

# **Russian Security State**

GOVT-5519 / IPOL-3519 / REES-5519

## Lecture 09. Backgrounder. Repression

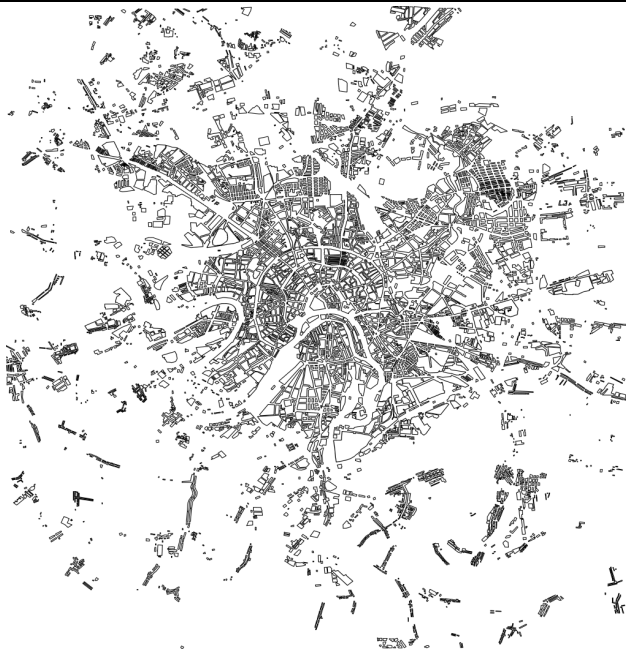
Yuri M. Zhukov  
Associate Professor  
Georgetown University

October 3, 2024

## Today's objectives

1. *Define*: what repression is
2. *Explain*: why states repress
3. *Explore*: effect of repression on dissent

Why repress?  
Does repression work?



Why repress?  
Does repression work?



**Definition:**

repression = use of violence and intimidation  
to maintain political power



Figure 3: NKVD

## Why repression is important

- repression is a leading cause of death
- over 169 million people killed by own governments or occupying powers in 20th century (Rummel 1994)

REGIMES	YEARS	TOTAL
<b>MEGAMURDERERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>151,491</b>
<b>DEKA-MEGAMURDERERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>128,168</b>
U.S.S.R.	1917-87	61,911
China (PRC)	1949-87	35,236
Germany	1933-45	20,946
China (KMT)	1928-49	10,075
<b>LESSER MEGAMURDERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>19,178</b>
Japan	1936-45	5,964
China (Mao Soviets) [3]	1923-49	3,466
Cambodia	1975-79	2,035
Turkey	1909-18	1,883
Vietnam	1945-87	1,670
Poland	1945-48	1,585
Pakistan	1958-87	1,503
Yugoslavia (Tito)	1944-87	1,072
<b>SUSPECTED MEGAMURDERERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>4,145</b>
North Korea	1948-87	1,663
Mexico	1900-20	1,417
Russia	1900-17	1,066
<b>CENTI-KILOMURDERERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>14,918</b>
TOP 5	1900-87	4,074
China (Warlords)	1917-49	910
Turkey (Atatürk)	1919-23	878
United Kingdom	1900-87	816
Portugal (Dictatorship)	1926-82	741
Indonesia	1965-87	729
<b>LESSER MURDERERS</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>2,792</b>
<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	<b>1900-87</b>	<b>169,202</b>

Figure 4: Heavy toll

## What kind of violence and intimidation?

Violations of *personal integrity rights*  
(i.e. threat or harm to physical body)

Repression is *coercive*

1. Deterrence logic
  - persuade passive opponents to not challenge state
  - make alternative more costly than status quo
2. Compellence logic
  - persuade active opponents to stop challenging state
  - make status quo more costly than alternative

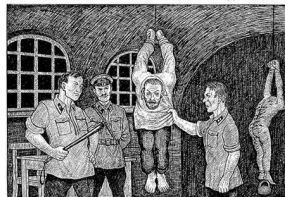


Figure 5: Yes, it adds up

## Examples

1. Disappearances
  - people have disappeared
  - political motivation likely
  - victims have not been found
2. Extrajudicial killings
  - killings of individuals without due process of law
3. Political imprisonment
  - incarceration of people for
    - non-violent opposition, speech
    - political/religious beliefs
    - non-violent religious practices
    - membership in political/ethnic/religious group
4. Torture
  - purposeful inflicting of extreme physical/mental pain
  - cruel or degrading treatment
  - deaths in custody

*Работники НКВД при допросах, врагов народа\* применяли старорусскую пытку-дыбу...*



