DETERRENCE OR DEFIANCE? HOW SEVERITY AND SELECTIVITY SHAPE PROTEST RESPONSES TO REPRESSION*

Francisca Castro†

State repression's effect on protest behavior is theorized to depend on two key dimensions: its severity (level of harm imposed) and selectivity (whether targeted or indiscriminate). While scholars have developed sophisticated theoretical frameworks around these dimensions, most empirical evidence comes from authoritarian contexts. Moreover, we lack systematic evidence about how specific combinations of severity and selectivity influence protest dynamics. Using data from Chile's 2019 protest cycle, I examine how different tactical combinations shape subsequent mobilization. Through models accounting for spatial dynamics and temporal effects, I find patterns that challenge theoretical expectations. Contrary to predictions, selective high-severity tactics generated short-term mobilization rather than deterrence, while low-severity tactics produced significant protest increases regardless of their selectivity. Survey evidence reveals that these effects operated partly through public attitudes. These findings demonstrate the need to revise theoretical frameworks around severity and selectivity, particularly in democratic contexts.

Protests serve as a critical means for people to express their demands and to make themselves heard. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of protests worldwide.[1] This surge has coincided with growing public discontent over political, economic, and social issues. Although protests are a fundamental political right in democratic regimes, more often than not, demonstrators are severely repressed. The use of force by law enforcement against protesters has increased, even in consolidated democracies.[2] Scholarship on the repression-dissent nexus suggests that repression can have divergent effects: it may either discourage and diminish protest activity or provoke a backlash, potentially increasing mobilization and escalating protesters' tactics toward violence (Rasler 1996; Sullivan, Loyle, and Davenport 2012). However, the specific mechanisms that explain whether repression deters or increases protests remain subject to ongoing scholarly debate.

Research examining the relationship between state repression and protest behavior has identified two key dimensions that shape repression's effects: severity and selectivity. Severity refers to the harshness of the measures employed, whereas selectivity indicates whether such measures are targeted at specific individuals or applied indiscriminately. When repression leads to deterrence, it typically operates through high-severity tactics that impose substantial costs on participants (Gamson 1975; Tilly 1978) or through selective targeting that degrades organizational infrastructure (Sika 2024). However, these features can sometimes produce opposite outcomes (Pearlman 2013). High-severity repression may generate moral outrage when perceived as unjust (Hess and Martin 2006; Honari 2018). At the same time, indiscriminate application of repressive tactics can foster solidarity and shared grievances (Della Porta 1997; Josua and Edel 2015), increasing the willingness of people to participate in protests. Despite recognition that repression's effects likely depend on these tactical choices (Earl and Soule 2010), empirical studies have yet to thoroughly examine how the interaction between severity and selectivity shapes protest responses.

* Dr. Francisca Castro is a postdoctoral researcher at ISDC – International Security and Development Center. E-Mail address: castro@isdc.org. Mailing address: ISDC, Gerichtstraße 49, 13347 Berlin, Germany.

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While scholars have developed sophisticated theoretical frameworks for analyzing repression (see Davenport 2007a), two important gaps remain. First, research has tended to focus on repression in authoritarian contexts (e.g., Bautista et al. 2023; Curtice and Behlendorf 2021), leaving us with limited knowledge about how severity and selectivity operate in democratic settings, where institutional constraints and public expectations of governmental and police accountability may condition their effects. Second, although recent studies have examined broader strategic choices in democracies, such as escalation versus restraint (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2017), we lack systematic evidence about how specific combinations of severity and selectivity influence protest dynamics. This gap is particularly critical because democratic governments often face intense domestic and international pressure to balance maintaining public order with upholding civil rights, which may result in novel forms of repression or more subtle applications of force. This paper addresses these gaps by providing a detailed analysis of how different elements of repressive tactics—what some studies have called "patterns of violence" (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017)—affect subsequent protest mobilization.

