Running Uphill: Political Opportunity in Non-democracies

MARYJANE OSA* AND CRISTINA CORDUNEANU-HUCI**

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes twenty-four cases of occurrence/non-occurrence of mobilization in non-democratic states to determine conditions of political opportunity in high-risk authoritarian contexts. Ragin’s (1987) Boolean method of qualitative comparison (QCA 3.0) is used to identify specific configurations of conditions that constitute political opportunity in non-democracies.

We find that political opportunity is sensitive to conditions created by divided elites, changes in repression, media access, influential allies, and social networks. Our analysis identifies four configurations that create an opening for mobilization under authoritarian conditions. The key factors, identified by QCA in the most parsimonious model, are media access and social networks. These two factors are sufficient conditions for producing mobilization in non-democratic states.

Introduction

How is it possible for oppressed groups to mobilize to act on their grievances in a repressive, authoritarian state? The dominant political process theory of social mobilization and related studies of contentious politics primarily focus on protest in democratic societies (Diani 1996;

* Department of Sociology, Northwestern University, Evanston.
** Department of Government and International Studies, University of South Carolina, Columbia.
Kitschelt 1986; Klandermans 1997; Rucht 1996). In democracies, civil rights are constitutionally protected, the mass media are uncensored, and dissent is tolerated. However, in non-democratic states, the political system is relatively closed, dissenters are persecuted, and the media is controlled. Can the political process framework equally illuminate mobilization in non-democracies?

Empirical studies of non-democratic mobilization over-sample cases of popular contention at the moment of democratic transition. That is, social scientists select their cases from the tail of the distribution – instances where the authoritarian state already has been fatally weakened (Glenn 2001; Kuran 1991; Mueller 1999). Since data on repressive regimes are scarce, social action that takes place despite the risks imposed by a stable authoritarian state is not commonly studied. Yet some have argued that the preconditions of a successful transition to democracy are found in courageous, often abortive, attempts by social actors to challenge non-democratic institutions and repressive practices (Noonan 1995; Sandoval 1998).

An investigation of conditions that facilitate mobilization in stable authoritarian regimes can thus correct for deficiencies in two separate (sometimes overlapping) scholarly literatures. The Western bias of social movement theory, particularly the political process framework, can be ameliorated through comparative analyses of political opportunity conditions in non-democracies. The democratization literature can be extended by examining popular contention in repressive regimes where the ruling elites block, rather than succumb to, the democratic forces.

Even monolithic tyrannies may lie on cracked foundations. The fissures in the edifice of oppressive rule are worth hunting for. The purpose of our research is to identify political opportunities that enable non-elites to resist, and contend with, authoritarian governments at the peak of their power. We have studied twenty-four political situations in fifteen stable non-democracies, two thirds of which resulted in significant socio-political mobilizations, and one-third of which did not. Through qualitative comparative analysis, we seek the minimal set of conditions necessary for high risk/high cost activism and popular contention in non-democratic contexts.

The Dimensions of Political Opportunity
Social movement scholars have identified a number of different factors that create openings for political opportunity in an authoritarian setting. Most often mentioned are: elite divisions, changes in state repression, media access, and influential allies. There is no consensus regarding which factor or combination is necessary or sufficient to initiate mobilization in non-democratic settings. For example, a divided elite was judged to
Political Opportunity in Non-democracies

be an important factor creating political opportunity for challengers in 1989 China, the Philippines 1986, and South Korea 1987 (Calhoun 1994; Liang, Nathan, and Perry 2001; Schock 1999; Yun 1997; Zuo and Benford 1995). However, system-challenging mobilizations also occurred where the authoritarian elite was unified, e.g., the 1980 mobilization in Poland and the 1989 Leipzig demonstrations in GDR (Mueller 1999; Osa 2003).

Complicating the analysis of political opportunity is the “repression/protest paradox” which stems from the contradictory effects of political violence. Under some circumstances, regime violence successfully quells popular protest, but other times it provokes even larger mass collective action. Repression often has its intended effects, decreasing mobilization, as happened with the suppression of the student movement in China, or with the crackdown on Romanian miners 1977 (Calhoun 1994; Deletant 1998; Vasi 2003; Zuo and Benford 1995). On the other hand, there are also cases like Burma, where the bloody suppression of student demonstrations led to an increase in protest mobilization as by-standers became outraged at the military regime (Shock 1999).

Social scientists have attempted to resolve the repression/popular protest paradox (Brockett 1995; Mason and Krane 1989; Opp and Roehl 1990). From the rational choice perspective, Mason and Krane (1989) argue that the targeting strategy of a regime discriminates among potential victims of political violence, thus differentially affecting individual calculations regarding the decision to participate in popular protest. They posit that such regimes are strategically repressing either: 1) leaders of the opposition, 2) the rank-and-file members of opposition groups, or 3) the mass public, through indiscriminate state violence. Brockett (1995) disagrees with them, demonstrating that Mason and Krane’s thesis is empirically falsified by the experience of El Salvador and Guatemala (Brockett 1995:119-130). In particular, Brockett’s research shows that the third targeting strategy of indiscriminate state violence sustained over time does not increase mass support for oppositional collective action. He proposes instead that the popular response to state repression is influenced by the dynamics of the protest cycle. Brockett argues that intense repression will accelerate mobilization only during the ascendant phase of protest, i.e., during the opening of political opportunity. Later in the cycle, as exhaustion or cooptation takes a toll on movements, repression is likely to decrease protest participation. By considering repression as a joint factor of political opportunity during the upswing of the cycle, our study examines whether Brockett’s proposition holds true beyond the Central American cases he has examined.

