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Extinguish the Spark:
Mass Protests as a Determinant of Journalist
Killings, 1992 - 2020

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This work is dedicated to all of those who have lost their lives in the pursuit of truth.

Abstract

Previous research indicates that civilian mass mobilizations in protest of the government can have profound negative effects on a state's ability to govern. The most prevalent news sources in most localities are still traditional journalistic television and print publications. Citizens rely on journalists to track state abuse, misdeeds, and corruption, which affects when citizens mobilize against the state. The occurrence of protests, especially those involving protestor violence and lethal government responses, can seriously threaten a political regime and border on a civilian uprising. I contend that more frequent mass mobilizations in a state motivate the government to adopt a more preventative stance towards future protests. I argue that governments aiming to prevent a population from being driven to mobilize may deploy lethal measures against journalists in order to decrease information flow and prevent informed citizen mass mobilizations. I assert that states which experience more civilian mass mobilizations are more likely to engage in the extra-judicial killing of journalists as a means of attempting to limit future anti-state protests. Comparing motive-confirmed journalist killings between 1992 and 2020 with data detailing civilian mass mobilization events over the same time period, I show that when mass mobilizations occur in which protestors are killed by government authorities, the state is 3% more likely to kill journalists in the immediate future. This adds to a growing literature detailing factors that forecast violence against journalists and sheds light on the methods by which governments take action to suppress information from the populace.

Introduction

In 2004, violent mobilizations wracked the city of Beirut, Lebanon, as demonstrators protested rising fuel prices and high costs of living in the Middle Eastern country. Riots spread throughout the city, and protestors set the Ministry of Labor building ablaze. With citizens burning tires and throwing stones at soldiers, the Lebanese military opened fire on protestors, killing five people and injuring dozens more. News organization Al Jazeera reported at the time that these demonstrations were “Lebanon’s worst civil unrest in more than a decade.” After this incident, the Lebanese government took steps to ensure that future protests were less likely to take place. In 2005, Samir Qassir, a columnist for the Lebanese-based newspaper *An-Nahar*, was killed when the bomb that had been planted below the driver’s seat of his car exploded in Beirut. Qassir had a reputation as a journalist for being publicly critical of the Lebanese-Syrian security apparatus and the government, and he was known for supporting democratic movements within the state. Qassir had previously been threatened by Lebanese military officials, and an investigation by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) determined that the likely perpetrators of Qassir’s murder were government officials.

Governments reeling from the impacts of mass mobilizations and instances of civil unrest take measures to prevent such occurrences from happening again. Journalists like Qassir keep citizens informed about government misdeeds. Without this knowledge about what the government is doing, citizens are not informed enough about the government’s activities to protest or mobilize. By killing a journalist, a state endeavors to make the general population less aware of its actions 1) by directly decreasing the number of journalists critiquing the government and 2) by signaling to other journalists the willingness of the state to use lethal force to subjugate the press, which inspires self-censorship amongst journalists. In the wake of huge protests like

those seen in Lebanon in 2004, it would make sense for government officials to “kill the messenger” and extinguish the any future sparks of rebellion before they even reach the newspapers and airwaves.

The silencing of journalists who are working to expose corruption, illegal actions, human rights violations, and misdeeds of government officials, political groups, military bodies, criminal organizations, and powerful individuals has become a disturbingly common practice in recent decades. Violence against journalists has been decried at both the national and international level, yet journalism remains “one of the world’s most dangerous professions” according to the United Nations (UNOHCHR). The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization headquartered in the United States that has catalogued and investigated journalist killings worldwide for over 30 years. Their researchers have determined that a total of 1,440 journalists have been killed (by all actors) since 1992 directly because of or in relation to their work as a reporter. These significant acts of violence have occurred on five different continents in countries of varying size, regime type, and population.

I argue that one of the factors contributing to the likelihood that a journalist is killed by the state is the prior occurrence of anti-government protests within that state. My theoretical argument contends that, when states are subjected to civilian mass mobilizations, governments are more likely to kill or assassinate journalists. People need to know about the government’s actions/misdeeds/etc. in order to mobilize and protest those actions. Mass protests by the citizenry can pose an existential threat to a regime’s stability and can spur further civil unrest (Alemán & Yang, 2011; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Gillion, 2013; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017; Andrews & Seguin, 2015). Mass mobilizations can occur in various degrees, ranging from borderline civilian uprising to entirely peaceful marches. When states are subjected to higher

rates of the most threatening protests, my hypothesis asserts that states adopt more preventative measures to limit or reduce future protest incidents by killing journalists. Following trends of escalating violence, my main hypothesis argues that protests in which the state kills mobilizers would most likely correspond to a subsequent increase in the likelihood of the state killing journalists. These protest instances most mirror circumstances of civil rebellion—which the state has a vested interest in preventing—and indicate that the state already feels threatened enough by protests to deploy lethal force. Therefore, governments hoping to quell future civilian disapproval and mobilization are most likely to target society’s information flow following these protests. My theory contends that governments that cross the threshold of killing protesters are most at risk of subsequently killing journalists. One step below protests in which the government kills protesters are violent protests where mobilizers destroy property, attack state officials, etc. These protests allow for organized opposition of the state to publicly riot. The failure of the state to prevent such actions indicates a weakness in state security strength and could serve as motivation for future groups hoping to display outrage towards the government. It is for these reasons that my second hypothesis argues that violent protests are also expected to increase the likelihood of the state killing journalists.

