State Violence and Oppositional Protest in High-Capacity Authoritarian Regimes

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This examination of the mobilization-repression nexus in high-capacity authoritarian regimes draws on examples from China, Russia, Iran, and several Middle Eastern states to develop a framework for analyzing state violence and how political oppositions are organized. The study examines middle and low levels of state violence, the provincial and municipal organization of party and regime, and the police, private militias, and thugs as low-level enforcers, and focuses on: (1) the complexity of the state's apparatus of repression and control and how different levels exercise different forms of violence against activists; (2) the creativity of the opposition's actions to voice its demands and avoid repression and surveillance; and (3) the recursive relationship between the two, a dark dance between state and opposition with high stakes for both. Hierarchical analysis at national, provincial, and local levels, and lateral analysis across these levels, where elite interests frequently diverge, show that intersections and gaps on both axes can create lapses in social control and openings the opposition. These free spaces of speech and innovative action give rise to novel ways to keep oppositional sentiments in the public forum. The article offers several propositions for analyzing repression and state violence at various levels, and, similarly, the various ways that these free spaces occur.

In the late 1980s, Chechen nationalism was moderate, focusing on democratic reforms, cultural traditions, and bringing to light the history of Soviet repression. But in the early 1990s, sectors of the movement proposed a separatist agenda (Bohlen 1991). In the late summer of 1991, just a few months after the attempted coup d'etat by communist hardliners in the Moscow, a newly elected Chechen government began to take steps towards independence. The Russian state responded by invading the region with great brutality in winter 1994–95. Russian planes bombed the capital of Grozny, and towns and villages suspected of being rebel strongholds were razed. Households with young males who might support the insurgency were terrorized (Gall and de Wall 1998; Dunlop 1998). This first war was fought to a stalemate, but in October 1999 Russia again invaded with overwhelming military power. What remained of Grozny had been turned into a wasteland by December (Hughes 2007, 113; see also Tishkof 2004; German 2003). The indiscriminate and widespread use of force against the civilian population has been called genocidal, especially "indiscriminate bombardment and well-documented cases

of massacres" (Hughes 2007: 161). Putin's promise to "waste them to the shithouse" was fulfilled, and offers an earthy description of one way that state violence can occur – military action decided by high-level state elites.

Contemporary Russia gives us another example of state violence, but this time occurring at a lower analytical level. Mikhail Beketov, editor of a local newspaper in Khimki, a suburb of Moscow, had written often about the corruption of local officials, and had been warned to stop. In spring, 2008 he called for the resignation of the city's leadership, and a few days later a bomb destroyed his car (Levy 2010). Shortly thereafter, he was attacked leaving his home. The beating was so savage that his leg and several fingers had to be amputated. Brain injuries were so severe that he can barely utter simple sentences to this day. Although police promised a thorough investigation, the case remains unsolved. According to one observer:

> These types of attacks or other means of intimidation, including aggressive efforts by prosecutors to shut down news media out-

lets or nonprofit groups, serve as unnerving deterrents. And in a few cases, in recent years the violence in the country has escalated into contract killings. Corruption is widespread in Russia, and government often functions poorly. But most journalists and nonprofit groups shy away from delving deeply into these problems. (Levy 2010, A4)

They shy away because violence by state agents is a palpable reality. Other reporters and editors have been beaten and/or arrested on inflated charges. In the extreme, they have been murdered by contract killers. Anna Politkovskaya's assassination in 2006 is widely known, but there have been numerous others. One plausible estimate holds that over one hundred newspaper reporters and editors have been murdered since 2000 (Levy 2010).

This article develops a rubric for analyzing state violence at various levels, and, similarly, the various dimensions by which political opposition is organized. It offers preliminary rumination on the richness and diversity of political oppositions that builds on a small literature on "micromobilization" and "dissident networks" (Opp and Roehl 1990; Opp and Gern 1993; Johnston 2005) and, similarly, on a literature on the states' multileveled efforts at social control (Ferree 2005; White and White 1995; Carley 1997). It offers, in part, a contrast to approaches that see the protest mobilization-repression nexus as more or less straightforward reflections of costs, benefits, opportunities and thresholds for action. Approaching this goal from a broad comparative perspective of several different authoritarian states, I focus on three dimensions relevant to levels and forms of state violence: (1) the complexity of state's apparatus of repression and control and how different levels exercise variable forms of violence against activists, either to shut down protests or to prevent them from materializing through fear and intimidation; (2) the creativity of the opposition's actions to voice its demands and avoid repression and surveillance; and (3) the recursive and iterative relationship between the two, a dark dance between state and opposition with high stakes for both.

First, regarding the state, I argue that its repressive violence is best conceptualized according to a hierarchy of repressive administration. This includes, not just national-level military or security-force repression, as in Chechen case, or in

Syria throughout 2011 and 2012, but also personal-level thuggery against reporters, dissidents, and vocal citizens, as in the Russian example, or as commonly reported by Egyptian activists before Murbarak's fall, or today, by Chinese activists regularly. Additionally, I will specify a middle-range of state violence at the provincial level by party officials and administrators, by police and private militias, and by various other security organs. A further factor in the administration of social control is that at each of these levels, there are competing elite interests, which can create openings and even hidden allies for the opposition. While theorists of the modern bureaucratic state will find these observations about administrative levels noncontroversial, this article makes an original contribution by applying it to questions of social control and mobilization. State repression, is not a monolithic affair captured wholly by aggregate measures of police budgets, size of security apparatus, or protester deaths and injuries, but rather can be fruitfully analyzed both hierarchically at different levels and laterally, across these levels, where elite interests frequently diverge. Intersections and gaps on both axes can create lapses in social control and openings for the opposition.

The second dimension focuses on the opposition and how it takes advantage of these complexities of repressive administration. I will discuss the practicalities of social control in a particular kind of repressive state, high-capacity authoritarian regimes (or HCAs), and how it can never be complete precisely because of the scope and complexity of state administration. This creates free spaces for the political opposition that similarly occur at national, regional, and local levels. These free spaces are forums of speech and innovative action that give rise to novel ways to keep oppositional sentiments in the public forum. Rather than visions of crushing totalitarian fear and preference falsification (Kuran 1992), I will discuss the wellsprings of freedom and creativity that sometimes exist in modern authoritarian states. These "weapons of the weak" were chronicled by James Scott (1985, 1990), in his groundbreaking research on peasant societies. This article makes an original contribution by identifying several forms they take in modern HCAs (high-capacity authoritarianisms) to circumvent repression and keep oppositional sentiments alive.

The third focus combines the first two, following Tilly's call (2003) to understand collective violence in dynamic terms. I highlight how state violence occurs in an ongoing and recursive relationship with the opposition at the different levels of its organization. I conclude by suggesting that mid- and microlevels of social organization both of the opposition and the state – often overlooked by quantitative studies of the mobilization-repression nexus – play key roles in state-oppositional dynamics. I have in mind (1) how the diversity of social control apparatus means that the opposition sometimes finds occasional allies within it; and (2) how the widespread official corruption that characterizes these regimes at all levels is especially relevant at the local level. In general, I suggest that the gap between official ideology and the corruption that permeates HCAs animates the opposition through resentment and anger at hundreds of daily insults in the arena of daily life. As news, not only of daily injustices but also acts of protest and resistance, diffuse by word of mouth preference falsification and fear are mitigated, keeping alive oppositional sentiments in public opinion. The complexity of HCAs means that citizens are not completely quiescent, but rather they are very careful who they talk to.