To contribute to this research, I analyze the *Estallido Social* (social outburst), a protest cycle in Chile that began in October 2019 and lasted until the COVID19 pandemic. Chile's status as a consolidated democracy and its historically institutionalized police force make it an especially revealing case. The government's use of varied repressive tactics, ranging from low-severity crowd control to highly severe beatings, and from selective arrests to indiscriminate rubber bullet use, provides an appropriate setting to examine how severity and selectivity interact to shape protest responses. Leveraging daily protests and repression data, I test which combinations of these characteristics produce deterrence and backlash. By focusing on the day-to-day fluctuations in protest behavior, this approach reveals how immediate and cumulative experiences of repression influence activists' decisions to continue or expand mobilization. The analyses indicate that theoretical predictions about severity and selectivity require significant revision in democratic contexts, where citizens' normative expectations about appropriate police conduct and government accountability may fundamentally alter how repressive tactics influence mobilization.

The findings challenge traditional expectations about how severity and selectivity shape protest responses. Contrary to predictions that selective high-severity repression deters protests through targeted disruption, tactics like beatings generated short-term mobilization. Similarly unexpected, low-severity tactics produced significant mobilization regardless of their selectivity, with crowd control techniques showing gradually increasing effects over time. These results move beyond theories that singularly emphasize the threshold of costs, as per Gurr (1970) and Lichbach (1987), or the scope of repression, pointing out that protesters may interpret and respond to repressive measures based on perceived legitimacy, shared identities, and the broader political climate, not merely by calculated cost-benefit assessments.

Therefore, rather than operating primarily through immediate cost-benefit calculations (Digrazia 2014; Opp and Roehl 1990), the results highlight the importance of temporal dynamics and expectations regarding police conduct. The deterrent effect of high-severity tactics like rubber bullets emerged gradually through repeated application, while selective targeting proved less effective at suppressing dissent than theoretical models would predict (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler 2021; Josua and Edel 2015). Moreover, when repeatedly employed, even low-severity crowd control tactics eroded public trust in authorities, thereby increasing sympathy for protesters and encouraging further mobilization. Additional analyses using survey data suggest these patterns reflect how different tactical combinations shape public attitudes, with even low-severity crowd control techniques significantly influencing perceptions of police legitimacy and protest justification when applied repeatedly. This approach demonstrates how democratic contexts may fundamentally alter the relationship between tactical choices and protest responses, challenging existing theoretical frameworks developed primarily from authoritarian cases.

HOW REPRESSION AFFECTS PROTEST BEHAVIOR

Extensive research has scrutinized the relationship between state repression and protest behavior.[3] A key question examines why state repression, while intended to suppress dissent, can sometimes

produce the opposite outcome—a phenomenon that is also known as the coercion-protest paradox (Pearlman 2013). This paradox emerges because repression's effect depends on how it alters both the perceived costs of protest participation and protesters' emotional and strategic responses to state violence. Understanding this relationship requires examining how specific tactical choices shape dissent within institutional contexts.

Repression as a Mobilizer of Protest

Repression can increase protest participation via various mechanisms. Some explanations focus on the responses that repression generates in protesters, who may react with moral outrage or escalate their tactics to violence (Honari 2018; Setter and Nepstad 2022). While these participant-centered explanations offer valuable insights, they do not fully explain why specific repressive actions provoke stronger mobilization than others, as they overlook how specific characteristics of repressive tactics influence protesters' perceptions and decisions to mobilize. By examining the characteristics of repressive tactics, it is possible to understand the mechanisms through which state actions directly alter the perceived costs and benefits of protesting. This section focuses on two key characteristics of repression that emerge in the literature as particularly likely to generate this mobilizing effect: its visibility and its scope.

