York Times* data, a recent study has used different data of resistance campaigns rather than contentious events (Celestino and Gleditsch 2013). The major shortcoming of these data, which the authors acknowledge, is that the data underreport many repressed campaigns or failed waves of protests (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013). This bias in the data makes it inappropriate to test hypotheses about the potential backlash of contentious collective action. Also, since the positive outcome has affected the coding, such data also would not be suitable for testing the positive effects of resistance campaigns.

To meet this shortcoming, we use new data for protest events that are more comprehensive than *New York Times*–based data. We also use monthly data for both protest and liberalization to overcome the lag problem of previous studies. We take into account all the smaller changes in the level of democracy in a given country in order to not ignore smaller breakthroughs and backlashes in favor of rapid ruptures. In addition to the discussed limitations, existing scholarship has treated the outcomes of protest activities at the domestic level. This paper seeks to advance this scholarship through examining the cross-border effect of contentious events, as well as the diffusion mechanism for the spread of democratization.

Data

Our analysis examines 103 non-democratic states between 1990 and 2004. For each regime, we consider the risk of it becoming either more democratic or more autocratic in a given month as a function of political, demographic, and economic factors.

Since we are interested primarily in the processes of democratization, we restrict our cases to non-democracies. We operationalize non-democracies as countries with significant limits in such areas as electoral competiveness or executive constraint. The polity score is an aggregate measure between –10 and 10, which is based on five more-specific indexes that assess the competitiveness of executive recruitment, openness of executive recruitment, constraints on the chief executive, regulation of participation, and competitiveness of participation. Many major studies of democratization have used the polity score to operationalize liberalizing and deliberalizing outcomes (Boix 2011; Epstein et al. 2006; Wejnert 2005). Polity classifies all regimes with a score of –10 to –6 as closed autocracy; regimes with a score between –5 and –1 as open autocracies; regimes

with a score between 1 and 5 as closed democracies; and regimes with a score between 6 and 10 as open democracies. In our analysis, we include closed and open autocracies and closed democracies; that is, all states with a polity score of less than six, since Polity IV takes this as the threshold of transiting to a democratic regime. This cutoff is consistent with the practices of other researchers in this area (e.g., Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Kurzman and Leahey 2004).

Our dependent variable is liberalization and deliberalization, which we operationalize as a positive or negative change in the polity score, respectively. We extracted the dates of the liberalization and deliberalization events from the Polity IV data set and determined the exact month of each event. Although most research in the area has examined whether a country becomes democratic, for example, by shifting from a polity score of below six to a score of six or more (e.g., Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Kurzman and Leahey 2004), or has a major shift toward democracy, operationalized as having a polity score increase of three or more (e.g., Alemán and Yang 2011; Goldstone et al. 2010; Howard and Roessler 2006); similar to Wejnert (2005), we focus on the more common, incremental shifts of political liberalization. In our data set, we observe 157 instances of liberalization and thirty instances of deliberalization in 103 different states.

Our primary measure of political contention is daily event count data in the World Handbook of Political Indicators IV (Jenkins et al. 2012). These daily counts of contentious political events are based on automated coding of Reuters international newswire. Although this process may involve some loss of accuracy, in that actors and events are coded from the articles without human filtering (beyond the construction of the content analysis program), it has the advantage of being based on news briefs filed by all local Reuters bureaus worldwide; thus, it contains a much more comprehensive list of political events than those that are printed in the *New York Times* and other newspapers. The WHIV event data are designed to measure civil contention and are a cleansed[3] version of the contentious event forms of data released by King and Lowe (2003).