Finally, social networks are cited for their contribution to mobilization, but usually they are considered as an intervening variable between political
opportunity and social movement formation. Most social movement research treats networks as “mobilizing structures,” or “meso-level groups, organizations and informal groups” that form coordinating loci “through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam 1999). We have included it in our model of political opportunities because of an anomaly that we found during the collection and coding of the case study materials. Specifically, our study of the Romanian coal miners’ strike in 1977 turned up none of the hypothesized political opportunity variables. This dramatic and puzzling case is worth recounting here in some detail.

In July-August 1977, thirty-five thousand Romanian miners organized a work stoppage, took a government minister hostage, and threatened First Secretary Nicolae Ceauşescu with further actions if the government did not accede to their demands for improved working conditions and benefits. This protest took place at a time when there was no internal challenge to Ceauşescu from within the party or military, there was increasing repression and deep infiltration and control of society by the Securitate secret police, external governments were supporting Ceauşescu because of his independent foreign policy and determination to pay off foreign debts, and the dictator manipulated a far-reaching propaganda and media control operation. With so many obstacles to collective action arrayed against challengers, how could the Romanian miners organize such a broad-based and effective strike? To answer this question, we delved further into our source materials and investigated other miners’ strikes for clues (Ashwin 1999; Crowley 1997; Dennis 1969; Nash 1992). What we found pointed us to social networks.

In the Valea Jiuului mining region of Romania, Ceauşescu’s economic policies created a unique and volatile environment. To increase Romania’s hard-currency exports of coal, Romanian authorities provided various incentives to attract thousands of workers to the mining region. Once resettled, they faced many difficulties if they attempted to return to their former homes. Indeed, Ceauşescu’s policy included the abandonment – even the leveling – of many thousands of traditional villages. (This implemented Khrushchev 1959 rural systemization plan, eliminating the so-called “non-viable villages” (Deletant 1998:284-289)). When miners received work assignments, they were also allocated housing. As a result of the government’s placement of similarly assigned workers in the same housing blocs, the workers’ children also associated together in the schools. In addition, inter-marriage among these miners was a necessity, since further in- or out-migration from the region was seriously constrained. Consequently, the by-product of the regime’s economic policy was a social reality of multiplex networks: overlapping occupational, social, and residential affiliations. In addition, the specific organization of work for
the miners concentrated them below ground in hazardous conditions that necessitated a high degree of solidarity and mutual concern for survival’s sake. The party operatives and supervisors exercised their authority over the workers from the mining enterprise offices. Thus the workplace itself offered a site for workers’ autonomous organization, deep below the earth’s surface (Vasi 2003).

In the summer of 1977, the government cancelled previously generous retirement benefits for the miners and raised the retirement age from 50 to 55. On August 3, at a general meeting of the strikers at the large Lupeni mine, a list of demands was formulated to present to the authorities. They included: reduction of the work day from eight hours to six, restoring the retirement age to fifty, jobs for dependents (wives and daughters), improved medical care, and media coverage of the strike.

The actions of the miners provoked a government crisis. First Secretary Ceaușescu appointed a commission to negotiate with the miners that included top ranking government ministers, Politbureau members, and local mayors. When the commission arrived at the Lupeni mines, the officials were assaulted by workers when they tried to enter the mine manager’s office. The miners particularly distrusted the ranking member of the commission, Ilie Verdeț, the Politbureau member in charge of the economy and Ceaușescu’s close friend. They demanded that he call Ceaușescu to appear in person to negotiate with the strikers. The miners then took Verdeț hostage to put pressure on the dictator.

Ceaușescu, fearing that the unrest would spread beyond the mining sector, appeared at Lupeni to negotiate with striking miners. He promised to instate a six hour work day, build new factories to employ miners’ dependents, and take no retaliatory actions against strikers. These concessions brought the miners’ protest to an end. Shortly thereafter, the government began an extensive campaign of repression. The mining valley was sealed off by the army and secret police, strike leaders mysteriously disappeared, four thousand miners were relocated, and some were sent to forced labor camps (Deletant 1998:233).

Thus, in the Romanian case, absent any other source of political opportunity, the unusual social circumstances of the miners fostered highly multiplex social networks and gave the laborers autonomous space below ground to plan their actions. The networks provided channels for uncensored communications and the social contacts needed to locate material resources. Analysis of the Romanian case leads us to propose the following hypothesis: under some conditions, networks can generate internally the resources to leverage political opportunity. Thus, we have included social networks as an independent variable to explore whether these contribute directly to political opportunity, rather than (as is usual in
the literature) operate as an intervening variable within the mobilization process.

**Data and Methods**
The method of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA 3.0, Drass and Ragin 1986) developed by Charles Ragin (1987) is well-suited for an exploratory analysis of political opportunity conditions in non-democratic settings. First, it allows for detailed, contextual comparisons of more countries than is usual in comparative case studies. Second, QCA allows us to utilize a diverse set of data sources. For example, we use quantitative measures, such as event counts, to estimate governmental repression levels and we draw on the expertise of area scholars to interpret the qualitative evidence of domestic political divisions. Third, QCA assumes that social (and political) causality is non-linear, interdependent, and heterogeneous – a much more realistic set of assumptions for our cases than those underlying regression analysis. The use of standard statistical methods in this type of research is problematic for three reasons. First, since the boundaries of the population are unknown, sampling is impossible. Second, for quantitative analyses, the World Handbook data set is unreliable (Diani 1992; Diani and della Porta 1999). Finally, the protest event counts represent discrete values. For statistical analyses, we would have to transform these values into continuous variables as indices measuring magnitude or intensity. Since we are interested in the occurrence, or outcome, of mobilization, measurements of protest intensity or magnitude will not further the analysis. In short, we chose the method of qualitative comparative analysis in order to respect the contextual integrity of the cases, assume causal heterogeneity, and analyze moderately large and diverse sets of empirical instances (Amenta and Poulsen 1994; Ragin 1987, 1995).

