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Why Do People Join Backlash Protests? Lessons from Turkey

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Abstract

When people learn that demonstrators are being subjected to harsh treatment by the police, sometimes their reaction is to join demonstrations. What explains the potentially mobilizing power of repression? Information-oriented theories posit that repression changes people's beliefs about the likely success of the protests or the type of the government, thus encouraging them to join. Social–psychological theories posit that repression provokes a moral and emotional reaction from bystanders, and these emotional reactions are mobilizing. Our research offers a rare opportunity to test these theories, empirically, against one another. We offer experimental evidence from Turkey after the 2013 Gezi uprising. In this setting, emotional reactions appear to be the link between repression and backlash mobilization. Information-oriented theories of backlash mobilization may be less germane in democracies, in which people already have access to information about their governments, and in highly polarized polities, in which few people's political affinities are up for grabs.

Keywords

repression, backlash mobilization, emotions, social movements

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If people consider costs and benefits before they decide to join protests, then *backlash movements* are deeply puzzling. Backlash movements are ones that grow in the wake of police or military repression.[1] We might expect a spike in repression, and hence in the costs of participation, to discourage bystanders from joining. If protesters are "teargassed, clubbed, and ultimately arrested," it seems reasonable to expect, with Francisco (1995, 267), that the demonstrators' "mobilization capacity erodes as word of the repression flows through the society." Theories of regime dynamics generally assume that repression is a deterrent, one that makes people less likely to protest or rebel (see, e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2001, 2006; Boix 2003; Besley and Persson 2011; Svolik 2013).

But there are many instances in which police violence appears to stoke protest and rebellion, rather than suppress or deter it. Police attacks on marchers in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, and elsewhere in the Jim Crow South, helped galvanize the Civil Rights Movement (see, e.g., Chong 1991). A massacre in Tblisi in 1989 led to a spike in demonstrations, not just in Georgia but in several Soviet republics (Beissinger 2002). Recently, in Ukraine, Brazil, and Turkey in 2013, rough handling of early demonstrators by the police was quickly followed by a scale shift in the size of protests (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2017). And in Hong Kong in the fall of 2014, "what may have amounted only to small demonstrations mushroomed into a broad movement when the police used teargas and pepper spray in an attempt to break up protests" (Forsythe and Wong 2014).

Several theories explain why bystanders are sometimes mobilized by police repression of "early rising" protesters (McAdam 1995).[2] Many revolve around the *information* that repression conveys to bystanders, information about the resolve and effectiveness of the government and of its opponents, or about the government's type ("good" or "bad"). In short, repression conveys information that shifts people's factual beliefs in ways that encourage them to join the protests. Quite a different perspective on backlash protests revolves around people's *emotional* responses to repression. Repression makes some people angry; though it may also make them fearful, among some—and up to some levels of brutality—the anger outweighs the fear and brings bystanders into the streets. In this article, we take advantage of a rare opportunity to test these explanations against one another among citizens of a country—Turkey—that recently experienced a national uprising, sparked by rough treatment of a small group of demonstrators by the police. Our results indicate little effect of repression on subjects' beliefs but strong, and mobilizing, emotional reactions.

In the next section, we review alternative theoretical explanations of backlash mobilization. We contrast information and emotions-oriented accounts and spell out the empirical implications of each. In the following section, we offer background information about Turkey's Gezi Park uprising, which forms the backdrop of our survey experiment in Istanbul. We then describe that experiment and report the results. We also discuss the limitations of our empirical approach but offer additional contextual information that suggests that our findings indeed offer an accurate account of the dynamics of repression and mobilization in the Gezi Park uprising.

If not information but emotions were what drove the backlash in Turkey, it is nevertheless the case that protest organizers and government officials tried to strategize around these mass reactions. In the penultimate section, we offer evidence of their strategies from Turkey and from other countries. We end by discussing the broader implications of our findings. Although evidence from a single country hardly constitutes a definitive, general test of competing theories, our results point to the plausibility that emotional responses, even in the absence of belief change, can undergird backlash movements. Information accounts are probably more germane to authoritarian regimes, in which knowledge about the government and its opponents is harder to acquire, or in democracies in which people have weaker and more malleable prior beliefs about the government and activists than did the Turkish population.

Theories of Repression and the Mobilization of Bystanders

One can point to many instances in which repression by the police or military stamps out protests. It is intuitive why it has this effect. At high levels, repression instills fear; it may lead even committed activists to abandon the streets and shift to more subterranean spheres of actions (see, e.g., Lichbach 1987). Targeted arrest or killing of activists who occupy key network positions can also be effective in disrupting movements (Siegel 2011). But when the opposite is the case—when repression leads people to join the protests—what explains their reactions?

Models of Information and Belief Change

Several important models answer this question by focusing on the information that repression conveys and its power to thus shift bystanders' beliefs and actions. An important example is Lohmann's model (1994). Her work was inspired by the Leipzig Monday protests which helped bring down the government of the German Democratic Republic in 1989. In her model, everyday oppression by the authorities against individual citizens is dispersed and opaque to public opinion. Repression of open demonstrations exposes the repressive nature of the regime, leading people to recode it from good to bad.[3] "The regime loses public support and collapses if the protest activities reveal it to be malign" (1994, 49). Opp, also studying protests in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), makes a similar point: "repression might lead to discontent and thus increase one of the positive incentives to protest" (1994, 103).

Relatedly, Shadmehr and Boleslavsky (2015) analyze a model in which bystanders must decide whether to join protests after observing the government repress activists. The bystanders are uncertain about the "types" of the government and activists, whether they are good or bad. In some equilibria, bystanders whose prior beliefs are such that they would not ordinarily join protests observe repression and update these beliefs, coming to view the government as bad and the activists as good.[4] Bystanders' uncertainty about the other actors is crucial to this model; if they

were certain about either the government's or the activists' types, repression would not be informative and there would never be backlash demonstrations.