This research endeavor analyzes the most threatening forms of anti-state protests in order to determine if mass mobilizations push a state to adopt an aggressive and preventative stance in which the government uses lethal force to silence journalists. My results show that, when a protest occurs in which the government kills protesters, the likelihood of the government killing a journalist in the following year increases by approximately 3%. Violent protests did not result in a statistically significant relation to journalist killings. These results connect with my theory in

terms of conflict escalation: As protests get closer to civil uprising and revolution, the state takes more serious measures to quell future revolt.

Below, I detail previous literature relevant to my investigation and lay out my theoretical argument. I then present my research design and methodology before reporting my empirical findings. I conclude with a discussion of these findings in the broader context of conflict and press freedom.

Literature Review

Prior research studies and academic publications lay the groundwork for my investigation. These literatures provide two main concepts that aid my project. Firstly, it conveys the ability of protests to impact the governing political regime. Secondly, it reveals several factors that contribute to the killing of journalists both at the international and nation levels.

My theory relies upon the premise that protests and mass mobilizations can threaten a state enough for the state to take the protective/offensive action of killing journalists. Previous literature has demonstrated the impact of protest efforts and points to substantive reasoning for why governments might take action to avoid such results. Cross-national analyses of the effects caused by civilian mass mobilizations show that protest efforts against authoritarian regimes can aid democratization (Alemán & Yang, 2011; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013) and can increase the likelihood of subsequent democratic survival (Kadivar, 2018). In more democratic regimes, many scholars consider protests and mass mobilizations to be ‘informative cues’ that convey the priorities of the citizenry to the legislators and government officials (Gillion, 2013; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017). However, this public message to the government inherently communicates a

threat to those in power: Satisfy the demands of those you represent or risk losing your political position (Andrews & Seguin, 2015; Gillion, 2013).

On the broadest scale possible, many substantive research projects investigate factors leading to state-driven extrajudicial killings, targeting killings, and democide. Investigations have demonstrated that governmental regimes have been known to use extrajudicial killings to control opposition members, ensure security, and motivate compliance (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Piazaa & Walsh, 2009). However, specific research projects find relatively high degrees of national variations in trends of extrajudicial killings. Military and government-sanctioned paramilitary groups have used “death squads” in places like El Salvador to quell the mobilization of domestic political opposition (Mason and Krane 1989), whereas places like the Phillipines have been found to have higher rates of extrajudicial killings in drug-prone regions (Tusalem, 2019). Furthermore, the Phillipines have been found to exhibit more extrajudicial killings in regions with larger, more affluent, populations (Tusalem, 2019), while Kenya has been known to have its highest rates of extrajudicial killings occur in poorer regions or “slums” (Jones et al., 2017). This wide diversity of information regarding extrajudicial killings informs more focused research into the killing of journalists specifically.

Prior cross-national empirical studies have brought to light some factors that influence the killing of journalists. Characteristics of governmental regimes have been found to be particularly influential. Regime type has been demonstrated to be a factor that affects journalist killings, and it has interestingly been seen that journalist killings are more common in democratic regimes than autocratic regimes (Asal et al., 2018). Asal’s argument claims that a lack of independent media and a culture antithetical to a free press creates fewer instances in

which journalists are put in danger in non-democratic states. Additionally, research has shown that journalist killings decrease on average as autocratic and anocratic regimes endure, but regime duration has no measured impact on the frequency of journalist killings in democracies (Solis, 2021). Journalists face a greater risk of lethal violence in mixed political regimes with uneven levels of democratic accountability and rights protections across regions (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021). Democratic consolidation generally decreases journalist killings (Solis, 2021). Within institutional democracies, journalists are likely to be most vulnerable to state violence when working in remote areas with locally elected and powerful regional authorities, particularly for less visible journalists. Without effective monitoring and accountability, national democratic institutions alone are unable to effectively protect journalists from any perpetrator (Carey & Gohdes, 2021). Furthermore, government corruption is correlated to journalist killings in countries with near total press freedom (Bjørnskov & Freytag, 2016). Finally, where a journalist was killed, overall repression in society was significantly more likely to increase in the subsequent two years (Gohdes & Carey, 2017).