**Case Selection**
Non-democracies obviously encompass a number of types: military dictatorships, monarchies, one-party states, and Leninist (or state socialist) regimes, to name a few. Yet, with the exception of traditional monarchies, they share an important characteristic: these societies lack a mechanism for regular, legitimate transfers of power sanctioned by those subject to the state. As a result, the basis of rule in non-democracies always involves a much higher degree of coercion than that in democratic states. And the institutions of coercion vary little among the types of authoritarian states.

Three features of authoritarianism act as barriers to collective action. First, political activity is usually confined to membership in a single mobilization party (e.g., the communist party in China or the USSR, the Ba’ath party in Syria). Second, the mass media are usually under some
form of state control. Third, individual citizenship rights and due process are not guaranteed. By contrast, the democratic state facilitates social movement organization and mobilization: freedoms of speech, association, and the press are constitutionally guaranteed, and oppositional forms of political activism are considered legitimate.

For our study, we selected twenty-four cases of occurrence/non-occurrence of mobilization in fifteen stable non-democratic regimes. Case selection was not randomized. To obtain a random sample, we would need to enumerate, or define a population, of occurrence/non-occurrence of political mobilization in non-democratic contexts. This type of list does not exist, nor would it be feasible to compile. Like Goodwin (2000), who recognizes this problem with randomization, we select cases to maximize variation and we refrain from attempting statistical tests on our sample. All cases from our data set occur during the Cold War (1948-1989) but vary according to type of non-democratic regime (e.g., military regimes, state socialist regimes, bureaucratic authoritarian regimes) and region (including Eastern and Southern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia).

What is a case? To set boundaries around the episodes of mobilization (or their absence) we began by graphing event counts from the World Handbook III (1985) to identify mobilization peaks and troughs. For fifteen non-democracies, we plotted two variables, political contention (a composite variable that includes strikes, demonstrations, riots, and armed attacks), and net repression (the difference between the number of political sanctions imposed and the relaxation of sanctions). Once we had located the periods of contention and quiescence, we turned to the descriptive area studies literature to learn more about catalytic events (or events of major significance) that would shed light on the mobilization contents. This secondary literature usually contained area experts’ periodizations that further explained the different phases of repression and contention. Finally, where area specialists contradicted the World Handbook data, we coded our cases based on the area analysts’ writings because of well known problems with data coding in the World Handbook (Diani 1992).

**Variables**

**DEPENDENT VARIABLE.** We defined “social mobilization” as sustained collective action opposing state policies by participants drawn from non-elite or repressed segments of society. This is a broader definition than Shock uses; he requires a high numerical threshold for participation (more than ten thousand participants) (Shock 1999). Since we wanted to include semi-clandestine attempts at oppositional mobilization (e.g., human rights organizing in Latin America) and neighborhood-level mobilizations (e.g., poor people’s movements in Honduras and Iran), we opted for a more
inclusive definition. Although human rights organizing and the occupation of buildings may seem qualitatively different than the traditional indicators of mobilization (e.g., strikes, demonstrations), in authoritarian contexts, they are all manifestations of high risk/high cost political action.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES. The four dimensions of political opportunity that were first implied by Tarrow’s (1994) formulation are now regarded by many scholars as crucial factors of mobilization under authoritarianism. These are: state repression, elite divisions, influential allies, and media access/informational flow (Osa 2003; Shock 1999; Zuo and Benford 1995). These four variables were used for the initial model. After our analysis of the Romanian miners case, and cognizant of the literature’s emphasis on mobilizing structures in non-democratic contexts, we decided to include social networks in the full model (Deletant 1998; Loveman 1998; Osa 2001; Oxhorn 1991).

Since the QCA method proceeds by comparing and reducing conditions to their most parsimonious configurations, the correct selection of conditions is paramount for achieving reliable results. Thus, a short discussion on how the independent variables were identified is necessary.¹ Four factors were coded as dummy variables: elite divisions, influential allies, media access/information flow, and social networks. One condition was coded in terms of its dynamics: 0, if repression was decreasing; 1, if repression was increasing. This accords with extant research suggesting that it is not the repressive apparatus itself, but rather a change in its actions that determines the masses to mobilize (Shock 1999; Tarrow 1998).