We include all events that are coded as protest or riots. These include events where people were reported to be protesting, marching, sitting in, occupying buildings, picketing, or rioting. We have removed foreign-targeted protests and riots such as anti-Israel demonstrations in Iran from our data. In other words, all protests and riots other than those with foreign targets were included. This totals 4,972 acts of contentious collective action in 103 different non-democratic countries. We observe at least one contentious political event in 2,234 of our 8,189 country-month observations. Since we are interested in the cumulative impact of protest, our measures of contentious events each month are based on the cumulative number of events that had occurred over the prior eleven months.[4]

We include a number of measures to control for factors that are likely to be associated with both democratization and protest. Since scholars have debated the effects of economic development on democratization (Boix 2011; Boix and Stokes 2003; Epstein et al. 2006; Przeworski and Limongi 1997), we include measures of both per-capita GDP and change from the previous year in US 2000 dollars (World Bank 2012). Scholars have also discussed whether oil-producing countries are more resilient about pressures for democratization (Haber and Menaldo 2011; Herb 2005; Ramsay 2011; Ross 2012). Hence, we include a

Table 1. Summary Statistics for Independent Variable with Mean, Median, 5th and 95th Percentile, Standard Deviation, and Standard Deviation within and between Countries

Variable	Mean	Median	p5	p95	s.d.	s.d. within	s.d. between
Prior civil unrest	5.55	2	0	23	12.64	9.10	9.13
Stability duration	135.01	55	4	434	185.3	63.6	158.7
Military regime	0.07	0	0	1	0.25	0.14	0.20
Polity score	−3.29	−4	−10	5	4.68	2.38	4.22
Oil production (ln)	2.62	0.86	0.00	8.24	3.03	0.58	2.79
GDP growth %	1.44	1.89	−10.20	10.80	8.43	7.60	5.72
GDP per capita (ln)	6.62	6.38	4.99	9.34	1.30	0.18	1.26
Population size (ln)	15.90	15.98	13.21	18.14	1.50	0.10	1.50
Formerly democratic	0.25	0	0	1	0.43	0.04	0.46

measure of a country's annual oil production (Ross 2012). We also include a measure of population size from the World Development Indicator. These variables are measured in annual units and are one-year lagged.[5]

In addition, we include a series of measures related to a state's political structure. We measure a country's openness or closeness of the political scene by its lagged polity score. Although we use the same polity measure to define our universe of cases and outcome variable, significant variation exists among nondemocracies. Opportunities for mobilization and reform, for example, differ significantly between North Korea under Kim Jong-Il (polity score = −10) and Fujimori's Peru (polity score = 1). We also include a measure for whether a country has a history of being democratic. This is a dummy variable that is coded as 1 if the country has ever crossed the threshold of a polity score of 6, and otherwise is coded as 0. Finally, as several studies have suggested that military regimes are more at risk of breakdown (Brownlee 2009; Geddes 1999), we include a measure of whether the regime is controlled by the military, based on data from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) (for the summary statistics see table 1).

We also include regional variables for liberalization and protest.[6] Two variables capture the portion of liberalization in each region over the previous eleven months, whereas another variable calculates the mean protest in a given region. Each variable is calculated separately for each country (the country's value is excluded from the mean). Two variables measure successful and backlashed protests in each region. These variables capture the mean of protest events before liberalizing and deliberalizing events in a given region over the previous eleven months. We also include an indicator variable for region to control for unmeasured regional effects.

Method

Our primary outcome of interest is whether a regime had become more or less democratic in a given month. Since the outcome variable can have three possible values (liberalization, deliberalization, or stay the same), we employ multinomial