Prior nation-specific research has brought to light other factors that influence the killing of journalists in specific contexts. In Mexico, research has found that journalists are at a much greater risk of murder than the general Mexican population (Bartman, 2018). Furthermore, violent deaths of journalists are more likely to occur in areas of Mexico with higher levels of “social violence, internal conflict, severe violations of human rights, low democratic development, and economic inequality” (Brambila, 2017). Journalists are more likely to be targeted by criminal organizations when rival criminal groups occupy the same local territory (Holland & Rios, 2017). Research has shown that journalists in all areas of Mexico fear violent reprisals for their work, even those who have not been subjected to threats or attacks. As a result,

journalists in Mexico express high levels of self-censorship (González Macías & Reyna García, 2019). Other studies have found that repression in Mexico deters critical news coverage by journalists (Salazar, 2019) and that violence against journalists affects not only the journalists themselves but also media organizations and the broader society (Gonzalez, 2021). These empirical projects examining the case study of Mexico emphasize the sense of danger that journalists feel, showcase factors contributing to local instances of journalistic violence, and demonstrate that attempts to silence and intimidate journalists can succeed through both direct censorship and self-censorship.

Further studies have found that journalists are especially at risk when reporting on locally powerful individuals and when working in areas with high levels of anti-media discourse. Investigations into journalist murders in the Philippines have shown that journalists who were killed had often threatened the interests of local power-holders rather than the national government (Aguilar Jr. et al., 2014). Additional research studying Venezuela has demonstrated that anti-media messages from politicians are positively correlated with non-state violent attacks against journalists, and the longer politicians maintain public anti-media discourse, the greater the likelihood that these verbal attacks will increase the vulnerability of journalists (Mazzaro, 2021).

Self-censorship amongst journalists in some areas is reinforced by aggressive action from the state and other actors (González Macías & Reyna García, 2019). National studies in Columbia have found that journalists are inhibited from freely reporting due to reliance upon advertising and sources, fear of legal and social harassment, and pressure from media figures. These factors contribute to self-censorship amongst journalists in Columbia. Nevertheless, journalists in Columbia have been seen to utilize effective alternative methods to avoid press

barriers and to further free information flows (Barrios & Miller, 2021). Furthermore, journalists in Colombia reported lower levels of perceived professional autonomy when inhibited by political and economic influences. Foremost among these external influences were violence and the murder of journalists, especially when these attacks were connected to the newsroom (Garcés-Prettel, 2020). These studies bolter arguments for the effectiveness of journalist suppression and demonstrate the importance of acknowledging that a multiplicity of actors sometimes seek to silence those with a voice in the media.

Theory and Hypotheses

When states are threatened by protests and riots, governments endeavor to prevent such mobilizations from happening again by killing journalists. This decreases the ability of citizens to become informed about unfavorable government actions, which reduces the likelihood that the population will mobilize against the state in the future. This increased violence against journalists is most likely to result after protests that most threatened the state: those in which direct conflict occurred between the government and the citizenry and in which the government responded by killing citizens. We might also expect to see such an increase following destructive and violent mobilizations and riots. The paragraphs below elaborate upon this theory and connect previous literature with my hypotheses.

The Role of Journalists

The killing of a journalist is a significant event under all circumstances. In 81% of cases over the past ten years, those who killed journalists were able to escape with total impunity (Dunham, 2021). Furthermore, the level of journalist killings in a country plays a role in the calculation of both Reporters Without Borders's World Press Freedom Index and Freedom

House's Global Freedom Score. This lethal targeting based on occupation presents a distinct and significant threat to a free press and an open society. When journalists are killed, society is affected in a unique way. News work, journalism, and reporting fulfil unique and integral roles in the functioning of any civilization (Reporters Without Borders: Our Values). The production of journalistic content and the creation of "news" demands that several events transpire in a specific order: Something must take place, journalists must capture this occurrence and facilitate its publishing by the media, and this publication must be consumed by audience members (Tai & Chang, 2002). If any of these three stages is corrupted or inhibited, the information flows in society are harmed. However, the direct role of organization-sponsored journalists has been co-opted to some degree by the rising number of "citizen journalists," who report on and promote newsworthy happenings without affiliation to a major news group (Nikkanen, 2011).

Research has found that traditional television news stations and physical newspapers are still the predominate forms of news communication around the world, far outpacing pure-internet sources on average. Furthermore, the majority of internet news sources are more widely consumed when they are connected to or associated with a traditional news outlet (Kennedy & Prat, 2018). In this way, journalists and the mass media organizations they serve are still integral to making the population aware of important activities in their communities and in their governments. Because of this, the inciting incidences that cause a civilian group to publicly mobilize against the government usually are conveyed to the population by journalists. Without these journalists, the population would lack the knowledge needed to even consider mobilizing against the state.