The visibility of repression shapes its potential to generate a response from the citizenry. When repressive actions are openly observable to protesters and bystanders, they can incite further protests by creating a shared awareness of state aggression. Unlike covert forms of repression, which prevent citizens from harboring anger against the regime by keeping the "enemy" invisible (Hager and Krakowski 2022), visible repression signals to the public that dissent is being actively suppressed. Such public knowledge can intensify grievances and mobilize support. For example, in the Arab Spring, repression that spread beyond those directly impacted drew large-scale participation even as risks grew (Pearlman 2013). The impact of visible repression is further amplified when it is documented and disseminated through social media or news coverage, as seen in events like the 2020 protests following George Floyd's killing (Reny and Newman 2021). In this way, both immediate, in-person visibility and subsequent media coverage can widen the protest base, encouraging mobilization among individuals who might not otherwise have participated.

The scope of repression also affects its mobilizing potential. When widespread repression affects entire communities rather than specific individuals, it creates a shared sense of grievance and solidarity (Della Porta 1997; Josua and Edel 2015). Under these conditions, potential protesters may perceive that the risks of protesting are not significantly higher than the risks of nonparticipation if repression is indiscriminate. This perception can lower the relative costs of protesting and encourage collective action. The Catalan independence movement illustrates this dynamic, where repressive actions that affected broad segments of the population intensified support across previously uninvolved communities (Balcells, Dorsey, and Tellez 2021). When the scope of repression is broad, tactics aimed at isolating and intimidating specific protesters lose their effectiveness, as potential dissenters perceive that anyone can become a target (Esberg 2021). This shared experience of risk under widespread repression can, in turn, deepen solidarity and strengthen collective resistance (Thachil 2020). Consequently, as repression expands to encompass entire communities, the perceived collective benefits of protest may outweigh the individual risks, shifting the cost-benefit analysis in favor of mobilization.

These characteristics of repression help explain why state efforts to suppress dissent can backfire and generate further mobilization. When repressive actions are both visible to a wide audience and broad in their application, they are particularly likely to alter the cost-benefit calculations of potential protesters in ways that favor participation rather than deterrence.

Repression as a Deterrent of Protest

Just as repression can inadvertently drive more protests, it can also effectively deter dissent by making the risks of participation unacceptably high. Two core characteristics of repressive tactics—

intensity and targeting—enhance repression's potential to suppress protest by amplifying the costs and risks for current and would-be participants.

The intensity of repressive tactics plays a crucial role in deterring protest. When repression involves severe personal consequences, such as severe injury, long-term imprisonment, or substantial financial penalties, the risks associated with dissent become more intimidating. High-intensity repression raises the stakes of participation to a level where individuals reconsider involvement, knowing that the potential consequences could be life-altering or even irreversible (Zhukov 2023). In addition to these direct, tangible costs, intense repression generates a pervasive atmosphere of fear that further discourages participation. When states employ overt and aggressive tactics, individuals anticipate personal risks that go beyond physical harm, extending to legal repercussions and social stigmatization. For instance, Kilavuz, Grewal, and Kubinec (2023) observed that in Algeria, regions that experienced significant violence during the 1990s civil war saw lower protest participation in the 2019–2020 Hirak protests. Lingering trauma and heightened fear from past mass violence dissuaded individuals from engaging in dissent, even when underlying grievances persisted, which may have long-lasting consequences on civic engagement and political participation (Bühler and Madestam 2023). This emotional toll, reinforced by the memory of severe past repression, illustrates how high-intensity tactics can create lasting psychological barriers to protest, deterring engagement even after active repression subsides.

While intense repression deters protest by imposing severe consequences on participants, targeted repression achieves deterrence through selective disruption. Targeting precision allows repressive efforts to focus on key activists, organizational leaders, and the infrastructure of movements. By aiming tactics specifically at influential leaders, visible supporters, or critical infrastructure, precise repression undermines the organizational backbone of protest movements and signals heightened risks to others considering involvement. In that regard, Esberg (2021) shows how targeting movement leadership can effectively disrupt protest organization while minimizing public backlash. Similarly, Sika (2024) demonstrates that selective repression of key activists severely impacts their capacity to build and maintain the networks essential for protest coordination. Precision-targeted tactics deter broader engagement by creating a sense that the state has both the capability and intent to monitor and retaliate selectively, making it more challenging for activists to operate freely or anonymously.

