Responses to repression

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abstract  Scholars have long been interested in explaining the effect of state repression on political participation. Yet, the core question is still unanswered: what accounts for the variation in the effect of repression? This article posits that the variation lies in the fact that people may respond differently to the same levels of repression. Therefore, to better understand political participation under repression scholars need to pay more attention to the strategic decision making of individuals. The article proposes that theorization needs to move toward predictions about individuals’ responses to repression. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature on repression, the article seeks to lay a foundation for such theorization. A number of strategies in response to repression are identified. ‘Choice points’ are applied as the base of hypotheses about why or under what conditions people choose a particular strategy to respond to repression. In doing so, this article outlines new avenues for empirical research on repression.

keywords  micro-mobilization ◆ perceived repression ◆ political participation ◆ political protest ◆ repression ◆ response to repression ◆ social movements ◆ strategy

The unexpected waves of protests across the Middle East, in 2011, have once again generated academic interest in social movements in repressive contexts. Despite the similarities in the beginning of the uprisings, their trajectories have varied greatly from country to country (Brownlee et al., 2015; Povey, 2015). In Tunisia and Egypt, repression escalated the protests and eventually led to the overthrow of longtime dictatorships. In Egypt, after two years, conflicts flared up and the elected government was ousted by a military coup. The subsequent repression radicalized the protests resulting in violent confrontations (Josua and Edel, 2015). In Syria, the substantial increase in violent repression radicalized the protestors and led to a civil war between the government and armed opposition groups (Hinnebusch et al., 2016; Leenders, 2013). In Libya, also, violent repression resulted in a civil war with foreign military intervention that ended up with the government being overthrown. In Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, harsh repression ended up with the demobilization of the movement (Holmes, 2016) and in Yemen radical groups seized power (BBC, 2014) after political concessions as a result of the 2011 popular uprising (BBC, 2011; The Guardian, 2011). Clearly, this variation in the effect of repression on social movement activities begs further understanding and explanation.

The case of the Iranian Green Movement, which emerged 16 months before the Arab uprisings, presents an even more puzzling scenario. Different repression effects on a single social movement are identifiable over four years from 2009 to 2013. The disputed June 2009 presidential elections and harsh repression afterwards sparked widespread and massive popular protests (repression caused escalation). Despite brutal policing and street clashes, massive street demonstrations took place over eight months (no effect of repression). These were followed by a vast diffusion of online activism among protestors in 2010 (repression led to a tactical shift). In 2011, after the house arrest of the movement leaders, when the state increased the level of repression, the movement saw a substantial decline in tangible activities (repression caused demobilization/deterrence). But during the 2013 presidential election campaign the movement reinvigorated by being active in support of a moderate
candidate, despite the fact that there was still severe state repression (repression led to a tactical shift from movement politics to electoral politics). Clearly, the Green Movement challenges the famous model (Johnston, 2012: 110) which suggests that if repression continues, social movements either demobilize or radicalize (Brockett, 1993).

Recent reviews on state repression have highlighted the contradictory effects of repression and note that the reasons for this variation are insufficiently studied (Davenport, 2007; Earl and Soule, 2010; Johnston, 2012). I argue that the failure to explain the variation in repression effects is largely due to inattention to the strategic choices of individuals in response to repression. This is part of a broader problem, which is, according to Earl (2011), the lack of repression research at the micro-level. Most studies on the effect of repression tend to view repression as an independent macro factor and attempt to explain the intensity and form of political participation as the function of repression (Almeida, 2008; Boykoff, 2006; Khawaja, 1993; McAdam, 1990; Rasler, 1996; Wood, 2007). While these studies enhance our knowledge on the consequences of state repression, still little is known about the mechanisms underlying the variation in the effects of repression. In fact, repression studies neglect the fact that individuals, even though embedded within similar networks and structural contexts, as they perceive and interpret repression differently, and different options are available to them, respond differently to repression.

Using the so-called Coleman boat diagram (1990), I will illustrate how the variation in the effect of repression on political participation (at macro-level; see Arrow 0 in Figure 1) depends on the underlying mechanisms and the process of individual strategic choices in response to repression (at micro-level). The boat diagram reads as follows: repression – coupled with other contextual factors – influences an individual’s motivations, perceptions and preferences (Arrow 1). Changes in motivations, perceptions and preferences influence the decision to respond to repression (Arrow 2). The aggregation of individuals’ decisions shapes public political participation (Arrow 3). In this article, I focus on Arrow 2 and the question of what the strategic choices are in responding to repression and why individuals decide to adopt a specific strategy (i.e. the mechanism behind opting for the one rather than the other strategy in responding to repression).