Aside from its capacity to merely inform the citizenry, mass media organizations possess agenda setting capabilities. Shaw and Martin (1992) found that "one major function of mass

media is to enhance group consensus within the larger social system by providing issue agenda options more attractive than just those historically learned and expressed as an aspect of one's gender, race, age, level of education, or — to a lesser extent — level of wealth.” In short, news consumers determine how much importance should be placed on a given issue or event through the amount and type of information conveyed by the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This agenda-setting capacity of news reporters can aid in the formation of civilian protests.

Furthermore, research shows that watching and reading news media publications can increase the likelihood of citizens expressing public viewpoints and joining national conversations about policy (King et al., 2017). These studies indicate that journalists not only inform the public of government actions but also play a role in convincing the public to care about these issues and to voice their opinions about the state. From this perspective, journalists and news media organizations can directly contribute to motivating the population of a state to protest the government.

Mass Mobilizations

Mass mobilizations and protests against the government have occurred for years in virtually every nation on Earth. These civilian mobilizations have been shown to have significant impacts on the states in which they occur, and large-scale protests against the governing political regime can weaken or fatally cripple an authoritarian government by bringing about a democratic breakthrough (Kadivar, 2018; Bunce & Wolchik 2011; Thompson 2003). In democratic regimes, anti-government protests possess can shift perceptions and priorities of both other citizens and democratic legislators (McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Gillion, 2013; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017).

When presented with an anti-state protest or mass mobilization, government officials have three primary categories of response: accommodate, ignore, or suppress. When a state is

subjected to mass mobilizations (of peaceful or violent natures), the government may succumb to pressure and meet the demands of the protestors (Klein & Regan, 2018). A case study of this response type can be seen in Bolivia during 2019, where President Evo Morales resigned after almost fourteen years as the nation's executive officer after several weeks of escalating violent protests that accused the President of rigging the nation's election (Nugent, 2019). This example of government officials meeting the requests of civilian mobilizers represents the least common of the three broad categories of state responses, as less than 7% of mass mobilizations result in demands being accommodated initially (Clark & Regan, 2020).

The most common governmental response to anti-state mobilizations is to simply to ignore the demands of the protestors. While the impact of protests has been demonstrated to be substantive in many instances (especially when sustained over long periods of time), individual protests rarely push the government to implement changes, as over 54% of mass protests are ignored by the government initially (Clark & Regan, 2020). Instances of this are easily recognized by most American citizens and citizens of states throughout the world, who have seen mobilizations of the population outside capitol buildings and state halls demand everything from gun control to immigration policy changes with no governmental response.

The third manner in which governments can immediately respond to anti-state protests is through actions intended to silence the protestors. When it comes to silencing protestors directly, we commonly see instances of state officials arresting, dispersing, beating, shooting, and even killing mobilizers participating in both peaceful and violent protests. These instances of state violence against the population indicate efforts to immediately stifle those objecting to the state. The data shows that the first responses of states to mass mobilizations were one of the above forms of violence in over 40% of protests, with an average of 200 violent protest responses

happening globally each year. The highest level of violence—the killing of protesters—was the state’s first response to 263 protests between 1990 and 2020 (Clark & Regan, 2020).

Representative cases of a violent response to protests include Columbia in early/mid-2021, where police injured countless nonviolent protestors and killed over a dozen during a series of civilian anti-state mobilizations objecting to recent economic policy decisions; South Africa in mid-2021, where the police arrested dozens of protestors during a semi-violent mobilization against the government’s jailing of former president Jacob Zuma; and Kazakhstan in early 2022, where government security forces killed over one hundred anti-state rioters who were protesting poor living conditions, corruption, and the dramatic government-approved increase in the cost of fuel (Grattan & Faiola, 2021; BBC News, 2021; Kennedy & Woodyatt, 2022). These examples demonstrate the capacity of states to use violence to disperse and limit anti-state protests.

Violence Against Journalists

In addition to silencing protestors directly, states may try to decrease future protest efforts by shutting off the information flows that are causing the population to mobilize in the first place. With journalistic efforts often playing a necessary role in the development of mass mobilizations and protests, those governments at the receiving end of protestors’ criticisms naturally may choose to target journalists with violent measures in order to silence news conveyance and limit mobilization efforts. This fear of reprisal from the government is felt and internalized by journalists in states throughout the world, as seen in a 2017 article from The Guardian titled “‘You can get killed’: Journalists living in fear as states crack down.” Because states also possess non-violent, bureaucratic, and subtle means of stifling the efforts of journalists who expose unfavorable information about the government to the public, the killing of a journalist by the state (or supporters of the state) is a significant and noteworthy event.