*Узаконенный И.Сталиным и Генеральным прокурором СССР Я.Вышинским допрос 3-й степени позволял выколачивать любые показания у „врагов народа“ на себя и других лиц, многие, чтобы избежать себе от дальнейших пыток, признавались в шпионаже, диверсии, заговоре и т.д., сознательно шли под расстрел в убийном цехе УЧУ НКВД...*

Figure 6: Dyba



## Violence and intimidation by whom?

Incumbent political authorities

1. State actors

- law enforcement
- intelligence agencies
- military

2. Non-state actors

- pro-regime militias
- mercenaries
- 'goons'



Figure 7: Police



Figure 8: Also police?

## Violence and intimidation against whom?

Opponents of incumbent political authorities

1. Institutional opponents
  - political parties
  - rival elites
  - NGOs
  - peaceful protesters
2. Non-institutional opponents
  - insurgents
  - terrorists
  - rioters
  - violent protesters

*Repression vs. civil war*

- repression can occur outside of civil war
- civil war can't occur without repression  
(unless there's no government to defend)



Figure 9: Protestors



Figure 10: Guerillas

## Summary

---

*Repression*

---

Actor:	Incumbent political authorities
Target:	Suspected opponents of the incumbent authorities
Action:	Use or threat of physical violence
Context:	Peacetime or wartime

---

*Discussion:*

Where to draw the line between **repression** and **law enforcement**?

- what if political opposition = crime under law?
- what if criminal organization is seeking to supplant or replace the government? (e.g. Pablo Escobar)
- what if a political opponent is prosecuted for a non-political crime?

# Why repress?

## Threat perceptions

## External threats to the state

### The “Fifth Column”

1. Logic
  - states target real or potential agents of foreign powers (spies, saboteurs, traitors, collaborators)
  - can occur in wartime or peacetime
2. The problem
  - insufficient as explanation (some states do this more than others)
  - and limited ('5th column' is small subset of repression)



Figure 11: Red scare

# Internal threats to the state

## Domestic Security Threats

### 1. Logic

- states repress to prevent/stop behavior that threatens
  - individual leaders
  - incumbent regime
  - government personnel
  - political system
  - economy
  - lives, beliefs, and livelihoods of constituents

### 2. The problem

- almost every state faces some challenge like this
- some repress, others don't
- *what matters more*: type of threat or type of state?



Figure 12: So many enemies



# Internal threats to the state

## Types of threat

1. How high is the destructive potential?
  - violence, property damage
  - vs.
  - traffic delays, noise complaints
2. How large is the support base?
  - mass popular support
  - vs.
  - political fringe
3. How frequent are the threatening acts?
  - sustained, long-term
  - vs.
  - periodic, isolated, rare
4. Where is the threat located?
  - center vs. periphery
  - high vs. low visibility areas



Figure 13: Threatening

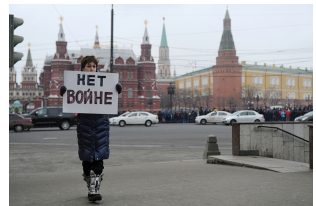


Figure 14: Less threatening

## Institutional constraints

## International institutions

### Human rights treaties

#### 1. Logic

- signatories agree domestic human rights practices
- violation prompts sanctions from 3rd parties, other costs
- states that sign/ratify HR treaties less likely to repress

#### 2. The problem

- selection effects  
(are more repressive states less likely to sign in first place?)
- requires robust enforcement mechanism (credible threat)

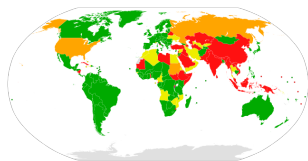


Figure 15: ICC members

# Economic interdependence

1. Logic #1: **Foreign investment**
  - investing in repressive states bad for business (divestment campaigns, boycotts)
  - countries reliant on foreign capital less likely to repress
2. Logic #2: **International trade**
  - more economic growth → less protest → less need for repression
  - diffusion of norms
3. Logic #3: **Economic sanctions**
  - sanctions cause hardship → government changes policy
4. The problem
  - effect varies across sectors
  - little empirical evidence that sanctions reduce repression



Figure 16: Magnitskiy

## Regime type

### Domestic democratic peace

1. Logic #1: **accountability**
  - repressive leaders are voted out
2. Logic #2: **norms**
  - democracies value free speech, tolerance, civil liberties
3. Logic #3: **institutions**
  - democracies provide venue for peaceful articulation of demands, corrective feedback
4. The problem
  - constraining effect varies by repression type
  - democracy is no panacea