This article takes a first step in thinking systematically about how this multileveled complexity affects the relationship between state repression and oppositional mobilization. It offers a framework for a more fine-grained analysis of state violence and its causes. Mark Lichbach once lamented, "Why have scholars theorized and reported that all possible curves fit the impact of repression on dissent?" (1987, 293). This article will show that part of the answer lies, on the one hand, in missing the complexity of repressive apparatus and, on the other, a failure to apprehend the creativity of the opposition. The article offers several propositions to serve as benchmarks for analysts of a more midlevel orientation to state violence, and concludes by suggesting how recognition of these gaps in theory might affect how researchers model the mobilization-repression relationship in the future.

1. State Violence and Mobilization
Research on state violence and protest mobilization has failed to produce a general model that consistently fits the

variety of trajectories and outcomes. Early research suggested a point in the application of state violence beyond which citizen frustration and aggression erupts, an implicit point of proportionality where repression begins to incite protest rather than quell it (Davies 1969; Feierabend and Feierabend 1962; Gurr 1970). Before that point, increasing repression tends to have a negative effect on protest levels because it raises the costs of participation. After that point, backlash occurs against the brutality of the regime's response. This is a model that is more applicable to authoritarian states and non-democracies because it presumes the state's willingness to escalate violence as needed, without concern for legality or human rights. For a repressive regime, knowing where this point lies is important because it informs "the dictator's dilemma" (Francisco 2005), the question of how much repression is necessary to quell dissent without provoking reactive backlash – a dilemma faced by the al-Assad regime in Syria 2012.

Subsequent research provided evidence for a completely opposite relationship, namely, that low levels of state violence are linked with political opportunities that mitigate protest mobilization. This is a model more appropriate to relatively open and democratic regimes. In this view, low repression corresponds with the availability of institutional channels for claim-making, which alleviate the need for extrainstitutional protest. As repression increases, institutional opportunities close and protest increases, but here too, only up to a threshold, which marks the point at which costs become too high. A line of deterrence is crossed, after which state violence increasingly inhibits protest mobilization. Several studies support the operation of a line of deterrence, not only in open political regimes but also where state violence was increasing: in France and England (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975), Northern Ireland (White and White 1995), South Africa (Olivier 1991), and Germany (Opp and Roehl 1990).

One reason for these inconsistent findings is that studies often combine different types of state regime, which is why this article focuses on HCAs only. Another reason is that aggregate measures of state violence are more reflective of system characteristics such as police expenditures or size of the armed forces than of the various forms of state violence

(Koopmans 1997, 152–53), which is why this article explores middle-range and microlevel data to make comparisons among state actions. Several scholars argue that it is not only the intensity but also the form of repression that affects mobilization, and it is plausible that the same goes for the form of oppositional actions. Opp and Roehl (1990) differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate protest, with the defining criteria resting on tactics and legality. White and White (1995) point out that, even in Western democracies, it is incorrect to assume that all repression occurs within legal parameters. They trace "informal" repression in Northern Ireland that is typically carried out by rogue individuals or circles within the police. In the United States, Carley (1995) draws upon government records about the American Indian Movement to trace covert repression.

But also, there is the view that the repression-protest relationship embraces too many variables, too much dynamic monitoring of opponents, and too complex temporal and spatial variations to be captured by a single model. Rasler (1996) and Kurzman (1996) both point out that the mere perception of an opportunity – one that may not objectively exist – can spur action, demand sacrifices, encourage small victories, and thereby create new openings. Groups can be dispersed spatially (Rasler 1996) and they can cluster by risk-taking orientation (Karklins and Peterson 1993). Similarly, the opposition has a repertoire of protest actions, between violence and nonviolence (Lichbach 1987; Moore 1998), between direct and indirect action, between overt protest and unobtrusive actions.

Because a great deal of research about the repression-mobilization relationship relies on modeling of aggregate data, it misses much of the "cultural work" of resistance and opposition (Scott 1985, 1990; Melucci 1985, 1989). Research in the field of social movements has long recognized the importance of behind-the-scenes activities in movement development: Morris identifies "movement halfway houses" in the U.S. civil rights movement (1982), Mueller refers to "cultural laboratories" in the women's movement (1994), and Fantasia and Hirsch discuss "spatial preserves" in Islamist movements (1995). The more widely used concept in this literature is *free spaces,* which describes gathering places outside direct surveillance of the state where new ideas can be voiced and put into practice (Polletta 1999). These are safe havens that mitigate the costs of participation and offer subtle and satisfying selective incentives to participants. As I will suggest, it is in the cracks of civil life created by the complex organization of HCAs where free spaces can flourish.

2. State Capacity and Violence

Regarding variations in state regimes, scholars have classified repressive states on various dimensions, the most important being the extent of state capacity, size of repressive apparatus, and legitimacy – or lack thereof. At the pole of extreme repressiveness, totalitarian states (such as North Korea, Belarus, and Tajikstan) are characterized by ongoing monitoring and social control through a highly developed police apparatus, strong ideological socialization, and continual ideological propagandizing. These are tasks that require an extensive mobilization capacity and continual internal monitoring of both state institutions and daily social life. Such resource-intensive tasks are characteristic of high levels of state capacity. More common are extremely repressive states that have lower capacity, sometimes labeled sultanistic regimes, a term introduced by Max Weber (1968), and elaborated by Linz and Stepan (1996; see also Linz and Cheabi 1998). These regimes rest on the autocratic rule of a supreme leader. They are dictatorships based on plunder and personalism, which are common in less developed states. State administration is concentrated in a small circle dependent on the supreme leader's beneficence. The forces of social control are his instruments of rule and enrichment, as was the case in Nicaragua under Somoza, Iran under the Shah Pahlavi, Romania under Ceausescu, or Uganda under Amin.

Authoritarian states tend to navigate a course between these two extremes. They offer more areas of freedom to their citizens and tend to be quite stable because they enjoy greater legitimacy. In contrast to Linz's early characterization of authoritarian states as having limited capacity and an underdeveloped state ideology (1964), it is fair to say that a more common contemporary pattern is extensive state development and greater degrees of legitimacy, for example, in one-party authoritarian states such as Mexico

before 1996, Argentina in the 1960s, or Venezuela today. There may actually be a modicum of political pluralism either in the form of permitted dissent (within bounds) among ruling party members or the existence of window-dressing parties with a handful of seats in rubber-stamp legislatures. One-party authoritarianisms use local party and union leaders who deliver the vote by distributing favors to the grassroots – especially employment – in return for support. These kinds of authoritarian states tend to be more stable than military authoritarianisms (Geddes 1999). Pluralism may be reflected in differences of opinion within bureaucratic agencies, for example when leaders rely on economic experts to guide modernization policies (O'Donnell 1973). Pluralism may also play a limited role in institutional development outside the state, such as the Catholic Church in communist Poland or in Francoist Spain. In these cases, the authoritarian state was unable to completely co-opt the church because of strong public opinion, and thus local churches became free spaces, mostly outside state control.