Elite divisions (DIVELIT) were considered present if, after a review of the literature, evidence was found of competing factions within the ruling elite. Competitors within the ruling party or junta had to have a realistic chance of supplanting the faction in charge. The presence of a symbolic

¹ For the first independent variable, dynamics of repression, we plotted the times series from the World Handbook, and we took the first difference \((n−(n−1))\). We took into account both long-term trends and annual value changes. The coding was then corroborated by the area literature’s findings on changes in repression. However, for the five cases after 1982 which were not covered by the World Handbook, we had to use area-specific secondary sources to identify changes in repression. The same coding protocol was followed for media access, since the quarterly version of the World Handbook detaches this variable from the aggregated repression index. For the qualitative variables (influential ally, elite divisions, social networks, mobilization), we coded 1 for presence and 0 for absence based on information from case studies by area experts. Each of these variables was coded independently by two coders and coding discrepancies were subject to further investigation. We did not impose thresholds in order to assess the degree of presence/absence for given variables. This will be the goal of a future stage of this project in which we will apply Ragin’s “fuzzy sets” method (2000).
opposition within the polity or of powerless moderates was not enough to signal a “divided elite.”

Repression is the only variable that was measured in terms of its dynamics (DYNREPR). For each case, we calculated the net repression as a difference between the number of political sanctions and the count of relaxation of sanctions calculated from the quarterly data. We used the variable definitions specified in the World Handbook III codebook. Variable 18, “imposition of political sanctions,” includes actions taken by the government to neutralize or suppress a perceived domestic threat to the regime. The “relaxation of sanctions,” Variable 20, involves the modification or elimination of these restrictions.

Influential allies (INFLALLY) were identified also through a review of the area literature. These allies could include: religious organizations (e.g., Catholic Church in Brazil), foreign governments (US support of anti-Marcos demonstrations), international organizations (European Commission for Human Rights, UNHRC), transnational social movements (Comite para la Paz), or foreign political parties (Italian Communist Party support of Spanish opposition).

Media access/information flows (MEDACC). All of the regimes included in the study tried to control the flow of public information, often by institutionalizing censorship and permitting only state-sponsored newspapers. We assessed the degree of media access, first, by examining the World Handbook data on the imposition/relaxation of censorship. In the cases where the World Handbook indicated that censorship controls had been relaxed or imposed, we went back to the original sources of the Handbook-coded data. The original newspaper reports provided more detailed information on imprisoned journalists or other press restrictions. Finally, the secondary literature provided fuller descriptions of the political context and information flows. We coded media access as present, if: there was a sustained relaxation of state censorship, or foreign journalists publicized opposition activities through factual reporting that was rebroadcast into the country by Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, or there was an active underground press that circulated uncensored materials. Most often, we found a combination of factors increasing information flows. For example, if a regime relaxed censorship of print media, authorities usually also put less effort into jamming Radio Free Europe broadcasts. Uncensored information on contention had to be available to the general public for media access to be considered present.

Different types of social networks (SOCNET) were included in this rough measure. We coded networks present if case studies had shown that mobilization resulted from coordinated activities of specific, linked groups. For example, in the South African and the Poland cases, inter-
organizational networks were implicated in mobilization (Herbstein 1979; Hirschsohn 1998; Hirson 1979; Karis and Gerhart 1997; Osa 2003). In the Honduran and Chilean cases, area experts pointed to inter-connected, neighborhood groups relying on activists’ interpersonal and community ties to motivate collective action (Brockett 1994; King 1989; Schneider 1991).

Data Set and QCA Procedures
The Political Opportunity Structures in Non-Democracies (POSND) database (Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2001) was constructed in MS Access and structured as five inter-linked tables. The first table contained information on state/political regime characteristics, such as regime structure, and notes concerning the political parties, unions, and economic organizations that were permitted under the regime. The second table coded case characteristics, including the temporal span, number of protest events, and graphs of the quantitative variables (e.g., repression). The third table was the event protocol, detailing individual events and recording bibliographic sources for the event information. The fourth table specified how variables were coded for each of the cases; binary values for the dependent and independent variables were set and coding justifications were noted. The final form was the table source, which contained author/date information for sources that documented each variable. Our database includes twenty-four cases, drawn from fifteen non-democratic countries. Eighteen of the cases resulted in social mobilization (SOCMOB = 1) and six cases resulted in the non-occurrence of mobilization (SOCMOB = 0).

QCA takes the raw data matrix of nominal-scale variables coded in a binary form and reconstructs it as a truth table (for the data matrix, see Appendix 1). The truth table comprises a number of rows ($2^n$ where $n =$ the number of independent variables) representing all logical combinations of values on the independent variables. The number of empirical cases corresponding to each row can vary between 0 and $n$. The program first takes the raw data matrix and transforms it into a truth table in which the non-existent logical combinations are added to the empirical instances. The minimization algorithm starts with the raw data matrix and, by eliminating redundant factors via a step-wise comparison of case pairs, it produces the “prime implicants,” the minimum sets of conditions considered necessary for producing a certain outcome (0 or 1 on the dependent variable). The underlying logic of comparison for this algorithm is derived from John Stuart Mill’s methods of agreement and difference (Mill 1974).

A potential problem with this method is the existence of contradictions, i.e., a pair of cases where the same set of causal conditions leads to opposite outcomes. Ragin suggests a number of options in dealing with
this problem. The first option ignores the contradiction, given that the same set of conditions causes both a positive and negative outcome. In practice, the two contradictory cases are removed from the truth table. The second option, more generous analytically, is based on the assumption that the probability of occurrence of any given outcome in the contradiction is 0.5. Only one case from the contradictory pair is included in the truth table. So when the positive outcome is considered, the positive case is included; when the negative outcome is analyzed, the negative case is included. The third alternative is purely qualitative and consists in reexamining the contradictory cases for missed idiosyncrasies. It has the potential for adding new independent variables to the analysis. Since we had a single contradiction in our data set, we took option one and allowed the computer to ignore the contradiction for the analysis; consequently there were twenty-two cases used in configuring the truth table.