I argue that, to make sense of the variation in the effect of repression on political participation, theorization needs to move toward predictions about individuals’ responses to repression. This article attempts to lay the foundations for such a theorization by reviewing the scholarship on the repression–political participation relationship through the lens of the strategic choices individuals can take. Thus, the article presents an approach that puts the strategic responses of individuals at the centre of accounts of political participation where state repression exists. Attention to strategic choices as a response to repression and attempting to uncover the underlying mechanisms on the micro-level links the macro to micro (Jasper, 2004; Meyer and Staggenborg, 2012), which, as Coleman (1990) sug-
gests, provides a better understanding of macro phenomena (see also Hedström and Swedberg, 1998).

After clarifying the concepts and terms that are used in this article, I review the evidence from the literature on the effect of repression on political participation. In doing so, I argue that scholars of repression should pay more attention to strategic decisions taken at the micro-level. Then, I identify different strategies that individuals choose in response to repression. I then apply ‘choice points’ of individuals, i.e. situations or moments at which people make strategic decisions/choices to respond to repression (Jasper, 2012), to indicate where scholars should investigate to predict individuals' responses to repression. Finally, I outline a research agenda that suggests new avenues for empirical research on repression.

Definitions: repression and political participation

Throughout this article political participation, as conceptualized by van Deth (2014), refers to the voluntary activities of citizens which take place in or are targeted toward the sphere of government/state/politics. ‘State repression’ – for brevity ‘repression’ – as Davenport (2005: 122) has defined it, refers to: ‘actions taken by authorities against individuals and/or groups within their territorial jurisdiction that either restrict the behavior and/or beliefs of citizens through the imposition of negative sanctions (e.g., applying curfews, conducting mass arrests, and banning political organizations) or that physically damage or eliminate citizens through the violation of personal integrity (e.g., using torture, disappearances, and mass killing)’. From a macro-level perspective, there is a broad consensus about Davenport’s definition of repression, which refers mostly to actions by states (Earl, 2011) and rarely to non-state actions (Ferree, 2004). However, from a micro-level perspective such consensus is lacking. The conceptualization of repression is blurred and its operationalization differs. In some studies, the term repression is used to describe the assessment by individuals of state repression (Opp and Roehl, 1990) as well as the violation of human rights (Anderson et al., 2002; Booth and Richard, 1996). In other studies, perceived repression is conceptualized as the evaluation by individuals about the risk taken through their own political activities (Opp, 1994).

This blurring of concepts has led to a variation in the operationalization of repression at the micro-level. To measure perceived repression of individuals, surveys ask respondents for instance, ‘whether they [believe] the amount of violence in their society to be low, medium or high’ (Booth and Richard, 1996: 1210), or ‘[t]o what degree do [they] believe there is respect for individual human rights nowadays in [their] country’ (Anderson et al., 2002: 445), or how they evaluate police action (Opp and Roehl, 1990). On the other hand, the assessment by respondents of the risk of their actions was measured by questions asking the probability of facing some sort of ‘state repression’ such as being arrested, being hurt by security forces, and being harassed at their place of work (Opp, 1994). Moreover, some studies investigate past experience of repression, asking whether ‘in the past respondents had contact with police or security forces for political reasons such as [being] watched, questioned, instructed, taken to the police station’ (Opp, 1994). Therefore, in defining individuals’ perspective on repression I propose to disentangle experienced repression from perceived repression. I define experienced repression as the actual experience of individuals of state repression and perceived repression as the perception of individuals about obstacles and threats by the state to political participation.

From ‘the effect of repression’ toward ‘the response to repression’

Early scholars of repression effects, under the dominance of structuralist approaches – i.e. political opportunities perspective and resource mobilization theory – attempted to explain the variation in the effect of repression by examining the moderating effect of some macro variables (Davenport, 2007). Examples of such variables are the form and time lag of repression (Koopmans, 1997; Rasler, 1996), location of protest cycle (Brockett, 1993), influential allies, elite divisions, press freedom (Schock, 1999), military infrastructure (Ortiz, 2007) and political regime setting (Ortiz, 2013). However, evidence showed that those explanations were not fully convincing. In severely repressive contexts with no major structural changes in political opportunities (at the macro-level) and with no strong oppositional organizations and identifiable leaderships, movements emerged (Loveman, 1998), revolutions occurred (Kurzman, 2004; Opp and Gern, 1993; Osa, 2003; Pfaff, 1996) and even the backlash against harsh massacres unfolded (Francisco, 2004, 2005). Hence, political changes did not necessarily go hand in hand with structural changes. Nor do all individuals who experience similar structural changes display similar political participation (see also van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010; Viterna, 2006). To make sense of variation in the effects of repression, as some (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Pfaff, 1996) have suggested, in addition to factors relating to political and
social structure, it is important to pay attention to the social psychological processes. Equally important, it has been observed (Koopmans, 1993) that the effect of repression on political participation depends on activists’ choices among the different options.