Cascade models of mobilization share some features with these information approaches. Lohmann relates her work to a long line of such models, in which people's decisions to protest depend on the actions of other citizens (see Granovetter 1978; DeNardo 1985; Kuran 1991). Among the mechanisms underpinning these threshold or cascade dynamics is shifting beliefs about the relative strength and weakness of the government and protesters. People observe the police using heavy-handed tactics against demonstrators and infer that the government is weaker than they had believed and that many other people will come to the same conclusion. Therefore, the movement grows. Opp (1994) also explores this dynamic. He contends that repression increases people's sense of the vulnerability of the government and the strength of opposition to it: "repression leads citizens to believe that the support of government in the population will further decrease and the fading support must ultimately lead to reforms. In this situation a citizen will surmise that his or her personal influence will be high too" (1994, 105; see also related models by Przeworski 1991 and Blaydes and Lo 2012).

In sum, we have a rich tradition of models in which government repression shifts bystanders' beliefs about the resolve or effectiveness of the government and the demonstrators, or about the type of one or both actors, and these new beliefs encourage at least some bystanders to join the movement.

Models of Emotions and Mobilization

Social–psychological theories of backlash movements have a very different flavor, in particular those that focus on the emotional impact of repression. People who are sympathetic with the goals of small protests or who feel affinity with the protesters observe them being attacked by police and react with empathetic anger and moral outrage.[5] These emotional responses encourage them to join the demonstrations. Pearlman (2013), for instance, offers an account of "emotions-infused decision-making" as a microfoundation of recent Arab uprisings. These are *push* models, in which emotions propel people to act, rather than *pull* models, in which they are drawn to action by the prospect of higher payoffs. Della Porta (2013, 153) writes that a "sense of injustice, as well as the creation of intense feelings of identification and solidarity, prompted by repression [of protesters] can increase the motivation to participate." Social–psychological research offers support for these emotions-oriented explanations. In lab experiments, treating subjects in a manner that they see as unfair elicits their moral outrage, treating other people unfairly elicits their empathetic anger and both outrage and empathetic anger encourage collective action (see Miller et al. 2009; Thomas, McGarty, and Mavor 2009; Valentino et al. 2011). Anger leads many people to reduce their assessments of risk, fear to increase it (Lerner and Keltner 2000, 2001). In a broad-ranging review, van Zomeren (2013, 381) writes that "anger is the most relevant emotion with respect to collective action because it is an approach emotion that seeks to redress injustices" (see also Jasper 2014).

Unlike older, mob theories, these later accounts stress the link between people's cognitive and moral appraisals of violence and their emotional responses (see van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013; van Zomeren et al. 2004; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Jasper (2014, 208) explains that anger and indignation "direct blame for social problems, create sympathy and admiration for protestors, and guide strategic choices." The person who learns that strangers are being beaten has to believe that their cause is a good one and that the actions of the police warrant terms like "brutality." This marriage of cognition and emotion leads to the expectation that shared identities and political affiliations will mediate bystanders' responses to repression. Where an opposition supporter sees fellow government opponents being teargassed and infers that an injustice is being done, a government supporter sees lawless hooligans who are receiving the treatment they deserve.

Information-oriented theories and emotions-oriented ones suggest questions for empirical research. Does repression convey information that prompts citizens to update their sense of the effectiveness of the movement and of their own impact? Does it make people desire more strongly that the movement succeed? Or instead of teaching them something about the government or demonstrators that they didn't already know, does it elicit their anger?

Of course, these effects could be at work simultaneously. It could be that backlash mobilization reflects shifts in people's beliefs alone or their emotional reactions alone. Or it could be that people experience both new beliefs and emotional reactions. If repression changes beliefs *and* stirs anger, a focus on emotions might sharpen our sense of the precise mechanisms involved in mobilization, but this would represent a less fundamental challenge to information theories. Emotional reactions might even be seen as epiphenomenal, a by-product of belief change. A finding that repression sparked mobilizing anger with *no* change of beliefs would represent a deeper challenge to information models.

At first glance, it may seem that changes in people's beliefs about the ruling authorities, on one side, and their emotional reactions, on the other, are tightly interwoven and will not, in reality, be separable. But there are examples of people being angered by acts of official violence, even though the acts are not, from their viewpoint, especially surprising or informative. Some come from the US Civil Rights Movement. The "bloody Sunday" attacks by Sheriff Bill Clark and his officers on Selma marchers in 1965 shocked white liberal northerners, who were exposed to them via a relatively new medium, television (see Wasow 2016). Among these northerners, we would expect both emotional reactions and changes in beliefs. But the brutality was not news for the local African American community; indeed, movement leaders anticipated and sometimes sought to draw police and sheriff's departments into acts of violence, a point we return to later. A similar dynamic is at work today. Residents of cities like Ferguson, Missouri, or Baton Rouge, Lousiana, were less surprised by acts of police violence than were outsiders (with video footage from cell phones, the new technology of information conveyance in the current period). For many locals, brutality was well known and did not represent

new information. But we would not be surprised that photographs, videos, and written reports of these actions would nevertheless provoke anger and moral outrage in the local community.

Istanbul's Gezi Park Protests

We have conducted in-depth research into recent backlash movements in a number of new democracies, Turkey among them (See Aytaç et al. 2017). The Gezi Park protests took place in late May through mid-June, 2013. Their epicenter was Istanbul, where the park is centrally located, next to the Taksim Square. The protests began with a small group, the Taksim Solidarity Committee, camping in the park, resisting the plans of the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to turn the area into a shopping mall and residences. At the end of May, the police tried to dislodge Taksim Solidarity members from the park, burning their tents and dousing them with water cannons, teargas, and pepper spray. Images and accounts of the attacks flew through the Internet and social media. The movement soon spread. Within days, demonstrators were in the streets of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and other cities, their numbers swelling to the hundreds of thousands.[6] The authorities' harsh treatment of protesters through mid-June—six were killed and hundreds injured—rained international condemnation down on the government.