In sum, by using the Boolean methods of qualitative comparative analysis, we can manage the complexity of our cases while considering the relevant factors in all their logical combinations. We can thus identify the political opportunity configurations in authoritarian countries that appear with the occurrence of the dependent variable, social mobilization. By analyzing these conjunctions, or “prime implicants,” we generate empirically grounded hypotheses that can be tested when good quality data become available.

Results
Since the evidence of social networks’ direct contribution to political opportunity was strong for only the Romanian case, we ran the analysis twice, once with the four political opportunity variables, and a second time with social networks added to the model. With the inclusion of social networks we achieve a model that is superior to the four political opportunity variables for the following reasons. First, when the social networks variable is excluded, the number of contradictory cases increases to eleven. According to De Meur and Rihoux (2002), a large number of contradictions – 46% in the case of this model – indicates that the variable selection is problematic. Second, when we include the social

---

The first model with the four political opportunity variables is specified in QCA notation, where the plus sign represents the logical operator “or,” as follows: **SOCMOB = DYNREPR + DIVELIT + INFLALLY + MEDIAACC.** The results of QCA analysis using this model were uninterpretable, non-parsimonious, and laden with contradictions. According to De Meur and Rihoux (2002), this is an indication that the selection of variables for the model is poor. The results from this analysis are provided in Appendix 2.

The final model adds social networks and is specified as: **SOCMOB = DYNREPR + DIVELIT + INFLALLY + MEDIAACC + SOCNET.** This is the model that is used in the analysis presented in the body of the text.
networks variable and the logical cases (for which there are no empirical data) and run the strict minimization procedure, the QCA results are extremely parsimonious, resulting in only two prime implicants. Moreover, the empirical complement of the two prime implicants is identical to the logical complement. This means that the logic predicts what actually happens in our twenty-two cases. In short, when we exclude social networks, the number of contradictory cases jumps to eleven, almost half of the entire dataset, and there is a disjunction between the logical and empirical complements. For these reasons, we present below the results from the expanded model of the four political opportunity variables plus social networks. The results from the four variable model that we rejected are given in Appendix 2.

Outcome One: Social Mobilization

We first consider whether social mobilization (SOCMOB) resulted from any combination of the five independent variables: dynamics of repression (DYNREPR), divided elites (DIVELIT), influential ally (INFLALLY), media access (MEDACC), and social networks (SOCNET). In our dataset, we have eighteen cases with positive outcomes: East Germany 1953, Poland 1956, Portugal 1958, Portugal 1962, Spain 1962, Greece 1968, Honduras 1968, Poland 1968, Chile 1973, Argentina 1977, South Africa 1976, Brazil 1977, Romania 1977, Iran 1980, Chile 1983, Romania 1987, Burma 1988, and China 1989. The results of QCA truth table minimization identify four prime implicants, or combination of conditions, that are associated with the outcome, social mobilization in these eighteen cases.

This first prime implicant shows that social mobilization occurred when challengers lacked media access if an influential ally (or allies) and social networks were both present. This scenario is covered by six cases in our database: Brazil 1977, Chile 1973, Iran 1980, Poland 1968, Portugal 1958 and Portugal 1962. State control of the media was total in most cases (Chile, Brazil and Portugal); already strict censorship was increasing in Poland where foreign journalists had been expelled from the country. Ironically, censorship was mildest in Iran: although the revolutionary government controlled what was published, reports of squatters’ protests did appear in the newspapers.

Challengers’ influential allies varied somewhat across the cases. In Brazil and Poland, the Catholic Church hierarchy offered support to grassroots mobilization. International human rights organizations were active in Chile. Iranian “houses of labor,” were local institutions backed by labor.

---

3 Since East Germany is one of the contradictory cases, it is dropped from the truth table. Consequently, only seventeen cases are included in the QCA analysis of the mobilization outcome.
unions and left-wing parties; these community-based organizations supported the poor people’s housing movement (Bayat 1997). In Portugal, suppressed political parties aligned with anti-Salazar groups (Fryer and Pinheiro 1961). In general, the external allies were long-standing institutions: local, such as the Iranian houses of labor; national, as in Portuguese historic political parties; or with international connections, such as the Church and human rights organizations in Latin America. Similarly, the networks involved in these mobilizations ran the gamut, from the “passive networks” of neighborhood residents in Iran, to loose coalitions of Brazilian students and workers linked through Catholic base communities, to inter-organizational networks of faith-based groups and human rights organizations in Chile.

In sum, all the six cases share the same overall configuration of political opportunity but vary according to how the factors are expressed, especially in the types of allies and networks available to challengers. We expect that this variation would dictate differences in how allies and challengers interact, and it would also be related to the scope, size, duration and type of mobilization. Thus, while the absence of media access, availability of allies and social networks is associated with social mobilization under the first prime implicant, the form that this collective action takes varies. Specifically, social mobilization ranges from street demonstrations (Portugal, Iran), student protests (Poland, Portugal), strikes (Brazil), land and building seizures (Iran), hunger strikes and riots (Portugal), and underground human rights organizing to assist families of political prisoners (Chile).
The second prime implicant shows that social mobilization occurred when repression decreased, the ruling elites were divided, challengers had access to media and social networks were activated. This seems to be a rather common scenario found in the social movements literature (Calhoun 1994; Osa 2001). Six cases in our database exhibited this configuration: Chile 1983, China 1989, Greece 1968, Honduras 1968, Spain 1962, and Poland 1956.