Figure 1. Predicted probability of political liberalization by regime duration based on table 2, model 2. Predicted values up to 90th percentile of protest levels. Vertical lines show 95 percent CI.
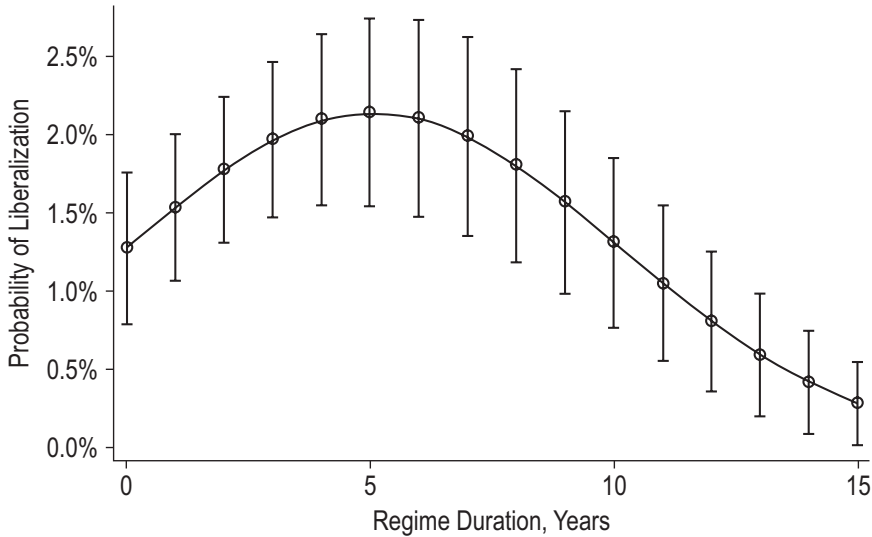
logistic regression. This allows us to simultaneously estimate the effect of our independent variables on the outcome without assuming that the effect size will be the same or even be in the same direction. Because observations within the same country are not likely to be independent, we adjust our standard errors to be robust to within-nation correlations. For our analysis of protest counts, we employ conditional fixed-effects negative binomial models, which include country-specific dispersion parameters. We compare model fits based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), which is based on a model's log-likelihood and number of parameters. When comparing models using the same estimator, lower AIC values are associated with a better-fitting model.

Results

Table 2 presents the results of two multinomial logistic regression models that explore the likelihood of democratic liberalization among autocratic countries. Model 1 presents the baseline model. As the level of political openness increases, the probability of liberalization decreases, with more authoritarian regimes more likely to reform than those that have already adopted some democratic measures. As shown in figure 1, duration has a curvilinear effect, with regimes most likely to liberalize in the first five years. Duration here refers to the time passed since the last liberalization or deliberalization. After that, the probability declines, such that by the fifteenth year, regime liberalization is a very rare event.

In contrast, regime type, GDP, GDP growth, and a democratic history are not significantly associated with an increased risk of liberalization. However, as oil production and regime stability increase, the probability of deliberalization

**Table 2. Multinomial Regression Results for Liberalization and Deliberalization**

	(1)		(2)	
	Deliberalization	Liberalization	Deliberalization	Liberalization
Prior civil unrest			0.981	1.014**
			(−0.73)	(3.70)
Military regime	0.815	1.633	0.782	1.670
	(−0.18)	(1.54)	(−0.22)	(1.59)
Political openness	1.122*	0.913**	1.125*	0.911**
	(2.30)	(−3.24)	(2.36)	(−3.32)
Oil production (ln)	1.411*	0.842*	1.405*	0.840*
	(2.46)	(−2.50)	(2.46)	(−2.54)
GDP growth %	0.964*	0.981	0.963*	0.984
	(−2.10)	(−1.66)	(−2.19)	(−1.45)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.757	1.333	0.769	1.305
	(−0.70)	(1.27)	(−0.66)	(1.21)
Population size (ln)	0.788	0.928	0.842	0.877
	(−1.47)	(−0.74)	(−0.96)	(−1.31)
Formerly democratic	1.522	1.022	1.445	1.087
	(0.78)	(0.08)	(0.67)	(0.31)
Stability duration	1.047**	1.017*	1.047**	1.018**
	(2.95)	(2.56)	(2.93)	(2.62)
Stability duration 2	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**
	(−3.29)	(−3.50)	(−3.26)	(−3.44)
Constant	0.0871	0.00368*	0.0304	0.00943
	(−0.54)	(−2.15)	(−0.72)	(−1.81)
Observations	8189		8189	
Clusters	103		103	
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	1313.9		1313.6	

Note: Exponentiated coefficients; *t*-statistics in parentheses.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

also significantly increases. Similarly and consistent with theories of resource curse, as oil production increases, the probability of liberalization decreases. Additionally, as the level of political openness rises, the chance for deliberalization increases and the probability of liberalization shrinks. For example, based on predicted values from the model with all other variables as observed, a country with a low level of political openness (polity score of −5), such as Equatorial Guinea in 2001, is 1.9 times more likely to take a step toward liberalization and 70 percent less likely to deliberalize than a country with a higher level of political openness (polity score of 5), such as Bangladesh in the same year.[7]