Protesters' self-reported reasons for joining the demonstrations point to repression as a key factor. On June 6–8, Konda Research and Consultancy, a private polling firm, conducted interviews with more than 4,000 protesters massed in Gezi Park.[7] The Konda interviewers asked, "At what point did you decide to participate in the protests?" About half of the respondents (49 percent) chose the answer, "after seeing police brutality." This was the modal response (Table 1).

A survey we conducted in Istanbul of a representative sample of the city's adult population also indicates that many people, protesters and nonprotesters alike, saw repression as inciting people to join.[8] In a closed-response question, we described two reasons a person might have to join the Gezi protest. He or she might want to take part in a movement "to force the government to work better for the citizens" or "after learning that protesters were teargassed and shot with water cannons." Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated that repression of protesters was the more important motivation leading a hypothetical person to join demonstrations. In a nationally representative survey conducted about a month after the protests, the late-May police repression was given as the most frequent answer when people were asked about what led to the escalation in the demonstrations and changed the course of events. Both opponents and supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [AKP]) gave this response.[9]

But if police attacks brought throngs of erstwhile bystanders into the streets, what lay behind their reactions? Did government repression change many Turks' beliefs about the government— did they earlier see it as benign, but, post-repression, come to view it as malevolent? Did it change their assessment of the strength of the

Table 1. Motivations of Protesters at Istanbul's Gezi Park.

At what point did you decide to participate in the protests?	*N*	Percentage
After seeing police brutality	2,134	49
When they began removing the trees	823	19
Upon the statements of PM Erdoğan	618	14
When the Taksim project was announced	442	10
After seeing the atmosphere in Taksim	186	4

Source: Konda Survey.
Note: PM = prime minister.

government and its steadfastness? Or was its impact mainly emotional, stoking anger, and outrage?

In the next section, we report on an experiment in Turkey, in which we expose a randomly selected group of subjects to reminders of police brutality in the Gezi Park protests and then probe their opinions of the ruling party (i.e., the government's "type"), beliefs about the government's strength and resolve, and their emotional responses. To empirically adjudicate among emotional and informational mechanisms for the link between repression and mobilization, we borrow from recent advances in formal mediation analysis (Imai et al. 2011; Imai and Yamamoto 2013).

An ideal test of the explanations outlined earlier might involve before- and after-repression measures of beliefs and emotions. But short of this unlikely design, there are real advantages to our empirical approach. By randomly assigning respondents to a scenario of police repression, our design not only mimics a before–after comparison but also ensures that the effect of repression on mobilization is not confounded by other characteristics of individuals that could, plausibly, drive both police targeting and participation. Confounders might include people's ideology, social class, or partisanship. In addition to the benefits of random assignment, our design employs treatments that are more connected to real-world events than is the case of many lab experiments about collective action. Of course, our empirical approach is not without drawbacks. The main concern is with the external validity of the experiment to the actual protests, which came earlier. Later we offer additional evidence from surveys of Gezi Park protesters and from our fieldwork that also points toward anger about police brutality as the key factor in the mobilization of bystanders.

The Istanbul Repression Experiment

In 2015, we conducted a survey experiment that took advantage of the renewed salience of the Gezi Park conflict in recent months. At the end of 2014, news broke that the Istanbul municipal government had set aside funds in its budget for the Gezi development project, stirring a public debate. In April and May 2015, we

Figure 1. Istanbul repression experiment: Images used in the *repression* treatment.

interviewed an online sample of 833 adult Istanbul residents.[10] We randomly assigned respondents to a *repression* treatment group, a *placebo* group, and a *control* group.[11] Respondents in the repression treatment saw a collage of photographs that brought to mind the severity of police actions during the Gezi protests (Figure 1). The accompanying text read: "During the Gezi Park protests in 2013, many observers highlighted that the very harsh police action towards the protesters ended with at least six people being killed and several hundred badly injured."

Respondents assigned to the placebo treatment group viewed a postcard-like image of the Istanbul skyline at night with the statement, "This photograph was taken in Istanbul last month" (Figure A1 in the online appendix). The purpose of having a placebo condition was to rule out the possibility that any differences between repression and control groups was due to the presence of images in the treatment groups rather than their content. People who were assigned to the control group saw no image.

To probe differences in average willingness to join protests across the experimental groups, respondents were asked the following question:

> Recently it has been reported in the news that the Municipality of Istanbul allocated funds for the Gezi Park development in its 2015 budget. If the government and municipality decided to go ahead with the project, and the authorities began clearing the trees from the park and people started to go out and protest, how likely would you be to join the protests by going out and attending a rally?

Table 2. Outcome Questions: Potential Mediators.

Explanations	Post-treatment questions
Information- oriented	If the government decides to go ahead with the project of developing Gezi Park, how effective do you think protests would be in stopping it? (*Protest effective*: 1 = not effective at all; 4 = very effective) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) • The Gezi protests in 2013 were indicative of the AKP government's weakness (*Government weak*) • The AKP government was confident of its handling of the protests (*Government confident*) We would like to know what you think about each of the four political parties with seats in the parliaments. Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. (*Views of AKP*)
Emotions-oriented	Below are a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Thinking about the images you have just seen, please indicate to what extent you feel each of the emotions below. (Control version: Please indicate to what extent you feel each emotion right now.) Angry, Outraged, Hopeless, Worried, Afraid, Hopeful (Presented in randomized order; answer scale 1 = very slightly or not at all; 5 = very much)

Note: AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi.