In this article I focus on high-capacity authoritarian regimes (HCAs), such as China, Russia, Iran, Mexico before democratization, and Egypt before the fall of Mubarak. Among the states that I will discuss, the degree of state capacity will vary, but only slightly, and will be noted when its effects are significant. The state capacity of China and Russia is very great, but it is lower in Syria, for example, where elements of state administration reflect more sultanistic and/or personalistic patterns based on family, tribal, and communal ties.

Many aspects of HCAs are well known. Those that are most relevant to my analysis can be summarized as follows:

1. *One-party rule.* Meaningful political participation is limited to one party. If present, opposition parties are more a symbolic gesture to a façade of democracy than any substantive reflection of competing interests. In Egypt, for example, support for "opposition parties" paled in contrast to the ruling National Democratic Party, which gained 88 percent of the vote in November 2010. Façade parties, such as the Wafd Party, the Leftist Unionist Party, and the Arab-Nasserite Party, among

others, divided the remaining seats between them. The largest opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, was illegal and outside the electoral process, although its candidates ran as independents. There is a sense that members of these opposition parties are complicit in authoritarian rule, yet when the opposition mobilizes, they often play key roles.

2. *Centralization of governance.* One dimension of this second characteristic flows from the first, namely, that party structure is often blurred or overlaps with state administrative functions. A second dimension is that legislative and judicial functions are subordinated to the executive institutions of the one-party state. The ongoing erosion of the independent judiciary in Venezuela by placing members of Chavez's Bolivarian Party in regional and local judgeships is an example. Regarding the military, its degree of independence varies according to different historical and regional contexts. In some states there may be a strong overlap with party membership, as has occurred in Venezuela too, as a result of conscious policy by Chavez to ensure the loyalty of commanders. In Egypt, the military maintained a degree of independence through geopolitical ties with the U.S. and through its involvement in profit-making enterprises. Recent regime changes in Egypt and Tunisia demonstrate how destabilizing military independence from state and party can be.

3. *Media control.* HCAs seek to limit and control those institutions that govern the flow of information to citizens. Ministries of information and propaganda manage the complex task of censoring news and commentary, but, as I will discuss, the effectiveness of their efforts is often a casualty of state administrative complexity because newspapers and broadcast media are often local or regional, and therefore harder to control.

4. *Highly developed social control apparatus.* Numerous levels of police organization are common: a national, state, and local police, state security forces, secret police, networks of spies, special militias, and party enforcers. These forces are distinct from the military as loci of the means of violence in the authoritarian state, but the military too is often divided into special units, elite divisions, and republican guards chosen for loyalty to the president. Finally, bands of thugs – often policemen and

party members known for their brutality, physical intimidation, and violent efficiency – work as agents of enforcement and fear, especially during states of emergency. It may be that they are organized more formally into militias or vigilante groups to do the bidding of economic and political elites *ex jure.*

5. *Absence of citizen protections.* The logical extension of a highly developed police apparatus is the arbitrary use of police powers. Surveillance, extrajudicial detentions, capriciousness of enforcement, shakedowns, bribes, and protection rackets are all common. Detentions, beatings, harassment, incommunicado periods, torture, and, in the extreme, disappearances, create fear among family and loved ones that ripples through society. They also drive the accumulation of collective grievances and limit public forms of collective action – but encourage unobtrusive forms among certain sectors of the public, as I will discuss.

6. *Political venality.* More so than in democracies, there are huge benefits at the upper echelons of authoritarian states for economic and political elites who cooperate with the state and ruling party. For those who are willing to play the game within the rules of one-party control and forfeit principles of liberal democratic governance, self-interest is a powerful stabilizing factor at society's upper levels of status and wealth, which mitigates division among elites. At the lower levels of region, province, town, and municipality, the same logic is at work on a smaller scale, creating opportunities for sweetheart contracts, bribery, theft, real estate deals, and shakedowns that impart a strong interest in the status quo among local elites, and strong resentments among the public, for whom the injustices of such schemes do not go unnoticed.

7. *Clientalism.* The distribution of jobs, contracts, favors for family members, and the social capital of connections and status also become powerful tools for mitigating political opposition. At the lower levels of state authority, many citizens find employment in the state-controlled sectors of the economy (state-owned industries), administration (the various functions of the high-capacity state, such as health, education, welfare), and social control apparatus (police and army). This creates a large pool of citizens whose interests either lie with the status

quo or are complicated by various pulls and pressures in different directions regarding political opposition.

3. Elite Divisions: Spaces for Corruption and Resistance

Research has long recognized that division among ruling elites is a key factor in regime instability. To counter these forces, HCAs offer strong economic incentives of self-enrichment and enrichment of family members, both immediate and extended. In the absence of threats to the status quo, HCAs manage elite conflicts with the carrot of economic benefits and the stick of party discipline. For especially egregious behaviors there is the threat of expulsion and arrest. That such divisions occur frequently is noncontroversial among analysts, and is revealed especially in times of regime instability and change, such as in Tunisia in early 2011.

In January, 2011, Tunisian state and party leaders scrambled to distance themselves from the authoritarian rule of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in order to secure positions in the new regime after huge popular protests forced him to flee. Mohamed Ghanouchi was Ben Ali's right-hand man under the old regime. Despite challenges, Ghanouchi was able to portray himself as a competent administrator and technocrat and form a transitional cabinet. Other old-regime insiders were not so successful, and were quickly expelled from the transitional government in response to popular protests. Mouldi Jendoubi, the second-in-command of the Tunisian Trade Union, was at the forefront of calls for further expulsions, even though he and other union leaders both acquiesced to and benefited from their relationships with the Ben Ali government. Their call for a general strike to expunge party insiders from the new cabinet helped establish their credentials of oppositional militancy. These kinds of elite divisions are well-documented mechanisms of opening opportunities for mobilization of political oppositions (see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Polarization of elites is a fundamental criterion for the development of revolutionary situations (Goodwin 2002). While sometimes studied regarding the implementation and outcomes of protest (Amenta and Zyman 1991; Amenta and Young 1999), elite divisions at regional and local levels should also be considered in the repression-mobilization nexus.

As among national elites, competition and disagreement occur frequently among regional and local administrators too, both laterally and vertically. These divisions, both real and potential, are important for two reasons when analyzing state violence. First they create maneuvering room for elites at various levels to enhance their power and pursue self-enrichment, corruption, intimidation, and thuggery. Second, they also provide room for free spaces in which the developing opposition can take advantages of lapses in social control and enforcement, and play upon conflicting elite interests to recruit allies. Although elite analysis at the national level often takes precedence in the political and social sciences – and remains crucial in analyzing political instability and regime change – lapses of enforcement and shifting alliances at less exalted levels also can have far-reaching consequences, both for the developing opposition and for the "prevailing strategies" of social control (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995).

A key focus in this article is that the local level is where thousands of functionaries draw upon state and/or party authority to augment their meager salaries. Just as the upper echelons of power enrich themselves through land deals, state contracts, and joint ventures, so too do local inspectors, municipal employees, policemen, party leaders, union officials, and low-level bureaucrats, among others, take petty bribes, shakedown street vendors and local businessmen, and pursue their own interests. The protests that brought down the regime in Tunisia were precipitated precisely at this level, when a municipal inspector tried to confiscate the fruit from Mohamed Bouazizi's street-vending cart in the city of Sidi Bouzid. Itinerant vendors were commonly harassed by police and inspectors, with the understanding that they either pay a bribe of ten dinars (five euros, or several days' wages), or run away and lose their cart and stock (Fahim 2011). On December 17, 2010, Bouazizi stood firm and was beaten by inspectors. His self-immolation in protest precipitated the mass mobilizations that toppled the Ben Ali regime.