Alternative means of suppressing journalism and journalistic efforts include imprisoning journalists, banning private journalist groups and media organizations, limiting the distribution of certain anti-government news publications, allowing journalists to be tangled in complicated legal procedures, and a multitude of other complex tactics that make communicating negative opinions or information about the government more difficult, arduous, dangerous, or time-consuming.

However, the killing of a civilian who is causing the state difficulties would not be “out of the norm” for governments with repressive aspirations. Research has demonstrated that governmental regimes have historically utilized extrajudicial killings (or killings conducted by government officials without due process of law) to suppress opposition, coerce compliance, or preserve security (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Piazaa & Walsh, 2009). Journalists can often find themselves opposing these goals of the state, with anti-government protests serving as a dangerous sign that the population is being turned against the state through negative media and reporting. The threat posed to the state by the mobilization of the citizenry is palpable and well-demonstrated by the literature (Alemán & Yang, 2011; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). In order to “nip” future protests, riots, and mobilizations “in the bud,” states may use their resources to kill journalists so as to prevent them from fulfilling their necessary role in the chain of events leading up to a mass mobilization. Furthermore, killing a journalist intimidates other journalists, causing these journalists to self-censor, which further decreases reporting (Orgeret, 2016; González Macías & Reyna García, 2019). Journalists take steps to reduce controversial reporting when they witness atrocities committed against their contemporaries. In this way, the killing of a journalist has a broad impact on the news landscape of a nation that can suppress reporting of state misdeeds.

It is most likely that governmental regimes which have shown the capacity and desire to use lethal force to silence protestors are more likely to preventatively kill journalists. While peaceful protests and generally violent/destructive riots might not present a genuine threat to the sovereignty of the state, the most serious form of protest is that in which the state kills protesters. Oftentimes signaling something like civil unrest, direct civilian-state conflict, or even rebellion, protests in which the state kills protestors signal that the state is already in a threatened political stance and has already approved lethal action to silence dissenters. It is a logical connection to assume that deadly violence in the streets can push a state further to a point where the government assassinates journalists.

H1: When states respond to protests by killing protest participants, they are more likely to kill journalists.

It is further possible that mobilizations in which violent actions are taken by protestors can motivate the government to seek silencing actions. By destroying property, setting fire to buildings, looting stores, etc., protestors communicate the weakness of the state to keep its domain free from conflict. By highlighting the failure of a state to maintain security within its borders, aspiring demonstrators may be more inclined towards civil unrest. Mobilizers may view violent protest events as an avenue for continued, escalating rebellion. In this way, violent civilian mobilizations can serve a visible sign of the public's dissatisfaction with the government. By allowing such dissent to be shared, the state puts itself at risk of violent protests snowballing into total regime overthrow. In order to prevent such riots from taking place in the future, the state may use the extrajudicial killing of journalists to limit the ability of citizens to mobilize.

H2: When states experience more violent anti-government protests, they are more likely to kill journalists.

Research Design

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has compiled records of journalists killed around the world since 1992. CPJ researchers “independently investigate and verify the circumstances behind each death” to determine whether or not the killing was “motive-confirmed.” The CPJ considers journalist fatalities to be “motive-confirmed” when it is “reasonably certain” that the journalist in question was killed as a direct reprisal for their work, in combat crossfire, or while conducting a dangerous journalistic assignment. Using the CPJ’s database, the motive-confirmed journalist killings between 1992 and 2020 were coded according to county in each given year. This dataset and time range includes 1398 motive-confirmed journalist killings for all types of perpetrators of journalist killings across 103 countries.

Countries were included in the analysis if any motive-confirmed journalist killing took place according to the CPJ’s database, regardless of the source of fire. In this way, protests occurring in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan—which have experience journalist killings that have not been attributed by the CPJ to the government or military—are still included in the sample. This decision was made because countries that reported no journalist killings during that almost thirty-year period were outliers on one end of the spectrum or the other: Either these countries have such restrained information flows that journalist murders could not be discovered/investigated, or these countries have such strong protections for journalists that there are no realistic circumstances in which a protest would lead to a government-sanctioned journalist killing. In this way, protests occurring in countries like Germany, Portugal, and North Korea—which have no record of any motive-confirmed journalist killings since CPJ data collection began in 1992—are not included in the sample. This exclusion improves the accuracy of the analysis by focusing only on countries that meet at least minimum

levels of reporting/investigating journalist murders or that have at least—at some point—failed to protect journalists from lethal danger.

Journalist Killed is the dependent variable of this research project. It is a dichotomous variable that is coded as “1” if a journalist was killed in that country and year from one of the government-related sources of fire and as “0” otherwise. The decision was made to use a dichotomous variable instead of an ordinal variable, as the binary decision by a state to execute or kill the first journalist is a massive political and social leap compared to subsequent extrajudicial journalist killings. To be consistent with my theory, the dependent variable was compiled by using the CPJ’s data determining when “government officials” or “military officials” were the likely perpetrators of the killing. Instances where the CPJ publicized multiple “suspected sources of fire” were coded as the first source of fire in the CPJ’s original dataset.