Figure 2. Predicted probability of political liberalization by level of protest (0–95th percentile shown) based on table 2, model 2. Predicted values up to 90th percentile of protest levels. Vertical lines show 95 percent CI.
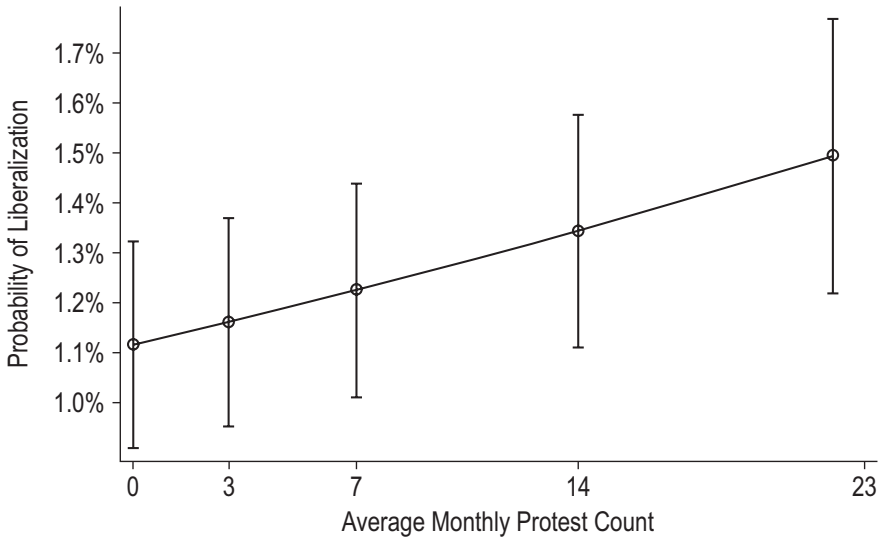
Model 2 adds a measure of the number of major contentious gatherings, including both protests and riots, which occurred in the prior year. In accordance to H1 and in contrast with H2, the measure popular mobilization is statistically significant and positively associated with the risk of liberalization. In contrast with H3, mobilization is not associated with the risk of deliberalization. While a country with the median number of contentious gatherings, three, is only slightly (4 percent) more likely to be at risk of liberalization than a country with no protest, a country at the 75th percentile in terms of protests is 9 percent more likely and a country at the 95th percentile, with twenty-two average monthly protests over the past year, has a 33 percent higher risk of liberalization than a country with no protests, as shown in figure 2. This effect is consistent with an agent-based collective actor of liberalization.

Table 3 extends our analysis to examine the impact of regional protest and liberalization on a country's likelihood of liberalizing. Across our three models, we find no evidence that regional liberalization has a direct effect on the likelihood that a country liberalizes, in contrast to H4. Model 1 tests the hypothesis that regional civil unrest may lead to political change by including a measure of the volume of protest in the region over the past eleven months. The measure of regional protest is statistically significant and associated with an increase in the likelihood of liberalization, suggesting that protest may have effects that spill beyond national borders. Model 2 looks at only successful influences by including the count of protests in other countries in the region that led to liberalization and the number of countries in the area that liberalized. Neither variable has a statistically significant effect. Model 3 looks at the reverse possibility: that either

deliberalization or the protests that lead to it might diffuse throughout a region. Similar to successful events, we find no significant effect for either deliberalization or protests that lead to deliberalization.

We also find evidence that a protest in one country, particularly a successful protest, is likely to lead to other protests in the region, consistent with H5, which looks at the indirect effect on contention. Table 4 models protests in the current month as a function of our set of controls, along with a cumulative count of the protests in the past eleven months. Model 1 shows the baseline model, where population size, GDPpc, and being formerly democratic are all positively associated with the count of protests, while GDP growth, oil production, and military regimes are all negatively associated with protest levels. We model the impact of regional protest with the count of the number of protests in other countries in the region over the past eleven months. As shown in model 2, this measure of regional contention has a positive and statistically significant impact on protest. Model 3 includes an additional measure of regional liberalization, to test whether this creates an incentive for additional protest. We find no evidence that it does. Model 4 adds successful protests, events prior to political liberalization, and unsuccessful protests. While the total volume of regional protests remains significant, the measure of successful protests is also significant. That is, protest diffuses regionally, and based on the coefficients, successful protests have an effect approximately three times as large as protest that made no difference.