This configuration starts with a lessening of repression. Decreasing repression often takes the form of a temporary reduction of regime violence due to international attention or a “thaw” in political relations stemming from such processes as de-Stalinization, détente, or perestroika. Elite divisions may occur within the ruling party (China, Poland, Spain) or the military (Chile, Honduras, Greece). Information flows increase because of coverage by the foreign press (China, Poland), Radio Free Europe or BBC broadcasts that are not being jammed (Poland, Spain), loosening restrictions on local press as part of the overall reduction of repression (Chile, Greece, Honduras, Spain), and publication of uncensored materials by émigrés abroad (Greece, Poland). Again, social networks can take a number of forms: local neighborhood networks organized by social movement groups (Chile), student networks (China, Poland, Spain) underground networks of banned organizations (Greece), and coalitions of peasant organizations (Honduras). The collective mobilizations associated with this second prime implicant took the following forms: demonstrations and protest marches (Chile, China, Greece, Poland), riots and arson (Poland), strikes (Spain, Chile), hunger strikes (China), student protests (China, Poland, Spain), and property seizures (Chile, Honduras).

The Chinese student mobilization and occupation of Tiananmen Square is a good illustration of this second prime implicant. First, in 1989, repression decreased as a result of the economic reforms of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang and a relaxation in the ideological field. Second, there was a strong division within the Communist Party elite between reformists and hard-line party elders. Third, large numbers of foreign journalists came to Beijing for the first Asian Development Bank meetings and Gorbachev’s upcoming state visit. There was some softening of state censorship; students also made use of “large character” posters and loudspeakers to broadcast information. In addition, Hong Kong news services, CNN and VOA were broadcasting reports of the students’ hunger strike and other protest events. Finally, the creation of cohesive student networks was facilitated by Beijing’s social geography that concentrated academic populations in small dormitories and neighborhoods (Calhoun 1994; Liang, Nathan and Link 2001; Zuo and Benford 1995).
The third prime implicant shows that social mobilization occurred when increased repression was imposed by a unified (at least nominally) ruling elite, and challengers lacked influential allies but had access to media. Only three cases exhibit these more restrictive conditions for mobilization: Argentina 1977, South Africa 1976, and Burma/Myanmar 1988. The tightening of already restrictive conditions in these cases by a unified elite increased a sense of injustice and focused challengers’ outrage on the authorities. The strong impetus for mobilization in the configuration stemmed from the communications media informing the public of extensive injustices and the ability of oppositional groups to use the media for organizing. The expansion of information flows took the following forms: the foreign press exposes regime violence in detailed reports (Argentina and South Africa), shortwave broadcasts of opposition radio station publicized injustices and opposition demands (South Africa), the circulation of underground press or independent publications expands rapidly (Burma, South Africa), and news of protest demonstrations appears in the official press when editors are pressured by employees at state publishing houses (Burma). The outcomes of social mobilization in these cases occurred as: demonstrations (Argentina, Burma, South Africa), boycotts (South Africa), and strikes (Burma).

The South African experience illustrates this set of conditions. Mobilization in Soweto in 1976 took place during a period of severe repression. Black leaders such as Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned since 1964 and the activities of the African National Congress were severely limited. The white ruling elite were united in support of apartheid, although leaders had begun to recognize that such a policy harmed the regime’s legitimacy. Protests began in Soweto when the government mandated the study of Afrikaans for public school students. News of the student demonstrations were broadcast on Radio Freedom, the short-wave station operated by the ANC. Besides uncensored radio broadcasts, information flows increased though the distribution of leaflets and underground literature. Foreign journalists also covered the resistance of secondary school students to the study of the Afrikaans language (Herbstein 1979; Karis and Gerhart 1997).

The fourth prime implicant is similar to the third in that an unified elite is combined with increasing repression. However, instead of media access providing a mechanism for mobilization, social networks form the basis for oppositional activity. There are two variants of this prime implicant: version a) shows the absence of media access, version b) is absent the influential ally.

This configuration begins in the same fashion as the third prime implicant: increasing repressive actions taken by an undivided elite creates social tension and enhances collective feelings of injustice. Social networks are the means through which opposition to the regime coalesces. Networks take a variety of forms: informal women’s networks (Argentina), inter-organizational networks of religious and human rights groups (Chile), multiplex labor/residential networks (Romania), and local networks of school-based, labor, and community groups (South Africa). Social mobilizations that occurred under this prime implicant included: organized assistance to victims of the regime by underground groups (Chile), strikes (Romania), protest marches and demonstrations (Argentina, Romania, South Africa), and boycotts (South Africa). An illustration of this configuration is Romania 1977, the anomalous case discussed at the beginning of this article. Here we found that despite severe and increasing repression by the Ceaușescu regime, Romanian coal miners were able to use their multiplex (overlapping) social, occupational, and residential networks to mobilize mine workers for an extensive strike. This occurred in the absence of media access, so the distribution of information (and other resources) had to occur within social networks.

Notice that a number of cases are covered by more than one function term. That is, different prime implicants can be associated with a single case. For example, the 1976 South African case is included as evidence for both the third prime implicant and the fourth prime implicant. This means that South African mobilization in 1976 resulted both from increasing repression, unified elite, media access, and no ally and from increasing repression, unified elite, social networks, and no ally. In short, the QCA analysis identifies two different configurations, or two sets of sufficient conditions, associated with mobilization in the South African case. Thus, if either the networks or media access had been absent, mobilization in Soweto still would have occurred.