These characteristics show how qualities of repressive tactics shape their deterrent impact. High-severity tactics alter the cost-benefit calculus by imposing substantial personal risks, while selective targeting undermines movement capacity by disrupting key organizational nodes and leadership networks. Together, these tactical dimensions help explain when repression achieves its intended effect of deterring dissent rather than provoking backlash.

ANALYZING REPRESSIVE TACTICS IN DEMOCRACIES

The mixed effects of repression on protest behavior highlight the need to examine the specific mechanisms through which state actions influence contentious politics. While repression can both mobilize and deter protest participation, these effects likely operate through distinct tactical choices that states employ to manage dissent. By focusing on specific repressive tactics in democracies, we can better understand how different forms of state response affect protest dynamics, helping to explain when and why repression leads to escalation versus deterrence. This section develops a theoretical framework that unpacks how distinct tactical choices trigger backlash or dissuasion responses. Thus, to understand how tactical choices affect protest dynamics, I propose a theoretical framework that analyzes repressive tactics along two key dimensions, as discussed in the previous section: severity and selectivity.

Severity of Repression.

The severity dimension captures the level of harm or consequences that tactics impose on protesters. Severity influences the perceived costs of participation, affecting protesters' calcu-

lations about the risks involved (Lichbach 1987). Low-severity tactics impose minimal immediate harm and may include crowd monitoring, police presence, or dispersal orders. They serve as signals of state awareness but may not significantly deter committed activists. High-severity tactics involve substantial harm or penalties, such as physical assault, use of lethal force, or long-term imprisonment. These tactics can increase the perceived costs of protesting, potentially deterring participation.

Selectivity of Repression.

The selectivity dimension refers to whether repression is applied indiscriminately across a broad group or selectively targeted at specific individuals or groups. Selectivity affects how the public perceives repression and can influence the potential for backlash or solidarity (Kalyvas 2006). Selective repression focuses on key activists, leaders, or specific groups deemed threatening. It aims to disrupt organizational capacity while minimizing widespread dissent. Indiscriminate repression is applied broadly without distinguishing between participants and nonparticipants and can generate collective grievances and increase solidarity among the population.

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Mechanisms Linking Repressive Tactics to Protest Behavior

The interaction between the severity and selectivity dimensions produces four distinct combinations of repressive tactics, each with unique implications for protest behavior. Table 1 maps these combinations and their associated mechanisms, providing a framework for analyzing how different tactical choices influence protest dynamics. The table's vertical axis represents the severity of repression, capturing the intensity of consequences imposed on protesters, while the horizontal axis represents selectivity in the application of these tactics. Each cell identifies the primary mechanisms through which that combination affects protest behavior, clarifying whether the expected outcome is backlash, deterrence, or no effect. These mechanisms explain how tactical choices translate into movement responses, helping to understand when repression will lead to escalation versus suppression.

Table 1. Dimensions of Repressive Tactics

		Selectivity	
		Low (Indiscriminate)	*High (Selective)*
Severity	*High*	Expected backlash through: - Increase in grievances - Fostering of solidarity - Undermining of state's legitimacy	Expected deterrence through: - Deterrence of key actors - Disruption of networks - Reduction in coordination capacity
	Low	Expected null effect due to: - Normalization of repression - Ineffective deterrence - Tactical adaptation by protesters	Expected deterrence through: - Minimization of public backlash - Strategic deterrence - Gradual participation decline

High Severity and Indiscriminate Repression.

When authorities employ severe tactics indiscriminately—such as mass shootings, widespread use of lethal force, or mass arrests without distinguishing between participants and bystanders—this approach is likely to provoke a backlash effect. Indiscriminate high-severity repression increases grievances by broadly targeting the population, intensifying antigovernment sentiments (Gurr 1970). The shared experience of severe repression fosters solidarity among protesters and the general public, strengthening group identity and collective resolve to oppose

the state (Opp 1994). Moreover, the excessive and unjust nature of indiscriminate severe repression undermines the state's legitimacy in the eyes of both domestic and international audiences, leading to increased dissent and potential escalation of protests (Francisco 2004).