It is typical of HCAs that claims and grievances about state corruption accumulate nationally, regionally, and – perhaps most importantly – locally. Most citizens, for most of the time, experience the state at this level. And because of this,

the *enrichissez-vous* machinations of party elites in the capital, although far removed from quotidian experience, are often talked about and are well known as examples of illegitimate and unjust governance. As a normal and expected part of daily existence, authoritarian corruption rides on the complex division of labor of HCAs. When examining the varieties of state violence, these small injustices must be considered along with mobilization of the military or deployment of the riot police. Yet, just as the decentralization of social control in HCAs permits these small acts of violence, so too does it create interstices where the opposition can take shape and grow in the form of free spaces, again, especially at the local level.

These observations lead to three basic propositions about HCAs, which will guide the discussion that follows:

Propostion 1. Oppositional ubiquity. HCAs contain intrinsic spaces where opposition can develop, derived from the complexity of the social control task.

Proposition 2. Oppositional creativity. The creativity of certain activists in HCAs can produce intrinsic spaces for the opposition that reduce the associated risks.

Proposition 3. Oppositional motivation. The political venality of HCAs fuels oppositional sentiments and drives the creativity and ubiquity of actions embodied in the first two propositions. Corruption at the local level is especially important for fueling regime illegitimacy in the long term.

4. Opposition in HCAs: Unobtrusive and Ubiquitous

A large body of research about political and social movements has firmly established that large mobilizations do not emerge full-grown from the head of Zeus, but rather come from preexisting mobilizing structures that serve as the basis of organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1982, 1999; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996; Tarrow 1998). Most of these studies examine democratic regimes, but cracks and lapses in the repressive apparatus of HCAs suggest similar preorganization of grievance articulation. For example, during the summer of 2011 as Syrians confronted the al-Assad regime, their actions were guided by local coordinating committees in all the major

cities. Where did these groups spontaneously come from if everyone had been living in quiescence among their neighbors (Arsu and Stack 2011)? It is more likely that they grew out of hidden networks of opposition, often with ties with émigré activists, but primarily organized and maintained within the small free spaces of the repressive state.

My own field research in authoritarian states found that in the Soviet Union, in Poland, in Mexico, and in Francoist Spain, subterranean organizations of opposition, politicized in varying degrees, commonly existed– indeed, were permitted to exist – in the interstices of state administrative complexity (Johnston 2005, 2006, 2011; Johnston and Mueller 2001; Johnston and Taverna 2012). This principle strongly parallels Scott's classic analyses of repressive social relations in traditional societies (1985, 1990). The existence of informal, sometimes duplicitous oppositional groups and organizations offers an alternative explanation for the rapid mobilizations of "popular fronts" against the communist Eastern Europe regimes. Rather than years of pent-up frustration and preference falsification being unleashed by external events, mass mobilizations grew out of pre-existing networks among discontented citizens, who regularly discussed – albeit carefully – how they were fed up with the contradictions of "mature socialism," with the deficits of citizen freedom, with the small injustices of everyday life, and the inequities of communist party dominance.

In truth, HCAs never completely stamp out the opposition (the key point of proposition one above). Nor are HCA states single-actor monoliths with their agents marching in lock-step to enforce social control. I base these observations on several projects (Johnston 2005, 2006, 2011), whose findings can be summarized by the following observations: (1) Varieties of oppositional talk persist and are indeed quite common among particular networks of people – a finding that strongly contrasts the observation that "preference falsification" leads to political quiescence in repressive regimes (Kuran 1992). (2) Talk is frequently organized in groups and organizations that often function duplicitously, being public and often officially recognized, but surreptitiously maintaining an oppositional ambiance

among members. Creative actors carve out free spaces where they can take advantage of lapses in state surveillance, call upon new allies within the state, and innovate new tactics of opposition. (3) These networks of oppositionists – who vary in the risks they are willing to take – include outspoken dissidents and the members of their circles, especially among writers and artists, as well as ordinary citizens who resist the lack of freedom and react with repugnance against official corruption. (4) These groups and networks put pressure on the regime to democratize and are also springboards of yet more forceful and open oppositional activities once the regime takes steps to reform. (5) It is common for the free spaces these groups carve out to exist in part through the complicity of state agents who look the other way, or police who warn a suspect rather than detaining him or her, or party officials who choose not to report oppositional activities among friends. In some cases, these state agents may privately harbor oppositional sentiments.

We can see the ubiquity of oppositional talk even in states like North Korea, probably the closest example of a totalitarian state we have today. Despite intense cradle-to-grave political indoctrination, media manipulation and misinformation, widespread fear, xenophobic nationalism, Orwellian public discourse, and staged personality-cult rituals, many North Koreans can still sift through the lies to interpret self-interest. In late 2009 protests erupted when the North Korean state announced a shock currency devaluation that wiped out the life savings of many citizens (McNeil 2009; Demick 2010). People protested in the streets of the capital, Pyongyang, and in rural towns and villages (Li-Sun 2009), some setting fire to piles of now-worthless old currency. Moreover, such protests are not new. There were reports of protests by women against age prohibitions for participation in local markets four years ago. I have been told of jokes about Kim Il-Sung's hairdo. When Soviet archives were opened to researchers, it became clear that the Stalinist terror was not monolithic (Priestland 2007). Orders from Moscow were sometimes ignored in the distant republics. Aspects of Stalin's personality cult were not accepted, and sometimes even mocked. Some cases of low-level political dissent were identified (Viola 2003).

Recognizing that cracks in the repressive apparatus allow oppositional talk to occur and groups to exist is a finding with important implications for the mobilization-repression nexus. Just as there are undercurrents of conflict among political elites at different levels of administration, so too are there undercurrents of opposition, but here mostly at the local, quotidian level of life. Moreover, not only do cracks and hiatuses in the repressive apparatus allow activists to seize and construct free spaces, but covert oppositional attitudes among elites may create opportunities. As one former Soviet censor reported to me, when his bosses were on vacation he could let things pass. Sometimes it was friendship that made censors look the other way – when they could get away with it. Other times, free spaces existed because of the ineptitude or laziness of the security forces. Activists reported leniency by the police because the opposition's existence, to some extent, defined the police role and gave them something to do. As such, the game was afoot. More generally, this perspective suggests that the prevailing strategy of an authoritarian state is at least partly defined by its recognition of these free spaces.

Proposition 4. Free-space oppositions sometimes have low-level allies within HCA regimes, either intentionally through the actions of covert supporters, or unintentionally through laziness or ineptitude of regime personnel. Although not numerous, the impact of these "inside connections" is disproportionate to their number because they help oppositional sentiments to remain in public consciousness during periods of apparent quiescence.