The following three parts of this section describe in greater detail the necessity of moving from ‘the effect of repression’ toward ‘the response to repression’. The first part discusses perceived repression as a focal concept that enables scholars to translate the repression effect at the macro-level into the micro-level. The second part underlines the interplay between perceived/experienced repression and individuals’ participation motives at the micro-level. This suggests that in order to solve the puzzle of variation in the effect of repression, scholars should delve into the blackbox of social psychological processes. Finally, it will be argued that individuals have the capability to act independently despite repression, therefore agency should be taken into account while investigating the repression effect on political participation.

**Perceived repression**

The repression-effect question at macro-level is translated into a micro-level question, which is: Why do some people risk their lives and participate in protests under repression while others do not? This question draws scholars’ attention to perceived repression (Kurzman, 1996). Klandermans (1984) argues that participation depends on individuals’ assessment of costs against benefits. Accordingly, individuals decide to participate or not on the basis of their perceived costs/risks and benefits of participation. However, from one individual to another, the perceived costs and benefits of a certain activity can vary greatly. Therefore, perceived repression – the perception of individuals about the obstacles and threats by the state to political participation – can be unrelated to the level of state repression at the macro-level (Kurzman, 1996). As Einwohner and Maher (2011: 141) maintain, the emergence of resistance under severe repression depends on the assessment of threat by individuals. However, ‘the process by which people came to understand the threats facing them is complex’. This has two implications. Firstly, scholars should distinguish ‘objective’ repression – what states do – from ‘subjective’ repression – what individuals perceive (Kurzman, 1996; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991). Secondly, and equally important, repression scholars should pay attention to the variation in perceived repression among individuals/activists (Kurzman, 1996). Acknowledging variation in micro-level perceived repression, as Viterna (2006: 3) states, yields more accurate theories of high-risk activism and, in turn, improves our macro level understanding of the causes, successes, failures, and unintended consequences of popular revolutionary mobilization.

Initial studies on perceived repression treated it as synonymous with increasing cost, which would have a direct deterrent effect on political participation (Olson, 1965). However, as was pointed out, and cited in some examples in my introduction, the deterrence of dissidents is not the sole output of repression: it is documented that sometimes repression escalates political participation. To account for the mixed deterrence and escalation effects, others argue that state repression, although by definition it attempts to impede political participation by increasing its costs, at the same time may lead to micro-mobilization processes that increase motives for protest participation (Opp and Roehl, 1990).

**Micro-mobilization and participation motives**

Scholars have identified the motives that enhance political participation: shared grievances/interests, efficacy, ideology, social embeddedness, identity and emotions (for reviews, see van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2013; van Zomeren and Spears, 2009). Perceived repression plays a role in the relationship between each motive and political participation: it may increase grievances which invigorate participation (Almeida, 2005); it may also generate moral and social incentives to participate in protests (Opp, 1994, 2009; van Stekelenburg, 2013); or in interaction with the characteristics of social networks it may influence micro-mobilization (Loveman, 1998; Siegel, 2011). Perceived repression may instil fear or elicit anger among people. Decreasing or increasing willingness to participate depends on whether fear or anger spreads (Castells, 2012; Siegel, 2011); if fear spreads people withdraw from participation, if anger spreads they take to the streets (Klandermans et al., 2008).

Experienced repression, for its part, may both foster beliefs and ideology and increase the degree of embeddedness of individuals in political networks (McAdam, 1986, 1990); it may also forge politicized identity (Almeida, 2005; Loveman, 1998).

Therefore, the puzzle of variation in the effect of repression can partly be solved by investigating the interplay between perceived/experienced repression and individuals’ participation motives at the micro-level; by diving into the blackbox of motives, mechanisms and processes.

Yet, as Earl (2011) observed, there is less research at the micro-level on the effects of repression than at the macro-level – mainly because the data at the individual level are not easily available, particularly
in contexts of severe repression (Osa, 2003; Wood, 2007). In fact, there have been few attempts to link macro and micro within the repression effect literature (Earl, 2011). In attempting to investigate the micro-blackbox to account for the macro-puzzle of the state repression effect, many studies used micro-mobilization theories without micro-data (Almeida, 2005; Brockett, 1993; Khawaja, 1993; Rasler, 1996; Schock, 1999).

**Agency**

Not only does the unavailability of data at the micro-level in repressive contexts constrain progress in opening the micro-blackbox, even more detrimental, most studies focus on constraints on individuals and do not see individuals as having agency (but see Moghadam and Gheyanchi, 2010; Viterna, 2006).