Robustness

One potential problem with the analysis is that we include states that are experiencing a transition or interregnum period, according to Polity IV. Polity does not report the score for the components of the aggregate index for these observations, and instead the aggregate index is constructed based on the aggregate scores received before and after transition. To test whether our findings are driven by these cases, we dropped all the cases at transition or interregnum, and ran all of the analysis. The results of the new analysis show that our finding is robustness to this new set of cases (tables 1–3 in the online appendix).

Another potential concern about our analysis is that two components of the Polity IV aggregate index, PARCOMP (or competitiveness of participation) and PARREG (or regulation of political participation), include consideration of the presence of protest and violence. This might create a serious endogeneity problem in our analysis. As a robustness test, we ran all of the analyses with a new polity score stripped from these two components. The results are largely consistent with our original findings (tables 4–6 in the online appendix). One notable exception is that the relationship between regional civil unrest and liberalization is not statistically significant using this polity variant. Since the excluding polity elements may include some component of local unrest, this is further evidence that, as shown above, regional protest affects liberalization largely by increasing local protest.

Table 3. Multinomial Regression Results for Liberalization and Deliberalization

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	Deliberalization	Liberalization	Deliberalization	Liberalization	Deliberalization	Liberalization
Prior civil unrest	0.980	1.012**	0.979	1.015**	0.978	1.015**
	(−0.74)	(3.24)	(−0.76)	(4.07)	(−0.82)	(4.14)
Regional civil unrest	1.044	1.079**				
	(0.33)	(2.92)				
Regional successful unrest			0.823	1.005		
			(−0.55)	(0.03)		
Regional liberalization			1.010	1.011		
			(0.28)	(0.73)		
Regional backlashed unrest					0.457	0.949
					(−0.76)	(−0.21)
Regional deliberalization					1.017	1.015
					(0.60)	(0.52)
Military regime	0.778	1.677	0.755	2.021*	0.755	2.018*
	(−0.23)	(1.58)	(−0.26)	(2.08)	(−0.26)	(2.06)
Political openness	1.127*	0.919**	1.121*	0.923**	1.124*	0.920**
	(2.47)	(−3.09)	(2.29)	(−2.79)	(2.31)	(−2.85)
Oil production (ln)	1.403*	0.835**	1.401*	0.874*	1.391*	0.872*
	(2.46)	(−2.63)	(2.49)	(−2.17)	(2.37)	(−2.20)
GDP growth %	0.963*	0.984	0.962*	0.989	0.960*	0.988
	(−2.16)	(−1.40)	(−2.39)	(−0.92)	(−2.17)	(−0.98)

GDP per capita (ln)	0.781	1.346	0.785	1.174	0.794	1.188
	(−0.62)	(1.35)	(−0.61)	(0.86)	(−0.58)	(0.91)
Population size (ln)	0.855	0.891	0.845	0.893	0.859	0.895
	(−0.84)	(−1.11)	(−0.91)	(−1.08)	(−0.82)	(−1.08)
Formerly democratic	1.438	1.063	1.424	0.974	1.437	0.969
	(0.67)	(0.22)	(0.66)	(−0.10)	(0.68)	(−0.11)
Stability duration	1.047**	1.018**	1.040*	1.026**	1.039*	1.024**
	(2.90)	(2.63)	(2.53)	(3.02)	(2.37)	(3.06)
Stability duration 2	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**	1.000**
	(−3.25)	(−3.52)	(−3.04)	(−3.45)	(−2.89)	(−3.51)
Constant	0.0173	0.00399*	0.0322	0.00970	0.0277	0.00962*
	(−0.78)	(−2.06)	(−0.71)	(−1.95)	(−0.74)	(−1.97)
Observations	8,189	7,679	7,679	7,679	7,679	7,679
Clusters	103	97	97	97	97	97
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	1313.5	1207.4	1207.4	1207.5	1207.5	1207.5