Outcome Two: Social Quiescence

We now consider whether non-occurrence of social mobilization resulted from any combination of the five independent variables: dynamics of repression (DYNREPR), divided elites (DIVELIT), influential ally (INFLALLY), media access (MEDACC), and social networks (SOCNET). In our dataset, we have six cases with negative outcomes: Spain 1952, Poland 1960, South Africa 1964, Uruguay 1973, Romania 1978, and Chile 1983lcp. The results of QCA truth table minimization identify two prime implicants, or

---

4 Since Chile 1983lcp (low combative poblaciones) is the second contradictory case (paired with East Germany), it is dropped from the truth table. Consequently, only five cases are included in the QCA analysis of the no mobilization outcome.
Table 2
Prime Implicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Implicant</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOCMOBE = 0</td>
<td>N = 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1st

| dynrepr medacc INFLALLY divelit socnet |

2nd

| DYNREPR medacc infally divelit socnet |

1 Lower case notation indicates absence of the condition; upper case notation indicates presence of the condition.

2 DYNREPR = Dynamics of Repression; INFLALLY = Influential Ally; MEDACC = Media Access; DIVELIT = Division of Elites; SOCNET = Social Networks.

combination of conditions, that are associated with the negative outcome, non-social mobilization in these six cases.

The first prime implicant shows that no mobilization occurred when repression was decreasing, elites were unified, there was a lack of media access and social networks, but an influential ally was present. This configuration describes a context where a non-democratic regime whose elite is unified reduces overall repression but maintains strong control of the media. Even if an influential ally is available for challengers, absent social networks, this configuration of political opportunity is insufficient to foster mobilization. This conjuncture is represented by one case in our database, Poland 1960. In this case, Poland’s Communist leader, Władysław Gomułka, had consolidated his regime following the upheavals of 1956. By 1960, Gomułka had eliminated his rivals within the Party, lessened the repression of 1958-1959, and although the Catholic Church was available as an ally, opposition networks that had formed in 1956 had been liquidated. Poland was quiet until 1966 (Osa 2001).

The second prime implicant shows a combination of political opportunity variables that are common in repressive, non-democratic regimes. A unified elite increases repression and maintains strict control over media and information flows; challengers lack allies, oppositional networks, and media access. Sixty-seven percent of our cases of non-mobilization are covered by this function term: Romania 1978, South Africa 1964, Spain 1952, and Uruguay 1973. This finding shows that if the authoritarian state is able to maintain a unified elite and use the repressive apparatus to control the media, fragment society, and prevent challengers from finding external support, the regime will not be subject to contentious events. Such a conclusion would have come as no surprise to Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Franco, Pinochet and the numerous dictators who have historically employed this strategy.
Conclusion

QCA minimization identified four prime implicants, or specific combinations of political opportunity variables resulting in mobilization, and two prime implicants associated with its non-occurrence in authoritarian regimes. Beyond the identification and discussion of the various POS combinations, some more general conclusions can be drawn. First, we are satisfied that the five variables – dynamics of repression, divided elite, influential ally, media access and social networks – capture the significant dimensions of political opportunity in the non-democratic cases. In all the instances of social mobilization some combination of our variables were found; in all the cases of non-occurrence of social mobilization the variables were missing, with the lone exception of the influential ally. That the QCA program found only one contradiction in our data set also suggests there were no specification problems.

Second, what makes mobilization in a non-democratic context a high risk/high cost proposition is the propensity of such a regime to increase repression in order to quell contention. Paradoxically, mobilization results under increasing repression as well as under more relaxed conditions. We found that decreasing repression plays a role in creating political opportunity in one out of four possible conjunctures (prime implicant 2), although this condition might account for a larger percentage of mobilization episodes. On the other hand, increasing repression is a factor in two prime implicants (prime implicants 3 and 4 a, b). Our data provide additional cases to support Brockett’s contention that increasing repression at the beginning of a protest cycle will contribute to mobilization. However, since we do not collect data from the end of the cycle, his proposition is not falsifiable with our data set. In sum, although non-democratic regimes rely on repression to curtail political contention, our data show that this is only successful if the authorities are able simultaneously to prevent challengers’ media access and to inhibit the formation of politically-oriented social networks.

Third, social networks clearly create political opportunities as well as respond to them. Although most of the scholarly attention to networks has been on their role as “mobilizing structures” for social movements, our research suggests that networks can produce opportunities as well as spread mobilization. Where communities contain cohesive, interlocking or multiplex social networks, feelings of group identity and solidarity are enhanced. If harsh, repressive measures are imposed upon such a community and a sense of injustice grows, these solidary groups become motivated to protest, despite the odds. The networks generate resources internally (information, material supplies, protection) that are deployed in highly politicized contexts to create opportunities for action.
Finally, our analysis shows no necessary conditions of political opportunity in non-democracies. However, the four prime implicants discussed above identify different combinations, that is, four different sets of conditions considered sufficient to allow mobilization in authoritarian contexts. It is possible to reduce the prime implicants even further. We did a final QCA procedure to find the maximum reduction of political opportunity conditions. The program algorithm facilitates this by considering all the empirical cases (including the contradictions) and the subset of the logical cases that do not contradict empirical instances in the data set. This minimization algorithm identifies the key factors involved in producing the phenomena. For our dataset, these are: media access and social networks.