Respondents rated the likelihood of their joining the protest on a seven-point scale, ranging from *definitely would not* (1) to *definitely would* participate (7).[12]

Competing information- and emotions-oriented theories of backlash protests, as we have seen, focus on distinct reactions that people have to state violence. These distinct reactions can be thought of, in statistical terms, as mediators between repression and willingness to protest. One such mediator is beliefs about the steadfastness of the government and potential success of the movement. To probe the sensitivity of these beliefs to images of repression, we asked a series of questions, post-treatment, about the government's strength and the likely success of future protests (Table 2). Another theoretically important mediator is beliefs about the government's type. To see whether exposure to repression shifts these beliefs, we asked our respondents, post-treatment, their opinions of the ruling AKP party. A final mediator we probe is emotional responses, including anger. To evaluate treatment-induced changes in emotions, we draw on a tool widely used by psychologists, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988).[13] We instructed respondents to think about the images they had just seen and indicate the extent to which they felt anger, in addition to a number of other emotions, on a five-point scale.[14]

Results

The first result to note in our experiment is that people who were exposed to the repression treatment expressed greater willingness to join protests. This can be seen in the first model in Table 3, a regression analysis of average treatment effects on the respondents' likelihood of joining protests, with the control group as the omitted category.[15] Were this not the case, the interpretation of Gezi as a backlash movement, or the verisimilitude of our experiment, would be in question.

The second result to note is that the repression effect is driven by people who opposed the government. Recall that social–psychological models predict that not violence *per se*, but violence that is perceived as unjustified, provokes a backlash. In line with this prediction, the impact of repression in our samples was powerfully refracted by partisanship. As Model 2 shows, the mobilizing effect of repression in the full sample is driven by its impact on supporters of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* [CHP]). AKP supporters who were assigned to the repression treatment are no more likely to say they would join the protests than are their copartisans in the control group (model 3).[16]

Having seen that reminders of repression can boost people's willingness to protest, especially among antigovernment individuals, we turn to theoretically relevant mediators. Table 4 presents the effects of our treatments on these mediators among all respondents (top panel), CHP voters (middle panel), and AKP voters (bottom panel).[17] The first result to notice is that people in the repression treatment were left angrier than people in the control group (column 1). This was true of CHP supporters. Recall that these CHP supporters in the repression treatment declared themselves more willing to protest than were their counterparts in the control group (Table 3, model 2). Hence, each of the links in the emotions-based explanation is present: (1) *repression produces anger*, and (2) *anger encourages collective action among opponents of the ruling party*. Of course, this evidence alone cannot be considered conclusive, but it is highly suggestive that emotions are the primary mediator between repression and protest.

Notice, however, that AKP supporters in the repression treatment also became more angry than their copartisans in the control group, although they were no more likely to join the protests. Our interpretation is that AKP supporters were angered not by reminders of the authorities' harsh treatments of the protesters but simply by reminders of the Gezi protests. There is evidence that AKP supporters overwhelmingly believed the government's framing, put forth during the protests, that the protests were a plot by foreigners against Turkey. A representative survey conducted by Konda Research (2014, 39-40) shortly after the protests asked whether protesters were "demanding for their rights and freedoms in a democratic manner" or were part of a "plot against Turkey." Eighty-two percent of AKP supporters said it was a plot; only 10 percent of supporters of the main opposition party (CHP) answered this way. Since most AKP supporters seem to view the protesters as foreign agents or traitorous compatriots, their anger when reminded of Gezi protests is not surprising.

Table 3. Average Treatment Effects on Willingness to Protest.

DV: Likelihood of participation	(1a) Full sample	(1b) Full sample	(2a) CHP voters	(2b) CHP voters	(3a) AKP voters	(3b) AKP voters
Repression	0.38* (0.22)	0.32* (0.19)	0.62* (0.35)	0.57* (0.33)	0.17 (0.23)	0.20 (0.23)
Placebo	0.01 (0.21)	−0.05 (0.19)	0.26 (0.36)	−0.01 (0.36)	−0.06 (0.18)	−0.13 (0.19)
Intercept	3.23*** (0.15)	0.27 (0.53)	4.57*** (0.27)	3.17** (1.33)	1.49*** (0.14)	1.21** (0.50)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	694	641	217	204	173	161

Source: Authors' survey.
Note: Cell entries represent coefficients from an ordinary least squares regression of likelihood of participation on the repression and placebo treatments, using the control as reference category. Robust standard errors are given in parentheses. Some models include controls. Controls include gender, age, education, interest in politics, and opinion about the country's direction. AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; CHP = Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

Table 4. Average Treatment Effects on Potential Mediators.

	(1) Anger	(2) Protests effective	(3) Government weak	(4) Government confident	(5) Views of AKP
			All respondents		
Repression	0.91*** (0.13)	0.03 (0.09)	0.21 (0.13)	−0.06 (0.13)	−0.69* (0.39)
Placebo	−0.84*** (0.13)	−0.05 (0.09)	0.14 (0.13)	0.11 (0.13)	−0.07 (0.39)
Intercept	2.86*** (0.10)	2.84*** (0.06)	2.51*** (0.09)	2.83*** (0.09)	3.94*** (0.28)
N	636	680	653	651	654
			CHP voters		
Repression	1.10*** (0.19)	0.10 (0.15)	0.13 (0.22)	−0.22 (0.22)	−0.29 (0.24)
Placebo	−0.83*** (0.24)	0.26 (0.16)	0.12 (0.23)	0.22 (0.24)	−0.01 (0.30)
Intercept	3.40*** (0.17)	3.03*** (0.11)	3.19*** (0.17)	2.32*** (0.16)	0.74*** (0.21)
N	201	214	209	209	210
			AKP voters		
Repression	1.02*** (0.26)	−0.08 (0.18)	0.04 (0.17)	−0.01 (0.20)	−0.31 (0.21)
Placebo	−0.78*** (0.19)	−0.34** (0.15)	0.06 (0.18)	−0.06 (0.20)	−0.33 (0.26)
Intercept	2.05*** (0.16)	2.56*** (0.11)	1.51*** (0.11)	3.92*** (0.13)	9.41*** (0.13)
N	156	168	161	162	170