Note: Exponentiated coefficients; *t*-statistics in parentheses.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Table 4. Fixed Effect Negative Binomial Regression for Diffusion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Civil unrest	Civil unrest	Civil unrest	Civil unrest
Prior civil unrest	1.012**	1.011**	1.010**	1.010**
	(11.56)	(10.14)	(9.33)	(9.19)
Regional civil unrest		1.028**	1.034**	1.027**
		(4.07)	(4.32)	(3.05)
Regional successful unrest				1.039**
				(2.87)
Regional liberalization			0.998	0.995
			(−0.78)	(−1.53)
Regional backlashed unrest				1.076
				(1.72)
Regional deliberalization				1.000
				(−0.01)
Military regime	0.649**	0.638**	0.675**	0.671**
	(−3.78)	(−3.92)	(−3.25)	(−3.29)
Political openness	0.982*	0.986	0.982*	0.983*
	(−2.33)	(−1.81)	(−2.19)	(−2.08)
Oil production (ln)	0.908**	0.909**	0.910**	0.910**
	(−3.90)	(−3.87)	(−3.59)	(−3.60)
GDP growth %	0.987**	0.988**	0.988**	0.988**
	(−4.01)	(−3.81)	(−3.52)	(−3.59)
GDP per capita (ln)	1.370**	1.385**	1.392**	1.393**
	(5.01)	(5.11)	(4.81)	(4.79)
Population size (ln)	1.280**	1.296**	1.302**	1.290**
	(6.06)	(6.30)	(6.05)	(5.78)
Formerly democratic	1.865**	1.877**	2.084**	2.106**
	(4.92)	(4.94)	(5.38)	(5.41)
Stability duration	1.001	1.001	1.000	1.000
	(1.55)	(1.05)	(0.71)	(0.51)
Stability duration 2	1.000*	1.000	1.000	1.000
	(−2.15)	(−1.82)	(−1.70)	(−1.56)
Constant	0.00105**	0.000708**	0.000606**	0.000733**
	(−7.58)	(−7.90)	(−7.49)	(−7.24)
Observations	8,126	8,126	7,628	7,628
Clusters	92	92	89	89
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	13784.4	13770.7	12891.3	12884.5

Note: Exponentiated coefficients; *t*-statistics in parentheses.
* *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01

Conclusion and Discussion

Does contentious collective action make a change? Many social movement studies have addressed this question in the context of policy change in democratic countries, such as the United States. By examining the influence of contentious collective action on short-term liberalization, we investigated the effect of popular mobilization on more structural transformations, such as democratization.

In a cross-national analysis of liberalizing outcomes during the 1990–2004 period, we found that protests and riots increased the chance of a democratizing outcome as any change in the democratic qualities of a polity. The count of protest actions is one of the few statistically significant predictors of liberalization. Additionally, we found no evidence that protest is likely to lead to a major political backlash, with the count of protests not associated with political deliberalization. While we found no consistent evidence that regime changes or protest in adjacent countries directly affect the likelihood that a state will liberalize, we did find evidence of the regional diffusion of protests, especially successful protests. This is generally consistent with many waves of protest, such as those associated with the Arab Spring, where protest diffused from Tunisia especially after it was credited with the removal of its dictator.

The 2011 uprising in Egypt that led to the overthrow of the Mubarak regime was followed by a military coup against the Morsi-elected government two years later. While this could make observers skeptical about the liberalizing consequences of popular mobilization, our analysis shows that global mobilization has favored the democratization processes. The 2013 coup in Egypt and other similar cases appear to be an exception to the rule, rather than an illustrative instance. Future research should analyze cases of deliberalization backed by popular support as deviant cases, which in turn will enhance our understanding of the conditions under which mass contention results in liberalization or deliberalization.