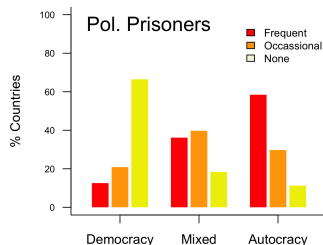


Figure 17: Fewer prisoners

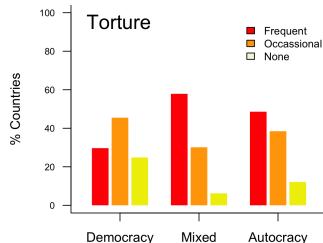


Figure 18: Plenty of torture

# Does repression work?

## What are the consequences?

does repression

- ☐ deter political opposition?
- ☐ escalate it?
- ☐ curvilinear effect?
- ☐ no effect?



Figure 19: King of the Ashes

## Theory 1: **Deterrence**

- repression raises costs of dissent
- and amplifies collective action problems for opposition

more repression → less dissent

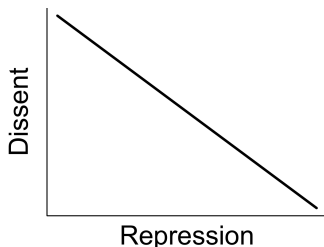


Figure 20: Deterrence



## Theory 2: **Alienation**

- repression radicalizes opponents
- and solves collective action problems for opposition (backlash mobilization)

more repression → more dissent

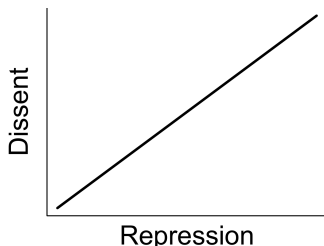


Figure 21: Alienation

### Theory 3: **Inverted-U hypothesis**

- repression alienates
- but there is a threshold level of repression, beyond which opposition becomes unable to recruit and resist

“half-measures” → more dissent  
mass repression → less dissent

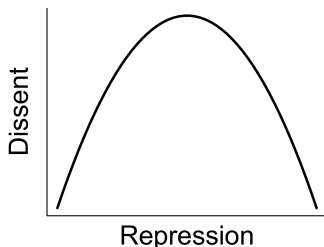


Figure 22: Inverted-U

## Case study: Chechnya

## Background: Caucasus Wars

1. 1816:  
Aleksy Yermolov becomes viceroy,  
begins conquest of N. Caucasus
2. 1817-1864:  
Caucasian Imamate vs. Russia  
→ mass resettlement, genocide
3. 1921-1926:  
Akushinskiy insurgency vs. Bolsheviks  
→ forcible disarmament
4. 1940-1944:  
Islrailov insurgency vs. Soviets  
→ mass deportation to Central Asia
5. 1989: Chechens return home



Figure 23: Map of Caucasus

## 1st Chechen War, 1994-96

### 1. Prelude

- 1991: Chechnya declares independence
- Yeltsin ignores this at first
- low-level Chechen civil war

### 2. Main phase

- 1994: troops sent to restore order
- catastrophic Russian losses
- poor intelligence, heavy air power, indiscriminate artillery shelling

### 3. Settlement

- 1996: separatists recapture Grozny
- Russia signs peace agreement
- Chechnya becomes de facto independent



Figure 24: Restoring order



Figure 25: And leaving

## 2nd Chechen War, 1999-2011

### 1. Prelude

- 1997: Chechen leadership splits
- rise of Salafi-Jihadis
- 1999: Basayev, Khattab invade Dagestan to create Islamic state

### 2. Main phase

- 1999: Russia invades Chechnya
- 2000: Russia takes Grozny, cities
- 2000-2011: guerrilla war in forests, Russian indiscriminate reprisals

### 3. No settlement

- 2004: Russia enlists former rebels (Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov)
- "Chechenization" of conflict
- violence becomes more selective
- Chechnya becomes police state