An Iranian women rights activist, in her article on the basis of her experience states:

> [C]ampaigns such as One Million Signatures or Stop Stoning Forever [were] created after 2005, as Ahmadinejad’s government imposed difficult conditions on civil society. This repression led the women’s movement to ask many questions such as the following: What is the relationship between repression … and the appearance of social movements? Do social movements grow only under open and democratic conditions or also in contexts of oppression? This self-reflection led to the emergence of new strategies and tactics that would preserve and strengthen the Iranian women’s movement. (Abbasgholizadeh, 2014: 834)

This statement illustrates that, contrary to the expectation of the repression literature that repression is a decisive constraint on social movements, dissidents under repression have agency and can respond to repression by adopting different strategies. For example, even in the most extreme repressive conditions of the Nazi death camps or Polish ghettos during World War II, prisoners and Jews had some agency over their actions and decisions (Maher, 2010; Soyar, 2014). In Islamic societies, everyday resistance against forced veiling and gender inequality shows agency in times of repression. Women, despite authoritarian rule and without any formal movement organization, resist inequality by their day-to-day practices that yield far-reaching changes (Bayat, 2013). Moreover, despite harsh repression, opposition leaders are still able to innovate and spread tactics which lessen the risks of activities (Francisco, 2004) and make ‘massive, rapid and accelerating mobilization’, or backlash possible (Francisco, 2005: 59). This shows that despite repression (i.e. constraints) individuals have some sort of capability to act independently (i.e. agency).

To conclude, although the existing literature provides much insight into what state repression has done to political participation – mainly from the macro-level perspective – we understand little of how individuals respond to repression (Linden and Klandermans, 2006; Moss, 2014; Zwerman and Steinhoff, 2005). To better understand and improve repression theories at the macro-level, it is necessary to open the blackbox of individuals’ decisions and choices in response to repression.

**Strategies for responding to repression: beyond the dichotomy of participant and non-participant**

Most of the literature on repression effects involves the question of whether people participate in protests or not under repression. However, in a broader context than a protest, people should not be recognized solely as either participants or non-participants. In order to manage the risk of their participation, people under repression engage in a variety of activities. In fact, the dichotomy of participation or non-participation under repression tells only a part of the story. The story will only be completed if scholars consider multiple strategies that can be used by individuals to resist repression (Rossi, 2015). Strategies have been defined as ‘a plan of collective action intended to accomplish goals within a particular context’ (Maney et al., 2012: xvii): for instance, going into abeyance in order to strengthen the activist network and forge collective identity (Taylor, 1989). Rossi (2015) identified several ‘collective strategies’ that the piqueteros social movement in Argentina has adopted. In what follows, on the basis of the existing literature, I will review the different strategies movements can choose from to resist repression.

**Strategies at the meso-level**

In response to repression, some movements may reduce their activities or refrain from any activities and go underground to survive. Alternatively, others will continue and resist repression by adopting different strategies (Earl and Soule, 2010; Moghadam and Gheyanchi, 2010; Titarenko et al., 2001). To resist repression, movements can adjust the tactic, arena and issue of protests, as well as the identity, to the form and the extent of repression. Tactics refer to the forms of political action or political participation. Arenas refer to the field in which political participation takes place.

**Shifting from one tactic or form of protest to another** can be one option to continue political activities under repression (Almeida, 2008; DeNardo, 1985;
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Under repression, movements can shift arenas of resistance and choose the ones which are more difficult to control by the government or ones which have more impact on public opinion. For instance, in the early 1970s, in response to repression, New Left movements in Japan and the United States moved the resistance to the courts and prisons, went underground or into exile. In these arenas, activists were able to continue their resistance, recruit new participants, and sustain their activities and identities (Zwerman and Steinhoff, 2005).

Also, movements can continue political activities by de-identification or masking their real identity (Einwohner, 2006); particularly in non-political or so-called ‘duplicate groups’ (such as social and recreational groups, churches and religious groups, intellectual and cultural groups) (Johnston, 2012). Masking their real identity by being active with a fake account or by using online anonymity granting tools (like TOR) is a well-known strategy in online activism under repression. In the extreme case of high-cost activism, hiding the real identity is the forced choice to resist repression and continue political activism, as Einwohner (2006) describes in the context of Jewish resistance in the Aryan side of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Given that movements tend to stick to the same tactic even when this tactic has been repressed (Franklin, 2013), another choice can be circumventing repression. Earl et al. (2013) document how Twitter was used to circumvent policing surrounding the G20 meetings held in Pittsburgh in 2009.