Source: Authors' survey.
Note: Cell entries represent coefficients from an ordinary least squares regression of informational and emotional mediators on the repression and placebo treatments, using the control as reference category. Robust standard errors are given in parentheses. AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; CHP = Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

Did reminders of repression influence people's beliefs about the likely success of the protests or of the government in ending them? We asked our sample, "If the government decides to go ahead with the project of developing Gezi Park, how effective do you think protests would be in stopping it?" We also asked whether the protests had been indicative of the AKP government's weakness and whether the AKP government was confident in its handling of the protests. *In no case did the*

repression treatment group's response pattern differ significantly from that of the control group (see columns 2–4, Table 4). We therefore find little evidence from Turkey that repression mobilized people by changing their beliefs about the likely success of the movement.

We turn now to the idea that repression induced people to update their beliefs about whether the regime was a beneficent or malevolent type. In the overall sample, respondents in the repression treatment did exhibit more negative views of the government than those of respondents in the control group. But opinions of the government held by opposition CHP supporters in the repression treatment were no worse than those of their copartisans in the control group. We saw earlier that CHP voters were the only subgroup whose willingness to protest rose in the repression treatment. Even if some AKP supporters were turned off by the government's heavy-handedness, both observational and experimental data indicate that these people were highly unlikely to protest. The inelasticity to repression of CHP supporters' opinions of the ruling party casts doubt on changing beliefs about the government's type as the link between police attacks and mobilization.[18]

How confident can we be that our experiment, conducted in early 2015, sheds light on mobilizing factors at work in actual protests, in 2013? One concern is that people who supported the opposition in early 2015 would include many who had earlier supported the AKP, or at least been more neutral in their partisan preferences, before the Gezi Park uprising. In other words, perhaps the events around Gezi changed many people's beliefs and opinions and these changes persisted, so there was little room for our experimental manipulations to move them further. But there are reasons to doubt this. There is scant evidence from the dynamics of public opinion polls conducted during and after the protests, or from Turkey's electoral processes, of such a shift. To the chagrin of activists, Turkey remained basically the same politically polarized society before and after Gezi, with little growth in the number—large but not a majority—of government opponents. In our sample survey of Istanbul residents conducted about five months after Gezi, for example, we asked both how our respondents voted in the latest general election (2011) and their current vote intentions. Ninety-three percent of respondents who voted for AKP in 2011 stated that they would vote for AKP if an election were held that day.[19] National poll results point to the same conclusion.[20]

Our evidence thus far suggests that repression did not make opposition supporters dislike the government more or view it as more vulnerable. It simply angered them and their anger encouraged them to take part in collective action. To further investigate what mediates the effect of repression on mobilization, we employ formal mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny 1986; Bullock, Green, and Ha 2010; Imai et al. 2011). Our goal is to identify the *average causal mediation effect* (ACME)—basically, what portion of the effect of repression on protest operates through mediating variables. We explore two potential mediators: emotions and opinions of the government, the only two that were influenced by the repression treatment (Table 4, top panel). Our measure of emotions, again, is the PANAS *anger* response; our measure

Table 5. Mediation Analysis of the Impact of Repression on Protest Participation.

Mediator	(1) Full sample	(2) AKP voters	(3) CHP voters
		Panel 1: Single mediator analysis	
Anger	.41***	.11	.37*
Views of AKP	−.05	.05	.04
		Panel 2: Two mediator analysis	
Anger	.43***	.13	.52**
Views of AKP	.06	.05	.02

Source: Authors' survey.
Note: Numbers in cells are average causal mediation effects, estimated with the R package *mediation* (R version 3.2.2 [2015-08-14], "Fire Safety"). In both single- and two-mediator models, the treatment is repression, the other experimental groups are the base category, and covariates in the specifications are age, gender, level of education, interest in politics, and opinions about direction of the country. AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; CHP = Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.
*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

of beliefs about government's type is *Views of AKP*.[21] Recent advances in mediation analysis allow us to study the simultaneous influence of two mediators on an outcome (Imai and Yamamoto 2013).[22] As recommended by Imai and Yamamoto (2013), we include controls for potential confounders.[23] In keeping with the prior analyses, we control for age, gender, level of education, interest in politics, and opinions about the direction of the country. Following these authors, we use as the base category the observations not assigned to the repression treatment.

Anger is the only effective mediator between repression and protest, in the full sample and among CHP supporters (Table 5). Consider mediation results just for those who support the CHP (32 percent of our sample). In this model, we assess mediation effects of anger and support for the AKP, simultaneously. The corresponding ACME is 0.47. This means that the total effect of the repression treatment on CHP supporters' willingness to protest is almost exclusively channeled through anger.[24] The analysis does not return significant mediation effects for views on the ruling party.