5. The Scope and Form of Free Spaces

Many of the groups and organizations that constitute opposition movements in HCAs are informally organized, less overtly political in focus, and their actions often unobtrusive. However, other groups may be less surreptitious and more formally organized, such as façade parties, which are recognized and permitted to exist within limits to convey the impression of political pluralism. One example located towards the organized pole is the Muslim Brotherhood, which by a decision as the national level operated under a *modus vivendi* with the Mubarak regime. The Brotherhood officially eschewed oppositional politics and cultivated its free spaces in grassroots organization of a

social, charitable, and religious character. As long as it operated within these constraints it was able to avoid direct suppression, although it was technically an illegal organization. The Brotherhood had to practice careful political restraint in arenas of civic discourse as a precondition of the free spaces it enjoyed. For the regime, the risks of such a strategy are that its security forces appear weak to the public because of the persistent and apparent contradiction between what it says (the Brotherhood is an illegal, radical Islamist organization) and what it does (turn the other way in the interests of placating the 20 percent of the population that support the organization). Another risk is that the organization becomes a springboard for mobilization against the regime should the context of opportunities and constraints change. It is interesting that thirty years ago a similar strategy was exercised by the communist regime in Poland regarding the Catholic Church, which was at the forefront of early Solidarity mobilization. Unlike the Church, the Brotherhood was slow to participate in the gathering opposition in early 2011, and stayed away from street protests, a position that it could not sustain as momentum grew.

Variability in state repression is also evident in China if we compare the violent campaign against Falun Gong several years ago with the blind-eye tolerance of house-church Christianity (Vala and O'Brien 2007). Somewhere between Beijing's halls of power and enforcement by local party cadres, one religious movement (Falun Gong, which seems to be supremely apolitical) is more heavily repressed, while the other, evangelical Christianity, encounters semi-tolerance in some locales (Vala and O'Brien 2007). Although both are prohibited by the letter of the law, it seems that many provincial officials see nonofficial Christianity as less threatening than the vague spiritualism of Falun Gong. The apparent contradiction of one being labeled a superstitious throwback to pre-communist China and the other not demonstrates the variability of enforcement at national and local levels. Where national direction is less clear, enforcement risks mitigation by different perceptions of potential threat and local interests, in this case, by lower-level bureaucrats in the state and party apparatus. Not only does the complexity of the state often lead to variable application of repression, but complexity of perception and interests, say, if a person's parents are secret Christians,

compounds it. Finally, there is also the issue of the how a particular policy sphere, in this case state control of religious practice, is related to political opposition. Permitting house-church worship by several dozen citizens is much less threatening than, say, the organization of ethnic political organizations in the Tibetan, Uyghur, and Mongolian regions that challenge the territorial integrity of the state.

Prior to 2011, when protest tolerance decreased significantly in the wake of the Arab Spring, this kind of selective repression characterized China's prevailing strategy. After the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province, which caused many deaths among young children because of shoddy school construction, a diverse and diffuse movement among parents mobilized to demand compensation and accountability of local officials. In addition to the participants' tragedy of personal loss, many local party officials had profited from building contracts where shortcuts and substandard materials were used, deepening perceptions of injustice and lack of accountability. Provincial officials allowed many of these protests to proceed, reflecting in part the need to appear responsive to citizens' demands (and the "Olympics thaw") – as long as they remain isolated, specific, local, and did not challenge dominant political alignments of state and party. Activists that passed these thresholds were often beaten and arrested.

Proposition 5. Because perceived threat determines repressive levels, there will be variability according to policy areas and claims of protests. Repression can also vary by administrative level of enforcement, creating temporary free spaces for movements.

Proposition five also applies to media control and limitations on press freedoms, which in China are both heavy and pervasive, but not hermetically sealed. On the one hand, news of political turmoil is routinely repressed. Riots in Lhasa or Urumqui find no space in Chinese dailies. The Ministry of Propaganda sends out weekly lists of stories that cannot be covered in print and broadcast media. During the 2011 popular mobilizations in Egypt, newspapers, broadcast media, and internet in China were mute on the subject (Wong and Barbosa 2011). On the other hand, the complexity of social control means that censorship sometimes fails simply because of ineptitude. To take one

example, a classified advertisement appearing in the *Chengdu Evening News* paid homage to the mothers who lost children in the Tiananmen Square massacre. The meaning of the ad slipped by the staff: "Saluting the strong mothers of victims of 64" was its cryptic text. Six-four is common shorthand for the repression on June 4 (6-4), 1989, when hundreds – perhaps thousands of students were killed by the People's Liberation Army. The advertisement referred to those few mothers who, despite an absolute ban on speaking of the massacre, have continued to call for an investigation. It seems that the young woman who accepted the ad was unaware of the significance of the "64" reference, and was told it was the date of a mining disaster when she asked the person placing the ad. News of the defiant ad went viral on the internet before censors were able to intervene. The Ministry of Propaganda had the final word, however, because three editors at the newspaper were fired in retaliation.

As in other aspects of society, members of the media may sometimes intentionally push the limits of tolerance. There are always a few reporters and editors who are willing to see how far they can go in pursuit of journalistic freedom. In June 2010, *Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis Daily),* a paper in the Pearl River Delta region known for its provocative editorials and investigative journalism, published a cartoon that also made veiled references the Tiananmen Square massacre. In one of several cartoons commemorating International Children's Day on June 1, a blackboard image drawn by a child depicts a lone figure standing in front of a line of tanks. The drawing echoes the famous news video from 1989, in which a sole student protester attempts to block the advance of tanks towards the square (see Figure 1). The cartoon was removed after the image began to circulate online with comments about the Tiananmen Square events. The torch in the upper left of the chalkboard replicates the one held by the iconic Goddess of Democracy at the Tiananmen demonstrations (the other notations also are indirect references to the student movement, see Earp 2010). The point is that, like the news blackout of anti-Mubarak protests, the regime attempted to strictly enforce silence about the events surrounding the Tiananmen Square protests, but cracks in the system occur for numerous reasons. It is not plausible that editors could

have carelessly missed these references; rather they seemed to be testing the limits of what could pass.

Figure 1: "Commemorating Children's Day" at Tiananmen Square

Source: http://chinaview.wordpress.com/2010/06/03/

These examples provide good characterizations of the relationship between state and opposition at local levels of the authoritarian state. We perhaps see it reported more frequently in relation to press freedoms because Western reporters in China, Iran, Russia, and elsewhere, are especially attuned to these. But the general conclusions are that small openings and cracks occur (1) because of the heroism of particular actors, such as reporter Shi Tao, who was sentenced to a ten-year prison term for e-mailing to the West the Ministry of Propaganda's directives about Tiananmen Square coverage. (2) Free spaces occur because of mistakes, ineptitude, complexity, and the sheer extent of the task of implementing total control. (3) They also are carved out through the complicity of certain agents who, as minor acts of rebellion against quiescence and pervasive control, let prohibited material pass. (4) They occur because of the inherent creativity of activists who find ways to evade restrictions that the authorities never contemplated (for example, the fascinating case of Chinese internet phenomenon of the "grass mud horse" which recently went viral there (see Wines 2009). In all these cases, the effect is not so much giant strides in political opposition, but rather

keeping the hope of political opposition alive among a populace that is frequently outraged at the small injustices encountered every day. Rather than preference falsification, the analyst might speak of the "hope confirmation" that these microlevel acts accomplish for segments of the population.