Reformation of mobilization networks over time (network reformation) is another kind of resistance to repression (Nepstad, 2004b; Osa, 2003; Taylor, 1989). Movement leaders can strategically restructure the movement network to counter ‘the factors that foster movement exit’ (Nepstad, 2004b). Under repression, coalitions across different sectors of civil society can be formed to enhance the mobilization ability of opposition (Osa, 2003; Schock, 2005). These so-called multi-sectoral movements play a major role in mobilizing people by providing potential participants with ‘a sense of an efficacious movement with broad support across civil society’ (Almeida, 2005: 74). Under the longstanding dictatorships of Middle Eastern countries, movements also tend to form unstructured, loosely connected networks with no formal leadership, to resist repression (Bayat, 2013; Press, 2009). People also tend to be involved in personal networks in repressive times (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993).

Furthermore, people can utilize state repression and transform it into an opportunity (Moss, 2014). For instance, by reframing or publicizing repression they can enhance moral incentives (Kenney, 2001), delegitimize the state (Chang and Kim, 2007; Della Porta, 1995; Moss, 2014), or increase ideological commitments (Postigo, 2010). Reform-oriented activists can exploit repression to negotiate with the government (Moss, 2014).

The so-called brinkmanship method, i.e. intensifying activities to escalate the repression to benefit from it, can also be used by activists in response to repression (Zwerman and Steinhoff, 2005). In the presence of social norms in favour of political participation, those who were turned into martyrs and heroes give momentum to movement activities (Linden and Klandermans, 2006). This is most relevant in repressive contexts where people who experience repression problems are socially rewarded for this.

Emotion management can be utilized to encourage participation in high-risk political activities (Goodwin and Pfaff, 2001). Movements can utilize repression to intensify morally related emotions such as pride and anxiety (Jasper, 2011).

Strategies at the micro-level

Although the works cited above have uncovered many examples of strategies adopted in response to repression by social movements (at the meso-level), I suggest that this research should go one step deeper, into the micro-level. These strategies are supplied by social movement leaders and activists, but they are only influential and successful when they coincide with the demand side of political participation (Klandermans, 2004). This means they need to be accepted and adopted by individuals. In repressive contexts, we often do not see strong leaders or organizations that are very effective in forcing individuals to follow their decisions. Decision making on political activities in such contexts is characterized as non-centralized. In such contexts, individuals’ decisions to respond to repression are crucial in the outcome of repression. Individuals have a diverse array of choices available to them to respond to repression. Different strategies adopted by individuals, hence different choices made by individuals at the micro-level, can result in different effects of repression on...
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Strategies

Refrain

- Refrain from any activity
- Going underground to survive

Resist

- Tactic shift
- Desensitization of issue/demand
- Arena shift
- De-identification
- Circumvention
- Network reformation
- Reframing
- Brinkmanship
- Emotions management

The observation at macro-level

- Demobilization
- Tactical shift
- Demobilization
- Demobilization
- Demobilization
- No effect
- Demobilization
- Escalation/backlash
- Escalation

Table 1. Choices, strategies and different effects of repression at the macro-level

Social movements at the meso-level and macro-level. Table 1 presents some of the strategies which have been documented in the existing literature and have been discussed earlier. The right-hand column in Table 1 shows how the outcome of adopting those strategies will be observed at the macro-level. For instance, shifting tactics, arena, issues and identity by individuals, at first sight, from a macro-perspective, would make it seem the protest was demobilized or dead. In fact, most quantitative indices of political protests ‘have ignored both the identity of the participants and the character of their demands’ (DeNardo, 1985: 5). Therefore, if movement activists continue their activities under another identity or strategically change the issue of their demands, it will be neglected by studies focusing on a certain issue/identity or overlooking the micro-level. As can be seen in Table 1, strategies can be diverse and consist of different elements. Therefore, we need to scrutinize the mechanisms underlying people’s strategic choices under repression.

‘Choice points’: windows to look into the blackbox

Each strategy has its associated risks, costs and benefits, can be coherent with the cultural environment, ideology or beliefs, and can be congruent with the shared identity or not (Bernstein, 1997; Moghadam and Gheytanchi, 2010). As such, strategies stem from ‘choice points’, defined by Jasper (2012) as moments or situations when people can choose to do something different and face alternatives. These choice points are dilemmas that an individual must solve with regard to how to respond to repression. The outcome of individuals’ choice points determines the strategies that they adopt and consequently the repression they experience. Following Jasper (2012), I suggest that in order to better understand how individuals respond to repression, more attention should be given to choice points and how individuals resolve the dilemmas embedded in these choice points.

