

Unintended Consequences of Repression: Alliance Formation in South Korea's Democracy Movement (1970-1979)

Paul Y. Chang, *Singapore Management University*

Research regarding the impact of repression on social movements has yielded conflicting findings; some argue that repression decreases the total quantity of protest events while others argue that it motivates protest. To move beyond this impasse, various scholars have suggested exploring how repression influences the quality of social movements. This study assesses the impact repression had on the formation of alliances between different social groups participating in South Korea's democracy movement. Results from negative binomial regression analyses show that repression facilitated the formation of alliances between movement actors at a time when the overall number of protest events decreased. This study contributes to the literature on coercion and mobilization by pointing to the possibility of movement development during low levels of a protest cycle.

Recent studies of social movements have identified repression as one important aspect of the larger political opportunity structure that significantly shapes movement trajectories (Davenport, Johnston and Mueller 2005; Zwermer and Steinhoff 2005; Earl 2003, 2006; Goldstone and Tilly 2001; della Porta 1996). Empirical findings from past studies have revealed a “paradox” regarding the impact of repression on social movements (Brockett 2005, 1995). While some argue that repression reduces movement vitality (Olzak, Beasley and Olivier 2003) because of the added costs associated with repression (Tilly 1978), others argue that repression increases the rate of protest and collective action (White 1989; Khawaja 1993, 1994). In reviews of this literature researchers have puzzled over the fact that, “Both threats and opportunities can mobilize activism... For some challengers, increased political openness enhances the prospects for mobilization, while other movements seem to respond more to threat than opportunity.” (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996:1645,1634; see also Earl 2006; Lichbach 1987).

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