Qualitative Evidence

We have offered survey-experimental evidence that the backlash movement in Turkey was fed by empathetic anger rather than by repression-induced shifts in beliefs about the governing authorities or the opposition. Our qualitative evidence accords with this assessment. Field research, our own and that conducted by other scholars, found that many people already had firm views of the government and of protesters before the events unfolded. Among bystanders who joined in, the anger and outrage they experienced in the wake of the late May 2013 attacks were what pushed them into action (see, in particular, Chen 2014). They expressed a sense of persistent and

increasing irritation rather than a drastic shift in political perceptions or opinions. The metaphors they invoked were along the lines of the "drop in the bucket that makes the water spill over" rather than, say, the "scales dropping from their eyes." As an example, one young woman whom we interviewed had never taken part in protests before Gezi, though she had little sympathy for the ruling AKP or for the then Prime Minister Erdoğan. Her commute to and from work took her through the Taksim Square metro station and, in early May, she had several brief conversations with Taksim Solidarity members who were leafleting in the area. She reported that, in late May, she was outraged by images of Taksim Solidarity campers being doused with pepper spray and their tents being burned. She then joined the protests and spent most of the two weeks that they lasted occupying Gezi Park. During the demonstrations, she used her iPad to record answers to her question, "Why are you here?" Nearly everyone she spoke to mentioned the police violence and described it as one more irritant among many. "All these things built up, and then the park was the final drop for many people." The beatings in the park were "the last drop that made the glass spill over."[25]

In our research into recent backlash movements in other new democracies, we have been struck as well by the power of emotional reactions to repression, emotional reactions that were not always accompanied by changing beliefs of bystanders who decided to join in. Ukraine is another new democracy that experienced a massive backlash movement, this one in the winter of 2013–2014. Our team's interviews there included one with Dymtro Bulatov. Bulatov is a car enthusiast who started the AutoMaidan, an organization that ferried protesters to and from the Maidan demonstrations. Bulatov had disliked the government of Viktor Yanukovych and had voted against it but he had not been politically active. That changed, for him and for many others, after a November 30, 2013, attack on a small group of protesters, carried out by Berkut special forces, which sent thirty-six people to the hospital.[26] Bulatov recalled for us the moment when he decided to get involved:

> I learned from my friend's Facebook post that the police were attempting to take this girl toward a police vehicle, whereas [my friend] tried to rescue her from the police and take her toward an ambulance, because she had been beaten and was covered in blood. Only then I turned on the television, opened the Internet, and, speaking honestly and plainly, I became enraged. You know, there are sometimes moments when you feel like you are coming apart because it is no longer possible to tolerate the situation. We phoned some friends to tell them that we have to put together a car protest.[27]

Thus, Bulatov vividly articulates the mix of raw emotions and their physical effect ("I became enraged," "you feel like you are coming apart") along with moral indignation ("it is no longer possible to tolerate the situation"). His anger is raw yet it is also empathetic: he learns about the attack from a friend, but the victim is a stranger.[28]

Strategizing around Bystanders

Even when emotions, rather than information or strategy, lie behind backlash movements, still protest leaders and government and police authorities strategize around emotional responses. As an example, we mentioned earlier the United States in the Civil Rights era. Acts of official violence were unsurprising to activists and African American communities in the South, but they were surprising to observers from outside of the region. Some of these outsiders were mobilized after learning of abuses by sheriffs' departments and local authorities, as was true of some participants in the Freedom Summer campaign (McAdam 1986). Probably more important than direct mobilization of outsiders was the moral and political support that repression elicited from other regions of the country.

These kinds of reactions were anticipated by the actors and were the object of strategy. With reference to black protesters in the early 1960s, Wasow (2016, 6) writes that "While bigoted white civilians and police forces often responded brutally to these protests, the protesters themselves went to great lengths to avoid responding in kind. The logic was, in part, that occupying the moral high ground . . . helped draw attention to and sympathy for the civil rights movement among persuadable members of the more moderate white majority." Chong (1991) captures the moves and countermoves of protesters and officials in the south, trying to get the other side to appear as the violence-prone aggressor, as a "public relations game." The activists' and authorities' first-best outcome in places like Montgomery and Selma was to provoke violence on the other side, while retaining an image of nonviolence on their own side. Some police and local elected officials were adept at keeping their officers in line, but others—such as Selma's Sheriff Clark—let their emotions get the best of them and found themselves and their departments on the defensive (Chong 1991, 26-27).

Like leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, organizers of the Egyptian Arab Spring protests were very aware of the mobilizing power of police repression. In the days before the Tahrir Square protests of January 25, 2011, activists spliced together video images of past police attacks and posted "get-out-the-protest clips on YouTube," stringing together "notorious scenes of police brutality captured by cell phone video cameras" (El-Ghobashy 2011, 266). The EuroMaidan protests in Ukraine were set off, as discussed, by a police attack a small group of protesters. Immediately after the November 30 Berkut attack, the Yanukovych government, newly aware of the potential for backlash, tried to back away from repression. When the Berkut were sent back into the Maidan in December to clear barricades from the square, they were given strict orders not to touch the protesters. But protest organizers deftly took advantage of the Berkut's return and of the visual images of a phalanx of officers in riot gear. According to Tatiana Chernovol, a protest leader and harsh critic of the government, the opposition at this point "exaggerated . . . they said people were being killed. No one was killed, some people were beaten, but [in general] the police acted very peacefully at that moment."[29]

For their part, ruling authorities who find themselves facing a backlash movement understand implicitly the importance of a counternarrative that justified their acts. In a polarized setting like Turkey, the government constructed this narrative not so much to keep protesters off the streets as to take advantage of the situation to rile their own supporters. Hence in the early days of the protests, then Prime Minister Erdoğan called the protesters "looters."[30] Later his and AKP leaders' rhetoric escalated, and they began to insinuate that the movement itself reflected not a home-grown environmental and secularist sentiments but a foreign plot against Turkey.[31] And, as mentioned, this framing of events seems to have had considerable influence on AKP supporters, eight out of the ten of whom believed that the protests were indeed a foreign plot against Turkey (Konda 2014). In sum, even in settings in which emotional responses lie behind bystanders' reactions to state violence, the authorities and movement leaders still strategize around the backlash.

Conclusion

Social scientists offer an array of explanations for why repression sometimes mobilizes bystanders. Some focus on information that changes beliefs about the government's type or its resolve and effectiveness, others on people's moral–emotional responses. We have offered unusual experimental evidence from Turkey that is basically supportive of the emotions-oriented explanations. The implication is not that backlash movements are all about emotions and not at all about strategic action in light of new information. But strategic action, in this setting and (we suspect) others, operates more at the level of movement leaders and government authorities and less among the mass of bystanders.