The CPJ’s investigators define “government officials” as “civilian government officials, including police” and “military officials” as “members of the government’s military” (CPJ Methodology). Nevertheless, this distinction regarding who actually killed a given journalist is oftentimes murky and difficult to understand. Major government officials are almost never the ones who physically “pull the trigger” that kills a journalist, but figuring out whether the government used elite military teams, contract assassins, or secret police to execute a certain killing is no easy task. No one is ever held accountable in over 80% of journalist killings, so much of the CPJ’s determinations regarding who killed a journalist rely upon investigative techniques, local sources, and reasonable suspicions (Dunham, 2021). However, in the majority of cases, the CPJ’s distinction between “government officials” and “military officials” is situational: Government officials are most often attributed as the suspected source of fire in journalist killings where the journalist was targeted and assassinated, whereas military officials

are most often attributed as the suspected source of fire in journalist killings where the journalist was killed in a military crossfire incident. By examining both “government officials” and “military officials” in my analysis, I ensure that the vast majority of journalist killings by the government are included in my dataset.

Under this aforementioned coding scheme, 475 motive-confirmed journalist killings are seen across the time period from 1992 to 2020, which forms the dependent variable. Of the 72 countries where a journalist was killed by the government or military, over 50% of them experienced 3 or fewer instances of the government killing journalists between 1992 and 2020. The relative rarity of this event indicates that the decision by a state to kill a journalist in the first place is a much larger step to take than subsequent journalist killings. It is for this reason that my research project is most concerned with determining whether protest events push governments to cross the line and take lethal action against the first journalist.

Key Explanatory Variables

The Mass Mobilization Protest Data Project is a joint research endeavor by David H. Clark from the Department of Political Science at Binghamton University and Patrick M. Regan from the Joan Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. This dataset provides my key explanatory variables for this research endeavor. The Mass Mobilization Data Project catalogues anti-state mass mobilizations around the world between 1990 and 2020 that meet the following criteria: 1) comprised of a gathering of 50 or more people, 2) targeted at the state or state policy, and 3) directed towards the policies of the home state and not a foreign state. The Mass Mobilization Protest Data Project further details each individual protest based on factors such as length, size, violence level, protester grievance, and state response. I use this dataset to construct the two key explanatory variables.

Protesters Killed is the explanatory variable in Models 1 and 3. It is an ordinal variable indicating the total number of anti-government protests in which the state killed protestors that occurred in a given country and year. After removing data for those countries in which no journalists have been killed for their work according to the CPJ's database since 1992, this dataset indicates that 220 protests took place in which the government's first response was to kill civilians between 1991 and 2020.

Protester Violence is the explanatory variable in Model 2. It is an ordinal variable indicating the total number of violent and destructive anti-government protests that occurred in a given country and year. After removing data for those countries in which no journalists have been killed for their work according to the CPJ's database since 1992, this dataset indicates that 2949 protests took place in which the protesters were violent between 1991 and 2020.

Control Variables

The *Democracy Dummy* variable is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a state is classified as a democracy by the Autocracies of the World Dataset during that year. It is coded "1" if the state was categorized as a democracy during that year and "0" otherwise. This control is used because research has demonstrated that more journalists are killed in democracies than other forms of government (Asal et al., 2018).

The *Regime Duration* variable is an ordinal variable that represents the log of a political regime's duration as coded by the Autocracies of the World Dataset. This variable is coded as the log of the number of years that a national government has been operating as a democracy or a specific type of autocracy. Whenever the government type changes, the counter restarts at "1." This methodology indicates that Syria has been a "military autocracy" since 1961, Russia has

been a “multiparty autocracy” since 1991, and the Philippines has been a “democracy” since 1986—to name a few examples. This control is used because research has demonstrated that the likelihood of journalists being killed for their reporting efforts decreases as autocratic and anocratic regimes endure (Solis, 2021).

The *Major War* variable is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a state was engaged in a major war during that year according to the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Version 21.1). It is coded “1” if the state was engaged in a war in which over 1000 battle-related deaths have occurred and “0” otherwise. *Major War* was controlled for in order to account for the high levels of violence associated with extensive warfare. In these instances, journalists (and civilians in general) are more commonly at risk of being killed in crossfire instances by government officials. Furthermore, there are reports that governments use war and conflict to mask their targeting of journalists (Carr, 2012).

The *Freedom of Speech* variable is an ordinal variable that measures freedom of speech in the country as either “complete,” “some,” or “none” (coded as “0,” “1,” and “2” respectively) according to the CIRI Human Rights Data Project. It is necessary to control for freedom of speech protections in a country when examining journalist killings. However, freedom of speech levels decrease when journalists are killed by the government and when protesters are threatened or attacked by the state. In this way, the *Freedom of Speech* variable may have an aggrandized impact when examining motivating factors of journalist killings.