Proposition 6. The effect of free-space acts of opposition is two-fold: creating a base for the social organization of oppositional movement, and breaking the social-psychological constraints of silence and preference falsification. This second effect broadens awareness of others who share oppositional sentiments, and creates a potential pool of actors poised to participate once mobilization efforts begin.

6. The Heterogeneity of State Violence

Max Weber observed that the state maintains a monopoly on the legitimate exercise of violence. Mao Tse-tung advised his cadres that all power flows from the barrel of a gun. It should come as no surprise as we consider the exercise of state power that the state uses violence against its citizenry much more frequently than the other way around. The sheer firepower and destructive reach of the modern state are overwhelming compared to what citizens have at their disposal. Yet HCAs are also typified by a complex division of labor in the business of violence among the military, security forces, special units known for their fierceness and/or loyalty, secret police, local police, vigilantes and militias, and, finally, thugs and enforcers who do the bidding of local elites and strongmen. Activists in Syria report that there are no less than sixteen distinct branches of security apparatus operating in major cities. Thus, the complex division of labor in HCAs extends to agents of state violence, and carries with it significant consequences regarding state violence and free spaces. My goals in this final section are to show (1) how these various levels are analytically discrete in the application of violence; and (2) how, even here, the recursive relationship between the state and opposition exerts its influence in the course of events, especially at microlevels, to create spaces for opposition.

6.1 The Military and Ethnic-Communal Heterogeneity

The highest, most institutionally established, and geographically most extensive level of analysis is the national

military. Military elites are often highly integrated and influential in HCAs, as in China, Russia, Venezuela, Mexico, Egypt, and Tunisia. Cleavages between political and military elites pose basic threats to regime stability, but it is typical that high-capacity states quell conflict through strong economic incentives for both political and military elites. When the interests of generals diverge from those of political leaders, however, history tells us that regime change often follows. Diverging interests at the elite level was a major element in recent events in Egypt, where pressure from the generals drove Mubarak and his National Democratic Party from power. The most plausible explanation is that military leaders threw in their lot with the protesters as a means to preserve their extensive involvement in private sector enterprises and ensure continuity of huge military budgets and massive foreign assistance, primarily from the United States. Here, divergent interests worked in favor of regime change and tentative steps toward liberalization. In contrast, the willingness of Chinese military leaders to unleash violent repression against students' democratic protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989 suggest there was strong correspondence between the interests of the military and political elites. Paradoxically, this correspondence rested in part on similar reasons, heavy military involvement in state and joint-venture enterprises, with the difference being the smaller scope of popular protest in China, which was confined to student mobilizations in Beijing and several other Chinese universities.

Proposition 7. The size and scope of popular unrest, the independence of the military, and the interaction between the two in relation to threats to military interests are the key factors determining the military's response to popular unrest.

Complicating the relationship between military and political elites are communal divisions within state territories, which function as another major variable in levels of state violence. Communal identities – not only ethnic but also religious and tribal – divide many states, and, more often than not, can unite the national military command against separatist pressures that threaten territorial integrity of the state. In ethnically diverse states it is common for the dominance of the majority group to be maintained in the upper ranks of the military. When it is not, the con-

sequences can be far-reaching. In the former Soviet Union, for example, ethnic divisions in the military undermined orders to fire on separatist protesters in various ethnic republics. In the Estonian SSR, Air Force General Djokar Dudaev, a Chechen, refused orders to fire on protesters calling for independence at a critical juncture in the Soviet Union's dissolution. Dudaev was schooled in nationalist separatism when he was assigned to the air force base in Tartu, Estonia, and went on to lead the separatist Chechen republic to independence in 1991, and into war with Russia in 1994.

In contrast, nationalist protests and anti-Han ethnic riots in the Tibetan and Xinjian Autonomous Regions, where separatist movements have mobilized, have been violently repressed by the Han-dominated military units. Ethnic homogeneity minimized the risk of division within the ranks. Because the defense of national territory is so basic to the military's function, the state's armed forces are frequently players in the violent suppression of separatist ethnic-national protests. In some cases, no doubt because communal identifications are strong and activate social-psychological responses of violence and retribution, the most extreme form of state violence – ethnic genocide – is typically perpetrated by ethnically unified army units. This was clearly seen in the opening narrative about the Russia-Chechen war and the extensive violence that Russian air force and army, motivated partially by ethnic stereotypes, perpetrated on Chechen civilians.

Proposition 8. State military violence is aggravated when ethnic and communal divisions overlap with oppositional protest mobilization. An ethnically homogeneous military command has less hesitation using violence against minority ethnic movements because attributions of difference mitigate empathy and identification.

In Syria, sectarian rather than ethnic divisions operate in military organization. The regime of Bashir al-Assad is dominated by Alawite Muslims, a minority Shiite sect, and Alawites tend to prevail among the leadership of the army and security forces. Alawite-led units slaughtered ten thousand people to put down protests in the Sunni city of Hama in 1982. Today, threatened by mounting opposition

led by the majority Sunnis and the social-psychological effects of communal identity, the Syrian army had at the time of writing killed over nine thousand protesters. Moreover, sectarian divisions in the lower ranks have undermined the effectiveness of military violence – more on this below.

6.2 Militias and Praetorian Guards

Militias mobilized at the regime's behest are to be distinguished from the national army, navy, and air force. While militias may be heavily armed, a common pattern is that they are under the command of the ruling party or a small inner circle of political elites associated with the head of state. Special military units that are segregated from the national armed forces can also be grouped here too. I have in mind Presidential Guards, Republican Guards, and similar praetorian units that are directly answerable to the leader as insurance against military coups d'etat, as in the case of Moammar Kadafi's Revolutionary Brigade. During the turmoil that swept through Libya in 2011, this sizeable force had units assigned to protect Kadafi against units that might prove less loyal. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's brother Maher, heads the Revolutionary Guard and the notorious Fourth Division, both based in Damascus. In general, elite forces are distinguished from regular troops by special pay, benefits, and equipment to ensure their loyalty.

Regarding the Libyan uprising, Kadafi's regime had lower capacity compared to Egypt or China, and tended toward the sultanistic pole of repressive regimes. Importantly, this was reflected in the fragmentation of the central military command and widespread defections among military commanders when protests broke out and repression began. Apart from the regular Libyan army, which had about forty-five thousand troops prior to the rebellion, the Revolutionary Guards had about four thousand and the People's Militia reserves about four thousand. Characteristically for sultanism, Kadafi's policy was to make sure that commanders were continually rotated to prevent bonds of loyalty from building between officers and men. He also kept some units loyal to him by appointing sons or family members to command them, and supplying them better than other units, both in the quantity and quality of armaments. The Khamis Brigade, commanded by one of

Kadafi's sons, is reported to have received newer equipment, such as the latest tanks and rocket launchers, while other units made do with aging and low-tech Soviet armaments (Zucchino 2011). These policies led to the rapid split in the country when the uprising began, as normal units, many of which were based in the east, defected to the opposition and better-armed, praetorian units concentrated in Tripoli to protect the regime.

Proposition 9. Reliance by political elites on special military units is characteristic of lower capacity authoritarian regimes tending toward the sultanistic model. This heterogeneity in the control of violent resources disposes such regimes to civil war rather than political transitions sustained by mass protests.