The backlash response can be a powerful tool for organizers and a real danger for governments. In Turkey, the government faced a national crisis with the Gezi Park uprising and had to back off plans for a project that a powerful prime minister had been keen to carry out. In the United States in 1960s, the cause of civil and political rights for African Americans was aided by the reaction of public opinion in the North, shocked by images of Bull Connor's attack dogs in Birmingham in 1963 or the attacks on marchers at the Pettus Bridge in Selma in 1965. In Ukraine, the Yanokovych government unleashed a torrent of problems for itself when it ordered the Berkut into the Maidan in November 2013; three months later, the government fell and Yanukovych fled to Russia.

That said, the combustion of anger and outrage that brings in throngs of new demonstrators, many of them previously disconnected from movement organizations, can burn itself out and be difficult for movement leaders to anticipate or control. In interviews, protest leaders made clear that they did not feel in control of the erstwhile bystanders' responses. A leader of Taksim Solidarity told us, "We don't know how the protests got that big. If we knew, we would do it again, immediately."[32] Reflecting on a major backlash movement in another new democracy—Brazil—also in 2013, an organizer told us, "In general, at least in

Brazil, the police arrive, beat people up, and everyone leaves. This wasn't the case" in the June protests. When we asked why this time was different, she threw the question back to us: "There are some things that are hard to explain. Perhaps researchers can explain it."[33]

We close with reflections on theory and scope conditions. Waves of scholarship about social movements have been inspired by real-world events. This is certainly true of important contributions reviewed in our article. Kuran, Przeworski, Lohmann, and Opp drew their insights from the late-authoritarian settings of Eastern and Central Europe; Shadmehr and Boleslavsky, as well as Blaydes and Lo, developed theories reflecting, in part, on antiregime movements in the Middle East and North Africa. Our own study is shaped by backlash movements in contemporary new democracies. There are good reasons to believe that theories, sometimes couched in very general terms, are apt for the kind of regime that the scholar has—implicitly or explicitly—in mind. Theories in which information changes people's willingness to act are more germane to authoritarian settings, less so to democratic societies in which information flows fairly freely. The same can be said of Kuran's influential preference–falsification model. It fits authoritarian systems better than democracies, in which people face relatively little pressure to mask their true political views. Chong's public relations model is well fitted to the complex setting of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, in which subnational authoritarian regimes, which enforced voting exclusions and violently suppressed citizens' civil rights, were embedded in a democratic national system.

Our results, too, clearly reflect realities common to many new democracies. Turkey is a democracy, though one with weak horizontal accountability, limited democratic pluralism, and frequent harassment of opposition members and media outlets.[34] The government inflicts substantial violence on its own population, whether liberal–secular urban populations (like the Gezi protesters) or Kurdish opponents. The "domestic democratic peace" is less in evidence there than in more consolidated democracies (Davenport 2007). Yet the government's ability to stanch information about its own actions is not nearly as developed as in fully authoritarian systems. Hence the kind of backlash movement it is likely to spawn is one in which a relatively well-informed and polarized public reacts powerfully, if sporadically, with moral outrage against official repression.

Among democracies, the impact of repression on people's political beliefs depends on the structure of social cleavages and public opinion. How dug in, or up for grabs, people's beliefs are in this regard—the strength, if you will, of their priors—will vary widely from country to country. Most Turks had very strong views of the government and the opposition, before the protests began. The information theories we reviewed would not generally predict backlash protests in settings like this one, in which strong priors would leave few people's beliefs malleable in light of repression, and yet a very dramatic one did occur in 2013. A more likely setting for this kind of information-induced shift in beliefs, we have suggested, was the north of the United States in the Civil Rights movement, where

geographic and social distance created information voids among sections of the citizenry who were predisposed to disapprove of antiprotesters violence, once that void was filled. The general lesson is that we need theories of repression and mobilization that are sensitive to context, tailored to specific kind of regimes, and specific structures of political opinion.

Authors' Note

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Supplemental Material

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Notes

1. Our usage follows that of the sociological literature as in studies like Francisco's (2004) "After the Massacre." We do not intend to signal countermobilization in opposition to protests.
2. Repression can also trigger the mobilization of first movers and their networks (see Lawrence 2016).
3. For other models in which government actions provide protesters a signal of government strength, see Ginkel and Smith (1999) and Pierskalla (2010).
4. As Shadmehr and Boleslavsky note, for a repression backfire to occur, bystanders must also care about the government's type *per se*. The authors do not conceive of bystanders as

internally differentiated, and in essence treat them as a single rational actor, but one who, at the outset of the game, has incomplete information about the unified rational actor.