Results

Three models are used to test my hypotheses. Logistic regression is used in each model to determine the correlation between the dependent variable (*Journalist Killed*) and the explanatory

variables (*Protesters Killed* and *Protester Violence*). All explanatory and control variables are lagged 1 year to address simultaneity bias. The results of these models can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Analysis of Journalist Killings by Government or Military between 1992 and 2020

<i>Variable</i>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>
	Protesters Killed	Protester Violence	Protesters Killed
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>
	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>
Protesters Killed	.245*		.363**
	(.128)		(.168)
Protester Violence		.027	
		(.024)	
Democracy Dummy			.401*
			(.247)
Regime Duration			-.000
			(.104)
Major War			1.327***
			(.294)
Freedom of Speech			-.346*
			(.179)
Constant	-2.438***	-2.443***	-2.484***
	(.145)	(.150)	(.324)
Log likelihood	-845.719	-846.815	-532.217
Wald Test (χ^2)	3.67*	1.30	33.23***
Observations	2987	2987	1922

Clustered standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Model 1 tests the bivariate relationship between journalist killings and protests in which the government kills protesters. This model demonstrates that, without controlling for any other factors, the *Protesters Killed* variable is significant at the 0.1% level. The results from this simple regression indicate that there is basic empirical support for my *Hypothesis 1*.

Model 2 tests the bivariate relationship between journalist killings and violent anti-government protests. This model demonstrates that, without controlling for any other factors, the

Protester Violence variable is not significant. The results from this regression indicate that there is insufficient basic support for my *Hypothesis 2*. This finding bolsters my theoretical argument that only the most threatening protest events can motivate a state to take lethal action against journalists. Violent protests in general fail to reach this high benchmark.

Model 3 utilizes logistic regression to analysis the relationship between journalist killings and protests in which the government kills protesters and accounts for several control factors. With these controls, the *Protesters Killed* variable is significant at the 0.05% level. The substantive effect of this variable indicates that, when the government kills protesters, the likelihood of the government killing a journalist in the next year increases by about 3%.

The *Democracy Dummy* variable is found to be significant at the 0.1% level—further supporting the findings of Asal et al. from 2018. The *Regime Duration* variable is found not to be significant in predicting the government’s killing of a journalist. Expectedly, the *Major War* variable has a massive significance in estimating a journalist killing in the following year with a statistical significance level of 0.01%. The substantive impact of this variable equates to a major war increasing the likelihood of a journalist being killed by the government in that state by 15% in the next year. This most likely stems from the major war continuing into the next year and journalists being killed in the crossfire or being targeted as part of the state’s military campaign. The *Freedom of Speech* variable is also found to be statistically significant at the 0.1% level. The statistical evidence for the impact of the *Protesters Killed* variable in the presence of such significant control variables provides immense support for my *Hypothesis 1*.

To further evaluate these empirical findings, I reviewed individual cases from the data to ensure that my theoretical mechanism is reflective of the incidence. One such case study is that of Musa Anter. Anter was a well-known Kurdish journalist who wrote columns for multiple

news publications in Turkey, including *Özgür Gündem*—a popular newspaper amongst the Kurdish people that reported developments in the ongoing Turkish-Kurdish conflict through an anti-government lens. In 1992, while visiting the Turkish city of Diyarbaki, Anter was lured into a taxi, driven to the outskirts of town, and shot four times by the “taxi driver.” The CPJ determined that Anter’s likely killers were “government officials.” While the long-lasting military conflict between the Turkish government and members of Kurdish militant groups undoubtedly played a role in motivating the government’s likely killing of Anter, Anter’s murder specifically occurred on the heels of a massive civilian mobilization in Diyarbaki in the previous year, where over 25,000 Kurdish individuals gathered to mourn and protest the recent killings of Kurdish fighters and political leaders. Turkish security forces are reported as having opened fire on the crowd, hundreds of Kurds were injured or arrested, and an unknown number of civilians were killed in the conflict with police (Clark & Regan, 2020). Reeling from these violent protests in Diyarbaki, I argue that the government took steps to silence journalists like Anter whose reporting might have insighted the next Kurdish mass mobilization. While the data might show that a broad empirical connection exists between certain protest events and subsequent journalist killings, it is specific stories like Anter’s that further demonstrate the probability of and support for my theory.