Figure 26: Old friends

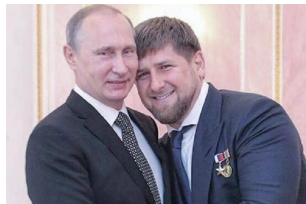


Figure 27: New friends

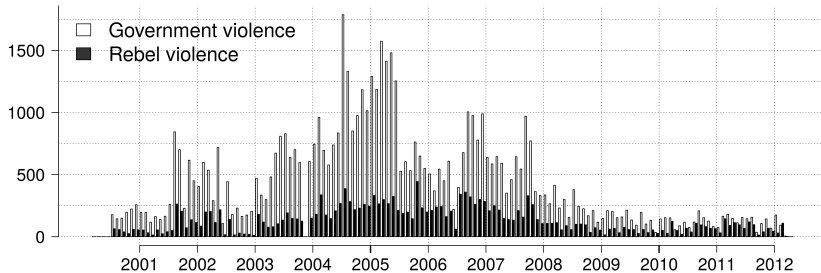


Figure 28: Government and rebel violence over time

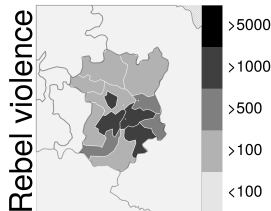


Figure 29: Insurgency

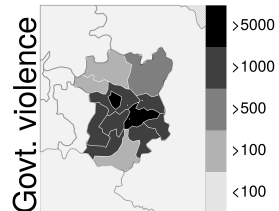


Figure 30: Counterinsurgency

## What do the data tell us?

1. Threshold effect exists
  - government violence alienates at low levels, deters at high levels
2. Reaching the threshold is hard
  - in most cases, Russian violence was below the threshold level
3. Threshold level depends on tactics
  - selective tactics: lower threshold
  - indiscriminate: high threshold

What does finding #3 suggest about effectiveness of “Chechenization”?

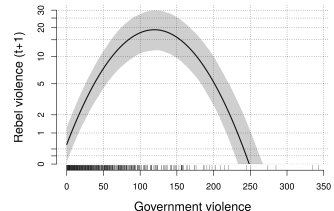


Figure 31: Polynomial model

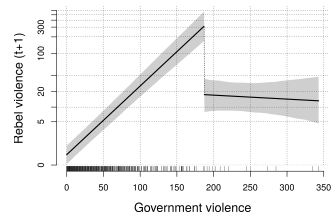


Figure 32: Threshold model



## Cross-national evidence

## Evidence from armed conflicts around the world, 1989-2019

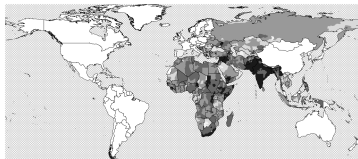


Figure 33: ACLED (100 countries)

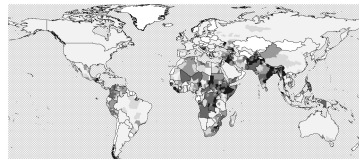


Figure 35: GED (121 countries)



Figure 34: PITF (132 countries)

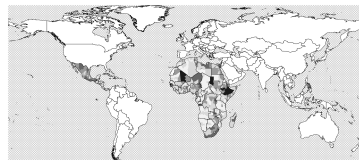


Figure 36: SCAD (60 countries)

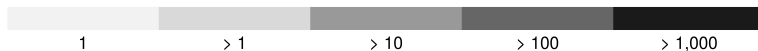


Figure 37: Number of violence events per province

## What do the data tell us?

1. Threshold effect exists
  - $\wedge$ -shaped curve in 60%–96% of cases, depending on data source
2. Level of repression needed to reach threshold varies from case to case
  - some reach it after  $< 10$  operations/month
  - others reach it after  $> 200$
3. Repression still often inflammatory
  - $\nearrow$ -shaped in 0%–12% of cases

Threshold is lower where:

1. Government has better information
2. Opponents cut off from foreign support
3. Opponents are silenced
4. Government signed human rights treaty

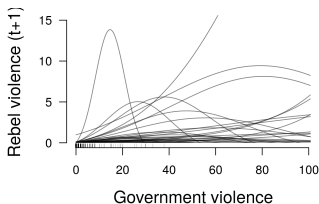


Figure 38: Polynomial model

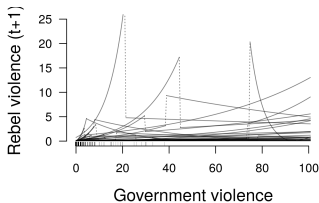


Figure 39: Threshold model

*Discussion:*

How to avoid creating a police state?

- is there always a trade-off between reducing government violence and preserving civil liberties?
- can you think of any countries that have avoided this pattern?

# NEXT MEETING

## *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (Tu, Oct. 8)

- Chechnya deep dive
- things to consider:
  - how much continuity/change do you see between Russia's approach to counterinsurgency in Chechnya and past campaigns (e.g. Western Ukraine after WWII)?
  - how has Russia's approach in Chechnya differed from U.S. approach in Iraq, Afghanistan?