5. Lawrence (2016) shows that family socialization can be a potent intergenerational source of affinity with victims of repression.
6. In response to this upsurge, on June 13, the police returned to Taksim Square, which surrounds the park. They used even more aggressive tactics than they had ten days earlier, this time succeeding in clearing the protesters from the square. On June 15, a vast police force attacked the park itself. They beat scores of protesters in the legs and upper bodies with batons and blanketed the area with teargas. This action finally cleared the park and ended the protests.
7. The June 6–8 interviews came at a time when the police had retreated from the Taksim area and the park served as a center of assembly point. The enumerators divided the park into ten zones of equal size and interviewed 4,393 demonstrators, in roughly equal numbers across these zones, in a nonstop shift over the two days (see Konda 2014 for more details).
8. We interviewed a probability sample of 1,214 adults in Istanbul between November 20 and December 15, 2013, five months after the Gezi protests. See the online appendix for more details.
9. The Konda national survey was conducted on July 6–7, 2013, with 2,629 respondents. About 34 percent of the national sample and 22 percent of AKP supporters cited police repression as the trigger of escalation; both were the modal responses for each group (see Konda 2014 for more details).
10. Participants were recruited through https://benderimki.com, a web-based convenience panel with around 90,000 active users as of April 2015.
11. See Table A1 in the online appendix for descriptive statistics of survey participants. A likelihood ratio test from the multinomial logit regression of treatment assignment on participants' observable characteristics is statistically insignificant (Wald $\chi^2_{(28)} = 22.6$, $p < .75$), indicating that randomization was successful. As part of our broader project on social movements, there was also an additional treatment group (not reported) in our experiment that explored the mobilizing effect of solidarity. Together with this treatment, the number of respondents reaches 1,111.
12. We also asked respondents whether they would become involved in less-demanding forms of activism and randomly varied the order of the answers. The complete list of the activities asked is presented in the online appendix. Our focus here is on the respondents' propensity to join the protests by going out and attending a rally.
13. Studies using representative and convenience samples in a variety of national contexts have confirmed Positive and Negative Affect Schedule as a reliable and valid measure—see, for example, Terracciano, McCrae, and Costa (2003) for an application in Italy and Crawford and Henry (2004) in the United Kingdom. It has been used in political science research as well, for instance, by Arceneaux (2012) and Waismel-Manor, Ifergane, and Cohen (2011).
14. Those in the control condition were instructed to think about the present moment.

15. To deal with the problem of inattentive respondents, we inconspicuously recorded the time each one spent completing the outcome questions. We set aside about 12 percent of online respondents who spent less than five seconds—the minimum time required for thoughtful replies. There are no statistically significant differences in the number of discarded responses across the experimental groups. There is evidence suggesting that randomization was successful within this sample as well, as a likelihood ratio test from the multinomial logit regression of treatment assignment on participants' observable characteristics is statistically insignificant (Wald $\chi^2_{(28)} = 27.9$, $p < .47$).
16. CHP and AKP supporters were people who said that if there were an election, the next day they would vote for the respective parties. Table A2 in the online supplementary appendix shows similar patterns when we regress people's willingness to engage in alternative forms of collective action on treatment assignment. The only noteworthy exception concerns the likelihood of signing a petition. The effect of repression on this form of participation is larger than for other outcomes and also holds for AKP voters.
17. Because the subsequent mediation analyses require the same number of observations of mediators and protest outcomes, we exclude respondents who do not answer the willingness to protest question. This choice does not alter the results. Specifications with controls are presented in Table A4 of the online appendix. Adding controls does not lead to any substantive change in results.
18. Table 4 shows that the effect of repression on views of AKP is larger in the full sample than among the AKP and CHP subsamples. The reason is that vote intentions are weakly correlated with assignment to the repression treatment and strong predictors of views of AKP (see Table A3 in the online appendix).
19. This figure excludes people who are undecided or refuse to answer vote intention question. If we include them, about 83 percent of AKP voters in 2011 declared an intention to vote for AKP, which constituted about 52 percent of our sample.
20. In a national poll conducted by Konda Research in July 2013, right after the protests, 52 percent of the Turkish voters said they would vote for the AKP if an election were held that day (Konda 2014). This figure is about the same as AKP's vote share in the latest general election before Gezi, 49.8 percent.
21. To arrive at the average causal mediation effect, mediation draws from a structural equation model with two regressions: (i) a regression of the mediator on the treatment (akin to the models reported in Table 4) and (ii) a regression of the outcome on the treatment and a mediator.
22. This method is appropriate when there is correlation among mediators. If the treatment influences the outcome through two correlated mediators, omitting one of them would be akin to introducing post-treatment bias, leading one to either overstate or understate how much the included mediator contributes to the outcome.
23. Note that, unlike the repression treatment, the value of the mediator was not randomly assigned by the experiment. Thus, as in an observational study, controls are needed to reduce confounding when estimating the effect of the mediators on the outcome (see Imai et al. 2011, 770).
24. The mediated effect is 52 percent and the total effect is 61 percent.

25. Anonymous protester interviewed by authors, Istanbul, July 17, 2014.
26. Those beaten were among a crowd of about 1,000 who remained in the Maidan square, holdovers from a protest earlier that day against President Viktor Yanukovych's decision not to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. At 4:30 a.m., the Berkut spilled into the square, beating everyone they could find—student protesters, municipal workers, visitors, and journalists. On Sunday, December 1, as many as 800,000 protesters surged into the Maidan. Three months later, the Ukrainian government fell and Yanukovych fled to Russia.
27. Leonid Peisakhin and Anastasia Rosovskaya interviewed Bulatov in Kiev on June 27, 2014.
28. Although it might be tempting to see Bulatov as an early riser, perhaps followed into the Maidan by others for whom emotions played a smaller, or more epiphenomenal role, note that protests were already under way ("the Maidan is already there").
29. Leonid Peisakhin and Anastasia Rosovskaya interviewed Tatiana Chornovol in Kiev on June 25, 2014.
30. Radikal newspaper, June 2, 2013. The word he used was *çapulcu* which can also be translated as marauders or bums.
31. See, for example, Radikal newspaper, June 3, 20, 22, 2013.
32. Interview with a leader of Taksim Solidarity Committee, conducted by authors on July 18, 2014 in Istanbul.
33. Interview with Movimento Passe Livre (MPL) leader, conducted by authors on May 26, 2014. The organizer did note some differences in the MPL's strategy in June, 2013, such as using a "high-intensity strategy" with daily, rather than weekly, demonstrations.
34. See, for example, Aytaç and Öniş (2014) and Diamond (2015). The latest Freedom in the World report of Freedom House (2016) categorizes Turkey as a "partly free" country with a downward trend in political rights and civil liberties due to renewed violence between the government and Kurdish militants and harassment of media outlets and opposition members by the government.

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