Figure 2 presents the schematic pathway of choosing strategies in response to repression. Focusing on the path of resisting repression by participation in political actions, three sets of choice points are identifiable. As I explained previously, one of the strategic decisions that any individual who faces repression should make is either to accept it and refrain from activities or to reject it and resist (Choice Point 1). Many of the repression studies at the micro-level focus on this choice point: participate or not. Once people opt to resist repression, they can choose between available strategies (Choice Point 2). However, the choices are more diverse and activities are broader – like some of the common strategies outlined in the previous section. One sort of strategy is shifting forms of political activities.
This is a strategic choice, not only in terms of the available tactics but also in which arena the struggle is fought out, what identity is deployed and which issue is targeted (Bernstein, 1997; Klandermans, 1984: 588; Meyer and Staggenborg, 2012: 6).

Clearly, choosing among tactics and arenas is interrelated. Some tactics can be undertaken only in certain arenas. People can also innovate new tactics (McAdam, 1983) and spot new arenas for the field of political action. For instance, during the 2009 post-election protests in Iran, in spite of severe repression of any opposition and the official news and information channels, various kinds of protests undertaken by ordinary citizens took place, such as shouting ‘Allahu akbar’ on rooftops (Honari, 2013).

In the sections that follow, I discuss two main elements of Choice Point 3, tactics and arenas, in more detail, as examples of applying a strategic approach, to better understand responses to repression.

**Tactic as choice point**

Several studies show that state repression led social movements to shift from one tactic to another (Almeida, 2008; Francisco, 1995, 1996; Lichbach, 1987). Up to the present, much of the research on ‘tactical shift’ has tended to focus on shifting toward radical tactics. Evidence for shifting from non-violent to violent tactics as a result of repression is found in different contexts, such as the former GDR and Czechoslovakia (Francisco, 1995), Northern Ireland (White, 1989, 1993), 1970s El Salvador (Almeida, 2008), Peru and Sri Lanka (Moore, 1998), South Asia (Boudreau, 2002), the Palestinian Intifada/Palestinian–Israeli conflict (Araj, 2008) and China (O’Brien and Deng, 2015). These findings are in line with Goldstein’s (1983: 340) proposition that ‘those countries that were consistently the most repressive, brutal, and obstinate in dealing with consequences of modernization and developing working-class dissidence reaped the harvest by producing
oppositions that were just as rigid, brutal, and obstinate. Despite considerably lower levels of repression, the shift from non-violent to violent tactics following increasing repression is also documented in democratic Western European societies (Francisco, 1996; Kriesi et al., 1995).

Studies investigating tactical shift beyond the dichotomy of non-violent and violent tactics are rare (for exceptions, see Boudreau, 2002; Moghadam and Gheytanchi, 2010). Rasler (1996), in his study on the repression effect in Iran’s 1979 revolution, has taken into account the interplay of demonstrations, strikes and repression/concession. In reality, when people face repression in staging or adopting a certain tactic, they choose other tactics. This choice is not limited to moving from non-violent to violent tactics. As Francisco (1995: 268) noted, ‘[i]f street demonstrations incur danger, mobilize quietly among workers and use the strike weapon. If the strike brings severe coercion, find a refuge that offers mobilization potential, for example, a church (mosque)-based group’.

Within the repression literature, research on tactical shift is often motivated by the implicit belief that individuals’ tactics are dependent on individuals’ perceptions about the costs of participation (Lichbach, 1987; Meyer and Tarrow, 1998). As a result, there has been, so far, a tendency to explain the dominance of a tactic adopted by an individual or a social movement in a particular time period as a function of repression. For instance, in outlining the diffusion of clandestine activities, it is argued that an increase in the costs of non-violent activities lead people to either refrain from any activities or pursue clandestine activities to avoid the cost associated with the other activities. With this approach, sustained repression unavoidably ends up with a tactical shift of a group of committed radicalized activists to violent activities (Lichbach, 1987). In a similar vein, comparing Italy and Germany in the 1970s, Della Porta (1995: 80) concludes that ‘repressive, diffuse, and hard techniques of policing tend to ... discourage mass and peaceful protest while fueling the most radical fringes’.

However, studies show that individuals sometimes choose tactics independent of repression, or at least other factors contribute to their tactical choice. Schock (2012) maintains that Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) strategically chose non-violent resistance over violent tactics or even everyday forms of resistance. Their preference is rooted in the ideology of the movement; not dependent on the level of repression. One study that considers different tactics under repression builds upon the assumption that people may purposively adjust the forms of their participation or tactics in relation to the form and extent of repression (Titarenko et al., 2001). The conventional account of tactical shifts takes us away from the wider and more complex views of social movements’ responses to repression. Focusing on tactical choice points is necessary both to account for the variation in the effect of repression and to be able to consider the broader range of tactics that individuals in repressive contexts may adopt. That is a prerequisite for understanding and explaining the rise and fall of forms of political participation over time and across space.