The division between the military and these special units and militias or elite security units also gives rise to spaces of opportunity for the opposition, and, as such is fundamental to the application of state violence. This was evident in Egypt when the army refused to fire on protesters, but security forces and hired thugs waded into protests on Friday, January 29, 2011. During the following two days, it was the army that stood between protesters and armed supporters of the regime. These events are examples of how elites commonly rely on special units to ensure repressive capacity. In Iran, the Basij Militia and Revolutionary Guards, not the military, played a key role in the suppression of the democratic movement in 2009 and recently in February 2011, (Worth and Fahti 2009). Various observers have reported to me that the regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad chooses not to rely on the military for political enforcement because their loyalty in repressing Iranian citizens cannot be counted on.

One possible reason for this derives from the same communal identifications that I mentioned earlier as factors in military violence against ethnic minorities. It is plausible that Egyptian and Tunisian military officers were hesitant to fire on protesting citizens in January and February 2011 because of an affinity they felt for them. This is not necessarily a reflection of support for protesters' grievances, but rather of shared identity as sons and daughters of the nation (if there are no communal divisions). This recognition means that officers think twice before ordering con-

scripts to fire on protesting youth with whom they can identify strongly, and risking a breakdown in the chain of command.

This is exactly what occurred in northern Syria town of Jisr al-Shoughour in 2011. Lower-level desertions had been reported for weeks as the regime mobilized national army units against protesters, but a large military operation against this Sunni stronghold meant that many Sunni conscripts were ordered to fire on townspeople. Scores refused, and some officers defected to aid the townspeople's resistance (Zoeph and Shadid 2011). While authoritarian states will vary in the degree of control and professionalization of the armed forces, in high-capacity regimes firing on citizens is not what conscripts are trained for, nor do middle-level officers see maneuvers against civilians as their professional calling. Observers from within Syria have documented that the Free Syrian Army, which by early 2012 was challenging Assad's forces in several towns, draws its recruits mostly from conscripts and low-level officers who refuse such orders (Bilefsky 2012).

As defections mount and the tide of protest rises, the militias and special army units mentioned earlier are mobilized. Their availability reflects how autocrats often recognize the gaps in repressive capability that derive from the consequences of low pay and community integration of police, or, perhaps, ethnic and/or regional divisions in the military and police. In the Syrian defections, low pay, lack of morale, poor conditions, and shortages of food among conscripts, plus the Alawite-Sunni sectarian divide between officers and their men, were factors in the breakdown of discipline.

Another repressive strategy in these circumstances is the use of mercenaries as a way to buy assurance of repressive capability. The rationale is that because foreigners have no ties to the community, and because they are often ethnically, racially, and linguistically different from the citizenry, they are more reliable perpetrators of violence – and perhaps more brutal. In the Bahraini protests of February 2011, where the initial response of King Hamad ibn Isa Khalifa was to order the police to invade the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout and fire on protesters, he was able to count on the obedience of his security forces partly because

many were foreigners from neighboring countries and from Southeast Asia (Parker and Murphy 2011). Later, he invited in Saudi Arabian troops to quell protests. As popular uprisings spread through the Arab world, Kaddafi in Libya was reported to have brought in as many as four thousand mercenary fighters from Niger, Mali, and Sudan's Darfur region (Daragahi and Therolf 2011; Gentleman 2011). Earlier he had also recruited Touareg from Mali and Niger into the Libyan Army. Their presence, plus that of the other the sub-Saharan mercenaries, buttressed Kaddafi's control of Tripoli as other parts of the country joined the rebellion and units of the regular military defected (MacFarquhar 2011). Mercenaries joined special militia units wearing red berets – as opposed to regular green army berets – to assault rebellious districts in Tripoli. For the analyst sorting out the array of repressive forces deployed during times of protest intensification, foreign mercenaries enter the mix of special militias, elite units, praetorian guards, and loyal security forces known for their brutality.

Proposition 10. Also characteristic of lower capacity authoritarian regimes tending toward the sultanistic model, is the use of foreign mercenaries, whose presence raises questions of control and risks escalating violence against civilians

Yet for mid-level party loyalists and local cadres threatened by protesting citizens, these kinds of repressive resources are typically not under their control. At these levels, it is more typical for local police and thugs to be called to do their bidding, which brings us to the next level of how violence is organized.

6.3 Thuggery and Vigilantes

Thuggery and vigilantes in their most radical and virulent forms tend to be organized informally and temporarily outside official sanction. Here I have in mind goons, enforcers, and knee-cappers who are often given free reign to beat protesters, intimidate oppositional activists, and/or instill fear among the populace. While being a thug or a bully is an individual behavior, it is common that HCAs employ such people (who will, of course, vary in their predispositions to violence, lawlessness, and self interest) in times of growing oppositional mobilization and/or times of crisis, as in the case of Libya, when Kaddafi armed his sup-

porters in Tripoli to intimidate citizens from protesting (Therolf 2011). While such violent episodes are not easily amenable to systematic research, it is plausible that the prospect of guns and official cartes blanche to use them attracts party members and friends who are prone to embrace opportunities for plunder, violence, and rape, rather than answering a "higher calling" to restore public safety.

Thuggery is also commonly employed by local agents of the state, not to quell protests or ensure state security in the broad sense, but to protect their own venal interests. In one example of extreme local-level thuggery in China, a 53-year-old man named Qian Yunhui, who had relentlessly campaigned for six years against illegal land seizures in his village, was reported to have been murdered by local men. According to his wife, he received a phone call asking him to go outside his house one morning, and simply disappeared. An hour later, his body was found crushed beneath the tire of a truck, victim of an apparent accident, but villagers earlier had witnessed several men holding him down in the road (Yang and Wong 2010). We know about this because pictures of his gory death were widely posted on the Chinese internet. Public interest was great because because land disputes are common occurrences in rural China (Yang and Wong 2010). Similar seizures of land by local officials and the death of an outspoken citizen spurred an unprecedented rebellion of the inhabitants of Wukan village, in Guangdong Province in December 2011. Provincial party officials promised elections and investigation of corrupt real estate deals to diffuse the rebellion (Jacobs 2012).

In another example, two Chinese journalists were severely beaten by Badong County police in May 2009 as they attempted to report on a case involving the rape of a young waitress by three party officials there. This case too drew significant public attention on the internet because it was a compelling narrative of official venality and passion – the waitress stabbed one of the officials in retaliation. The local party cadres compounded their offense by ordering the beatings in an attempt to block media reports of the incident. The reporters, Ms. Kong Pu from *The Beijing News* and Mr. Wei Yi from *Nanfang People's Weekly*, were arrested. Wei was forced to write a statement admitting that he "had conducted an interview without the local auth-

orities' approval." The audio and photo files Wei made during the interview were also destroyed (Ya 2009).

Proposition 11. In contrast to violence by the military or militias, thuggery is a low-level form of state violence common in HCAs. Its official intent is to maintain quiescence through fear, but often its practical effect is to reinforce free-space-based opposition and illegitimacy.