Political sociologists and political scientists have debated the importance of elite choices and mass mobilization in the process of democratization. Whereas certain scholars stressed elite choices as major drivers of the democratization process (Higley and Burton 1989; Huntington 1991; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986), several important works in comparative historical sociology highlight the role of popular mobilization in major democratic transformation (Kurzman 2008; Moore 1966; Paige 1998; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). Our finding about the positive effect of contentious collective action on short-term liberalization is in line with studies that argue for effectiveness of mass mobilization in the process of democratization. Although our analysis focuses on a different time period and employs a different methodology, our finding highlights the contentious nature of the democratization process, similar to the previous studies. This study, however, analyzes the effect of mass mobilization only for the occurrence of liberalizing gains rather than sustainability of such democratic achievements. Future research on this subject could be investigated whether liberalizing and democratic outcomes achieved by mass mobilization are more or less sustainable than achievements acquired by other methods. Future scholarship might, in other words, inquire into more long-term effects of popular mobilization for the democratization process.

Our findings indicate that contentious collective action in general, and successful mobilization in particular, indirectly increases the chance of liberalization in adjacent countries through encouraging protest activities. This finding contributes to studies of democracy and protest diffusions in several ways. This is the first systematic study of the cross-national diffusion of unarmed protest. While prior work has found that armed mobilization diffuses regionally to neighbor countries (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Gleditsch 2002; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006), we provide strong evidence for the regional diffusion of unarmed protest. Our finding also suggests that while protest that does not lead to regime liberalization is contagious, successful protest is even more contagious. This suggests that the contagious effect of protest events might be conditional upon their domestic political outcome. This model of diffusion is consistent with the larger social movement literature on the importance of being able to see protest as an effective means for social change prior to participation (e.g., Piven and Cloward 1979). We would expect to observe a similar phenomenon for both domestic protest diffusion and cross-national armed-conflict diffusion.

While previous quantitative studies of democracy diffusion have conflated the outcome of diffusion (democracy) and the venue of diffusion (protest) (e.g., Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2008; for more elaboration on this confusion, see Elkins and Simmons [2005]), we disentangle these two in our study for the first time. Studies of social movement diffusion (e.g., Andrews and Biggs 2006) as well as armed conflict, in contrast, have focused mostly on the spread of contention or organizations rather than the political outcome of the diffusion. Instead, we propose that studies of social movement diffusion and armed conflict also include the political outcome of such diffusion in their models. This direction advances our understanding of social movement outcomes beyond their domestic effects to their regional influence.

Methodologically, we highlight the importance of having a lag structure that is consistent with both theory and the phenomena. Protest can be a fast-moving event, and while some regimes are able to withstand years of protest, others collapse within days. The standard, data-driven technique of measuring the impact of protest only in the following year is likely to underestimate the true causal effect of protest. While we focused on regime change, selecting the appropriate lag may be even more important when studying the impact of protests in democratic settings. To the extent that legislators are responsive to protests, it is most likely those events that happened in the days and months preceding a hearing or vote, and not the year before, that have an impact.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online, http://sf.oxfordjournals. org/.

Notes

1. Nawaat, December 12, 2010. http://bit.ly/1gbgfCv.
2. This paper focuses on short-term effects of contentious collective action, instead of social consequences of contention over "longue durées" that, for example, Tilly (2003) examined in Europe from the 17th to the 20th century.

3. For a full description of the data, see https://sociology.osu.edu/worldhandbook/world-handbook-information-frequently-asked-questions.
4. Our findings are robust to other cutoff points and other decay function measures. Analysis available from the authors.
5. These measures are available only in annual units, while the models operate in monthly units. This data limitation might underestimate short-term (i.e., monthly) effects of these variables if monthly measures existed.
6. Regions include Sub-Saharan Africa ($n = 43$), Middle East ($n = 19$), Eastern Europe ($n = 13$), East and South East Asia ($n = 12$), Latin America and the Caribbean ($n = 10$), Central Asia ($n = 7$), South Asia ($n = 4$), and Oceania ($n = 3$).
7. We estimate the probabilities and changes in probabilities, and their associated standard errors, using the Stata margins command. All predictions are based by manipulating the values of one variable for all observations while leaving all others as observed.

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