As Meyer and Tarrow (1998: 22) state, ‘challengers will adopt the form of claims making that they believe to be most effective and least costly’. Therefore, individuals do not select their political participation solely on the basis of perceived repression; choices are also influenced by individuals’ assessment of individual and group efficacy. Opp (2009) discusses the interdependency of willingness to participate on repression and efficacy. In choosing the one or the other tactic, perceptions of individual/group efficacy combined with the perceived repression shape the choice of an individual. Efficacy can play a crucial role in the choice point of individual strategy. Soyar (2014: 53) found that in extremely repressive contexts, such as the Holocaust, the emergence of collective action is probable when ‘individual strategies are deemed less effective in protecting the immediate social network than joining collective action’. Indeed, the expectation about the probability of success of individuals’ own contribution, as well as the expectation about group success to achieve their goal, influence individuals’ decision to adopt a certain tactic (Klandermans, 1984).

Efficacy is not the only crucial factor in adopting tactics (Nepstad, 2004a) in response to repression. Other factors independently or in combination with efficacy can contribute in opting for one tactic over another. For instance, although individuals’ perception of efficacy can lead activists to non-violent over violent activities or vice versa (Tausch et al., 2011), political culture (Taylor and van Dyke, 2004) can influence the very perception of efficacy. In his study on the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), White (1989) shows that support for political violence results from a conscious decision that occurs when people come to see peaceful protest as ineffective. On the other hand, Irish Republicans deemed violent activities effective as a result of their political culture: since, ‘the violence of their parents had made Ireland ungovernable and forced the British to withdraw from a large portion of the island’ (White, 1993: 172). Abrahmian (2009) demonstrates that the Iranian 1979 revolution resorted to non-violent tactics despite severe repression, mainly because of the strategic choice of leaders to avoid armed
the following section.

Choosing between movement and electoral arenas in movement for global justice. I will elaborate on their studies on global movements – specifically the movement by Della Porta and her colleagues (2006) in the internet in response to repression has been documented by Della Porta and her colleagues (2006) in their studies on global movements – specifically the movement for global justice. I will elaborate on choosing between movement and electoral arenas in the following section.

Along with tactical choices, arena is another element of strategic choice (see Choice Point 3 in Figure 2). The concentration of political activities may move into arenas such as prisons, exile, elections and courts and politicize those arenas in response to repression. O’Hearn (2009) shows how Irish political prisoners strategically made prisons a resistance arena to create solidarity and a culture of resistance to invigorate political activities against the British regime in Ireland during the late 1970s. Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) similarly demonstrate that New Left activists in Japan and the US, who were the most immediate target of repression, transferred their resistance into new arenas of the courts and exile. This response to repression enabled them to sustain their activism within the New Left movement and beyond. An arena shift from the street to the internet in response to repression has been documented by Della Porta and her colleagues (2006) in their studies on global movements – specifically the movement for global justice. I will elaborate on choosing between movement and electoral arenas in the following section.

### Arena choice point

Electoral politics is also an arena that can be chosen by activists in strategic response to repression. Not only can election boycotts be used as a means to delegitimize the repressive government, voting can also be an option to decrease repression by supporting moderate candidates. The latter can be an option even in less competitive elections – where pro-democracy movements do not have their own candidate – by voting for the lesser of two evils. Oppositions can also be engaged in electoral campaigning to revive the movement and rebuild its networks. Elections are arenas that can reinvigorate political activities or bring social movements closer to their goals. In fact, fraudulent elections can alter individuals’ participation motives and spur massive protests, as vividly evidenced by the Green Movement in Iran, and the so-called Coloured Revolutions in post-communist countries (Tucker, 2007).

Within the social movement literature, research on the topic of repression tends to neglect elections as well as institutionalized activities. This inattention makes sense when we acknowledge that social movement scholars have often focused on more disruptive forms of collective action and left little room for electoral politics (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010). However, at the same time, it is unwarranted, given that election outcomes, on the one hand, can have an impact on repression and democratization (Davenport, 1997). On the other hand, there are important linkages between social movements and elections (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010, 2013), because elections, even if unfair and unfree, can have positive consequences for democratization and pro-democracy movements through massive protests in the aftermath of elections (Beaulieu, 2014; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006) or votes per se that unseat the incumbent (Howard and Roessler, 2006). The interaction of elections and repression is also an essential part of the process of fragmentation and radicalization within social movements. Kriesi and colleagues (1995) found, in the German and Dutch protest waves of the 1980s, the pattern of turning from disruptive but non-violent activities to a twin process of institutionalization and radicalization as a result of selective state repression on radicals and facilitation toward moderates.

Even during the transition time from dictatorship toward democracy, elections play a major role to absorb armed insurgents or rebellion groups to political parties (Almeida, 2008: 189). In the repressive context of China, in regions where voting is taken seriously by government and people, rightful resistance appears to be increasing (O’Brien and Li, 2006:...
53). Electoral routes and elections are broader than voting and participating in elections. There is always a choice to shift from non-institutionalized activities (movement politics) to institutionalized activities (electoral politics) or vice versa.