6.4 Police and Corruption

Similar tales of police brutality were reported as the veil of fear was lifted in Egypt and Tunisia in early 2011. In Russia, a recent poll found that one quarter of respondents had personal knowledge of incidents where the police beat or tortured people. A Russian member of parliament reports: "Our law-enforcement organs are seriously littered with scum and losers of all kinds" (Loiko 2011, A4). The reason is that in repressive regimes the police serve those in power as much as (and perhaps more than) they do some abstract sense of the regime's social order. Because the police are often enforcers of elite scams and shakedowns at national, regional, and local levels, the same bureaucrats and party officials are willing to turn their back on police abuses involved in similar corrupt activities – or even encourage them. Compounding the this synergy, lower-echelon police in authoritarian states are usually paid poorly, making bribes, shakedown, and illegal enterprises common sources of income, and when this occurs, the dirty money frequently flows upward to elites higher up in the feeding chain. When a lieutenant general in the Russian Police was recently arrested for corruption, the investigation revealed that he had lived in a mansion filled with jewelry, guns, antiques, and fine art. He also owned five different Moscow apartments and property in Cyprus and London (Loiko 2011, A4). This lifestyle was paid for by his cut of deals and scams conducted by those under his authority. Moreover, it is common that many regime elites know of these practices and turn a blind eye.

Although most of these observations will not surprise analysts of authoritarian states, I suggest that the use of police for political repression and state security – a fundamental principle of HCAs – has a ripple effect in local corruption and brutality that is perhaps less widely recognized. The relationship can be summarized as follows:

*Proposition 12. Because police are the local enforcers for cor-
rupt administrators and party functionaries, the carte
blanche they receive for low-level violence spawns lawlessness
that permeates society and feeds free-space-based illegitimacy.*

As one measure of this relationship, last February's texting
and twitter calls for mobilization in China (the preempted
Jasmine revolution) were for an end to authoritarian rule,
inflation, *and widespread corruption* (Jacobs and Ansfield
2011). Another measure is that two foci of early Syrian
protests against the al-Assad regime were the corrupt and
unaccountable security forces (especially regarding deaths
of detained youths) and the corrupt inner circle of Assad's
friends. Bashir Assad's first cousin, Rami Maklouf, is one of
the country's wealthiest businessmen (Shadid 2011). Mak-
louf is known in Syria as Mr. Five Percent, reflecting his
standard cut in deals from state contracts. His most public
business, Syriatel, had its offices attacked during protests in
May 2011, in an indication of public awareness of these
inner machinations of the ruling elite. It is likely that this
relationship between corruption and security forces was
the force behind the widely reported frustration and anger
that drove the recent revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia,
Bahrain, and Yemen. The empassioned narrative of the in-
communicado detention of Wael Ghonim thrust him into
the spotlight during the Egyptian protests precisely because
so many citizens were able to identify with it. Moreover, it
is likely that state elites know how their subjects resent the
pervasiveness of official corruption. In Syria, as an early
measure to insure quiescence in Aleppo, the country's sec-
ond largest city, the Assad regime specifically reined in cor-
rupt activities, bribe-taking, and shakedowns there.
According to one report, "For some people, these are really
wonderful times" (Abdulrahim 2011, 4).

At lower levels, the majority of the police and security
forces are made up of common workers, who, in the weak
and uneven economies of these authoritarian regimes, are
happy to have a regular job. For many, it is their in-
stitutional role that leads them to brutish behavior, but
when their shifts are over, they go home to family, friends,
and neighbors, many of whom understand that the bribes
are systemic income supplements, a regular part of doing
business, and a way to feed the family, however distasteful.

For the unemployed men in the neighborhood, it is plaus-
ible that most would not turn down an opportunity to put
on the uniform to earn a living the same way. In Mexico
under PRI authoritarianism, *la mordida* was resented be-
cause of its arbitrariness and its economic "bite" on
families, but also normative and widely expected. This
"normalization" complicates moments of political mobi-
lization at the microlevel of analysis, because the police and
security forces are torn between their own self interest and
orders from superiors, on the one hand, and social pressure
from friends and family not to follow orders to repress pro-
tests on the other. A critical moment in the Tunisian mobi-
lizations was when the police and security officers refused
to attack fellow citizens, and in turn were embraced by pro-
testers. In general, such defections mark crucial junctures
in opposition movements. As division appears within the
ranks of the police and security forces, on-the-ground tac-
tical assessments of advantage often appear to favor the
protesters by virtue of their sheer numbers. When this oc-
curs, regime change is not far behind.

7. Conclusions

Authoritarian states are not monoliths of social control and
administration. Understanding their complexity is funda-
mental to understanding how the mobilization-repression
nexus unfolds in them, and especially the forms and fre-
quency of state violence. It is axiomatic that HCAs do not
liberalize on their own. Even China, which since the 2008
Olympics (and prior to 2011) had been responsive to
citizen mobilization in some spheres – anticorruption cam-
paigns, for example – tightened social control in other
spheres to deftly manage citizen discontent. In both expan-
sion and contraction of responsiveness, it is popular press-
ure that often forces elite action. This is the reciprocal
relationship between regime and opposition in HCAs. The
focus of this article has been to trace out the contours of
how it occurs at various levels of state organization, with
insights from a comparative focus on mid- and lower levels.

The organization of the forces of violence, which varies by
states according to the threats that the opposition poses to
political elites, is especially important. I have traced several
tactics that political elites may employ, on the one hand, to
weaken threats from the military, especially division of

labor and resource allocation, and, on the other, to ensure repressive capacity when necessary. The organization of the military and militias ranges from centralization in the capital to barracks in distant peripheries of the state, which are often less reliable because of ethnic and/or communal divisions.

Parallel to the forces of violence are the forces of political control, surveillance, and fear management. These too are organized hierarchically and spatially, which, as for armies and militias, offers spaces for divisions and cracks in social control. At the local level there is often an overlap between party officials and the means of violence, as they employ thugs and vigilantes to enforce their interests. This is violence of the state at the micolevel, and is where the majority of citizens encounter an unjust and arbitrary state. But I also argue that the reciprocal dance between regime and opposition also is performed at this level too, and that creativity, bravery, and even crosscutting ties of family and friendship can undermine more formally organized police functions, which may necessitate the use of thugs and enforcers. These relationships raise the question of whether there are inherent contradictions in high-capacity authoritarian states. Although they may appear quite stable in the short and medium term, it is an interesting proposition that these underlying forces may foster the gathering of op-

positional sentiments and actions in the long term, and contribute to a spiral of violence, retribution, opposition, mobilization, and elite division. I close, then, with a provocative proposition that necessarily leaves many questions unanswered, but consistent with the intent of this article, namely to guide research on state violence, repression, and opposition in new directions, is derived from its mid- and lower-level focus on repression and opposition.

Proposition 13. The complexity of HCAs gives rise to basic contradictions that emanate from (1) the lack of accountability of political elites at various levels and the ensuing corruption that permeates society, and (2) how hiatuses in the social control administration create free spaces where illegitimacy and opposition thrive because of point number one. These two patterns suggest the inherent instability of HCAs in the long run.

The research task, then, is to specify why some HCAs persist as long as they do, say seventy years in the Soviet Union, or fifty in apartheid South Africa, or fifteen years in Pinochet's Chile. To answer such questions, a dialogue between the broad system-level comparisons characteristic of so much repression-mobilization research and the mid- and lower-level variables specified in this report, will likely be necessary.

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