In conclusion: our study examined the preconditions of democratization by identifying conditions under which political opportunities arise for challengers living under (seemingly unassailable) authoritarian governments. We found that the conventional strategies of non-democratic regimes for maintaining quiescence have both a logical and empirical foundation. Yet the greatest danger to stability in non-democracy occurs when society manages to overcome internal divisions and creates links between individuals and groups. Free and uncensored media also have an important role to play in confronting authoritarianism.

The policy implications of this research are clear: if democratic governments want to encourage challenger movements within authoritarian countries, they should support cultural and educational exchanges that stimulate information flows and create networks, subsidize uncensored broadcasts such as Radio Free Europe and BBC, support émigré publications, and provide assistance to non-governmental organizations such as women’s rights groups and human rights associations that operate internationally. Conversely, our research suggests that efforts to engage non-democratic regimes economically may have little effect on stimulating democratic oppositions. Authoritarian governments have many tools at their disposal for channeling profits through state-controlled organizations or to regime cronies.

Even when supported by external allies, the political opportunity conditions are not easily produced when authoritarian governments are at the peak of their power. In fact, all the mobilizations we have studied ended with the suppression of social mobilization. Nevertheless, the long-term outlook is hopeful: despite the numerous “failures” of collective action catalogued in our database, the majority of the countries we studied are now functioning democracies.
References

AMENfTA, EDWfN AND JANE POUfLEN

ASHWfN, SARAH

BAYAT, ASEF

BRACKETT, CHARLES

CALHOUN, CRAIG

CROWLEY, STEVEN

DELLA PORTA, DONATELLA AND MARIO DIANI

DELENT, DENNIS

DE MEUR, GISÈLE AND BENOÎT RIHOUX

DENNIS, NORMAN

DIANI, MARIO

DRASS, KRISȘ AND CHARLES C. RAGIN

FRYER, PETERS AND PATRICIA MCGOWAN PINHEIRO

GLENf III, JOHN K.
GOODWIN, JEFF

HERBSTEIN, DENIS

HIRSCHSOHN, PHILIP

HIRSON, BARUCH

KARIS, THOMAS G., GERHART, GAIL M.

KING, PETER J.

KITSCHELT, HERBERT P.

KLANDERMANS, BERT

LIANG, ZHANG, COMP., ANDREW J. NATHAN, AND PERRY LINK, EDs.

LOVEMAN, MARA

MCDONALD, DOUG

MASON, T. DAVID AND DALE KRANE

MILL, JOHN STUART

MUeller, Carol
NASH, JUNE

NOONAN, RITA
1995 “Women Against the State: Political Opportunities and Collective Action Frames in Chile’s Transition to Democracy.” Sociological Forum 10:81-111.

OPP, KARI, DIETER AND WOLFGANG ROEHL.

OSA, MARYJANE

OSA, MARYJANE AND CRISTINA CORDUNEANU-HUCI
2001 Political Opportunity Structures in Non-Democracies Database [computer files]. Columbia, SC.

OXHORN, PHILIP

RAGIN CHARLES C.

RUCHT, DIETER

SANDOVAL, A.M. SALVADOR

SCHNEIDER, CATHY

SCHOCK, KURT

TARROW, SIDNEY

1985 Charles L. Taylor, Principal Investigator. 2nd ed. Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, MI.
YUN, SEONGYI

VASI, ION B.

ZUO, JIPING AND ROBERT D. BENFORD
### Appendix 1
Political Opportunity Dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>ID code</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Temporal span of the case</th>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Dependent variable Social Mobilization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dynam- ics of Repres- ession</td>
<td>Access to Influ- ential Media Ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>SP52</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1952 to 1955</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>EG53</td>
<td>East Germany</td>
<td>1953-1 to 1954-3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>PL56</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1955 to 1958</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>PO58</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1958-1 to 1958-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>PL60</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1960 to 1965</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>PO62</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1961-1 to 1962-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>SP62</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1962-1969</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>SA64</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1964 (combative poblaciones)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>GR68</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1967-1 to 1969-4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>HO68</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>1968-1976</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>PL68</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1966 to 1970</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>CH73</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1973 to 1976</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>UR73</td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1973 to 1981</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>AR77</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1976 to 1979</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>SA76</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1976-2 to 1977-2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>BR77</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1977 to 1978</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>RO77</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1977-1 to 1977-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>RO78</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1978 to 1980</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>IR80</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1979-1 to 1981-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>CH83</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1983 to 1987</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1
(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case # ID code</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Temporal span of the case</th>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamics of Repression</td>
<td>Access to Media</td>
<td>Ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>CH83-lcp</td>
<td>1983-1987</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>RO87</td>
<td>Romania 1986 to 1987</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>BU88</td>
<td>Burma/Myanmar 1988-1 to 1988-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>CN89</td>
<td>China 1989-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2
Model I – four political opportunity dimensions

Model: SOCMOB = DYNREPR + MEDACC + INFLALLY + DIVELIT

Outputs Minimized: 1

Prime Implicants

\[ \text{SOCMOB} = 1 \]
\[ N = 17 \]

1. dynrepr INFLALLY DIVELIT\(^1,2\)
2. DYNREPR medacc INFLALLY
3. DYNREPR MEDACC infially divelit

\(^1\) Lower case notation indicates absence of the condition; upper case notation indicates presence of the condition.

\(^2\) DYNREPR = Dynamics of Repression; INFLALLY = Influential Ally; MEDACC = Media Access; DIVELIT = Division of Elites.