Indeed, the interrelation of social movements and repression is substantially influenced by elections, which needs to be considered if one seeks to have a fuller understanding of social movements under repression. Yet, there is not yet much systematic work on the interaction of repression and social movements with regard to elections. A few studies investigate the effect of repression on electoral attitudes of voters (Longo et al., 2014), while ignoring social movements. Others who study the interrelationship of movement activities and electoral activities of individuals do not pay attention to repression.

Conclusion and discussion

This article aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of repression and political participation. In addition to offering a review of the existing literature on repression, I argued for an approach that would lay the foundation for explaining individuals’ choices of a particular strategy in response to repression. First, I brought together the evidence that demonstrates that people may choose different strategies in response to repression. I then brought to the fore the ‘choice point’ in repression research as the basis for investigation and hypotheses about why or under what conditions people choose a particular strategy to respond to repression. The third choice point, which includes the two sub-choice points of tactic and arena choice, was discussed in more detail to show the merits of the strategy approach for the repression literature. As the bulk of this literature overwhelmingly focuses on simply desisting from or continuation in participation, this approach gives an opportunity to observe more diverse responses to repression. The article demonstrated that there is a shift possible from movement politics to electoral politics, from one tactic to another, or adopting strategies such as de-identification as a response to repression, through the deliberate decision making of individuals.

In most of the existing research on repression, power and agency are largely attributed to states, but not social movements and individuals (Zwerman and Steinhoff, 2005). By shifting the attention from state repression and the victimization of people toward people’s decisions and their agencies (Zwerman and Steinhoff, 2005: 90) the strategy approach helps to see states and dissidents equally as strategic actors; hence, it provides an opportunity to better predict political changes under repression. Moreover, focusing on strategies also provides a broader picture of activities under repression and includes activities that are not public and disruptive but widespread and crucial. These less known activities do not appear on the radar without focusing on the micro-level (Johnston, 2012). Finally, in responses to repression, linking the micro-level decisions of individuals to the macro-level of state repression leads scholars to better understand the interplay of constraint and agency (Jasper, 2012: 39). By acknowledging the variety of strategies, future research could concentrate on the social psychological motives, mechanisms and processes by which people adopt particular strategies to respond to repression.

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**résumé** Les chercheurs ont depuis longtemps tenté de comprendre l’effet de la répression étatique sur la participation politique. Pourtant la question demeure entière : Qu’est-ce qui explique la variation dans l’effet de la répression? Cet article suggère que cette variation réside dans le fait que les individus réagissent différemment à un même niveau de répression. Afin de mieux comprendre la participation politique dans un contexte répressif, les chercheurs doivent centrer l’analyse sur le processus de prise de décision stratégique des individus. Cet article propose de déplacer le regard sur les prédicitions des réponses individuelles à la répression. En faisant une revue de la littérature, cet article vise à construire de nouvelles bases théoriques sur la répression étatique. Nous énumérons une série de stratégies et identifions les ‘points de décision’ pour tenter d’expliquer pourquoi et sous quelles conditions les individus préconisent certaines stratégies plutôt que d’autres face à la répression. L’article se conclut en proposant de nouvelles avenues de recherche empirique sur la répression.

**mots-clés** micro-mobilisation • mouvements sociaux • participation politique • protestation politique • reponses à la répression • répression • repression perçue • stratégie

**resumen** Desde hace tiempo la academia ha mostrado interés por explicar el efecto de la represión estatal sobre la participación política. Sin embargo, la pregunta clave sobre el tema sigue sin respuesta: ¿Qué explica la variación en los efectos de la represión? Este artículo propone que la susodicha variación se produce debido a que es posible que la gente responda de formas diferentes a los mismos niveles de represión. Por lo tanto, para comprender mejor la participación política bajo los efectos de la represión, la investigación académica debe prestar más atención a la toma individual de decisiones estratégicas. El artículo propone que la teorización necesita avanzar hacia predicciones sobre respuestas individuales a la represión. A través de una exhaustiva revisión de la literatura existente sobre represión, el artículo busca sentar las bases para tal esfuerzo teórico. Se identifican una serie de estrategias de respuesta a la represión y se aplican ‘puntos de elección’ como base de las hipótesis sobre por qué o bajo qué condiciones las personas eligen una determinada estrategia en respuesta a la represión. De esta forma, este artículo dibuja nuevas vías para la investigación empírica sobre la represión.

**palabras clave** estrategia • micro-mobilización • movimientos sociales • participación política • protesta política • represión • represión percibida • respuesta a la represión