Conclusion and Implications

Journalists put themselves in dangerous situations and at odds with powerful figures in the pursuit of truth. Thousands of journalists have been arrested, harassed, beaten, injured, or killed for their efforts over the past decades, and journalists continue to be targeted for their work around the globe. One place known to be particularly unsafe for journalists and reporters is protests. Anti-government mobilizations have too often resulted in violence against media

workers, as clashes between civilians and government security forces put everyone in the vicinity at risk. While the threat that violent protests present to reporters covering those protests has long been understood by journalists and the media, this research project reveals that the threat to journalists may not dissipate once the protest ends. My research shows that, when governments use lethal force to quell a present-day mobilization, they are more likely to kill journalists in the future, which could represent a government effort to prevent future mobilizations.

While many factors might motivate a state to use lethal force against a journalist, the evidence of my research indicates that protests in which the state kills protesters are correlated with the government killing a journalist in the following year. The substantive impact for this research is significant: Protesters being killed by the government increases the likelihood of a journalist being killed by the government in the next year by approximately 3%. Although no substantive correlation is found between less threatening protests and journalist killings, this research indicates that states reeling from the political and social dangers of deadly protests are more likely to take steps to stop future protest and civil uprising events by killing journalists. By targeting journalists, governments could be attempting to make it less likely that subsequent mobilizations will occur. Government kills journalists in order to silence anti-government voices and to intimidate other journalists into censoring themselves. With the information flows of society being strangled by the state, citizens cannot be informed enough to mobilize.

This research informs the journalism profession about a substantive lethal danger. Journalists working in regions or countries experiencing high levels of violence against protesters should be cautious when disseminating publications that reflect poorly on the government. These protests where the government kills protesters could serve as a “tipping point” that pushes the government “over the edge” and causes them to lash out on those sparking

anti-government mobilizations. Journalists, reporters, and media organizations need to closely monitor the situations of the countries in which they work, as the shifting responses of the government to protests can put journalists at risk. Additionally, this research highlights the need for further protections for journalists working in dangerous areas. Governments that view the killing of journalists as a means of limiting future civil unrest have adopted a viewpoint that posits journalists as opponents in a game of war rather than conveyors of truth. Journalists deserve full support and protection in what they do, and international organizations and governing bodies should endeavor to protect them in every way possible from governments seeking to silence reporting efforts.

The findings of this research endeavor contribute to a growing literature about cross-national factors that drive the killing of journalists around the world (Asal et al., 2018; Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021; Solis, 2021; Carey & Gohdes, 2021; Bjørnskov & Freytag, 2016). These results provide greater support to the understanding of extrajudicial killings as means of enforcing compliance and suppressing opposition (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Piazaa & Walsh, 2009). This project bolsters Asal et al.'s findings in 2018 that democracies experience more journalist killings by showing that their results hold even when the dependent variable is limited to only government killings. It also provides evidence that Solis's research from 2021 indicating that journalists are killed less often as autocratic regimes endure is not supported when the dependent variable is limited to only journalists killed by the government. It provides empirical support to the generally accepted idea that war is a dangerous place for journalists. Lastly, it demonstrates the palpable danger that deadly protest events can present to journalists in the following year.

Although deadly protests only increase the likelihood of a journalist killing by a small percentage, any new discoveries in this research area are crucial. Any new knowledge gained that allows for journalists to be more strongly protected is beneficial to society. This increase in journalist killings involves human lives, so no substantiated discovery could be insignificant. Furthermore, this research topic is still a fledgling discipline compared to other sectors of political science research. Cross-nation studies investigating journalist killings are limited. For this reason, my findings bolster an awareness of when practitioners of one of society's most important professions are targeted for their work. These results provide actionable information that allows journalists to better understand when they might be more at risk of state-sanctioned violence, and they expand political science research into factors affecting free speech.

Future research in this area could examine specific variations of this research according to government type, protest size, or regional variation. With these model variations, other types of protests—such as violent protests, peaceful protests, or protests in general—could be analyzed to see if a statistically significant correlation is seen under specific circumstances or in certain areas. Furthermore, this research design could be utilized to examine whether protests influence governments to kill more than one journalist—such as examining the jump from governments killing one journalist to two journalists, two journalists to three journalists, etc. Finally, different lengths of lagging effects could be utilized in order to see if governments respond to deadly protests by killing journalists one month later, six months later, two years later, or so on. These expanded findings would further develop an understanding of how anti-government protests and the government killing journalists are linked.

Additional supplemental research could investigate the emerging relationship between social media reporting and government responses. The rapid information exchange of social

media platforms has made it possible for individuals without official journalistic credentials to act as informants and critics of the state to the broader society. These studies could examine the government's response to individuals who dispense anti-government messages on social platforms via the internet. This could aid in empirically demonstrating the risks associated with non-journalist actors publicly disapproving of the governing regime. While it is most likely that the government's oppressive actions would become more widespread when looking at social media reporting—as greater numbers of individuals are putting themselves at odds with the state, empirical research supporting this would be useful to assist and inform those who aim to speak out against the government.

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