High Severity and Selective Repression.

Selective application of severe consequences, such as prosecuting key organizers, harsh legal penalties against key organizers, and the employment of excessive force against specific activists, is expected to have a deterrence effect. By imposing high costs on specific individuals who are central to the movement, the state aims to deter these key actors from continued involvement and to discourage others from assuming leadership roles (Lichbach 1987). The removal or incapacitation of movement leaders disrupts the movement's coordination, communication, and strategic planning, reducing its effectiveness and ability to mobilize resources (Earl 2011).[4]

Low Severity and Indiscriminate Repression.

Applying mild tactics broadly, such as general surveillance, frequent identity checks, or the enforcement of minor legal infractions, is unlikely to affect subsequent mobilization. The low severity of the consequences may not sufficiently discourage participation, especially among highly motivated protesters committed to the cause. Widespread low-level repression may also lead to the normalization of such tactics, where the public becomes desensitized, reducing their effectiveness over time (Davenport 2005). Additionally, protesters may adapt tactically to these measures, developing strategies to mitigate their impact or using repression to garner sympathy and support. In this combination, neither strong deterrence nor significant backlash is likely. The mild nature of the tactics fails to impose substantial costs, while the indiscriminate application does not target key vulnerabilities within the movement. Therefore, the overall impact on protest behavior is limited.

Low Severity and Selective Repression.

Selective use of mild tactics—such as targeted surveillance, administrative harassment, or warnings issued to specific activists—is more likely to achieve deterrence while minimizing public backlash. By focusing on key individuals, authorities aim to subtly discourage participation and strain organizational capacities without attracting widespread attention or outrage. Targeted individuals may reassess their involvement due to perceived personal risks, leading to a gradual decline in participation among core activists (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). The low severity of the tactics employed reduces the likelihood of provoking sympathy or solidarity from the broader public, thereby limiting the potential for backlash. In democratic settings, this approach is likely to allow authorities to manage dissent effectively within legal and normative constraints.

Scope Conditions

In democracies, three key factors shape how repressive tactics influence protest behavior. First, legal norms, media scrutiny, and electoral accountability constrain the use of high-severity and indiscriminate repression (Davenport 2007b). Authorities are more likely to use low-severity and selective tactics to manage dissent while maintaining legitimacy. Second, the visibility of repression is heightened through media coverage and social networks, which can rapidly document and disseminate evidence of police actions. Third, expectations about appropriate police behavior mean that even relatively mild forms of repression may generate significant public backlash if perceived as violating institutional norms.

Under these conditions, the findings about tactical effects should replicate in other democracies with strong media institutions and civilian oversight of police. However, the results may not extend to authoritarian contexts where visibility is limited, institutional constraints are weak, and public expectations of police behavior differ substantially. Similarly, in countries experiencing

democratic backsliding or where police forces retain significant autonomy from civilian control, the relationship between tactical choices and protest responses may follow different patterns. Understanding these scope conditions helps explain why similar repressive tactics can produce different outcomes across political contexts.

CONTEXT: THE CHILEAN *ESTALLIDO*

The *Estallido Social* (social outburst) in Chile, which began in October 2019, was not merely a localized event but an important case for understanding the dynamics of police repression and its effects on sociopolitical landscapes. Characterized by widespread daily manifestations and significant public engagement across multiple localities, this protest cycle sheds light on broader patterns of state response to collective dissent. Its nearly six-month duration provides a unique perspective on the repression-contention nexus over time, beyond isolated incidents. Thus, the *Estallido* serves as a valuable case for exploring how various repressive strategies influence public mobilization trends, providing insights into the complex balance between state coercion and the resilience of protest movements worldwide.

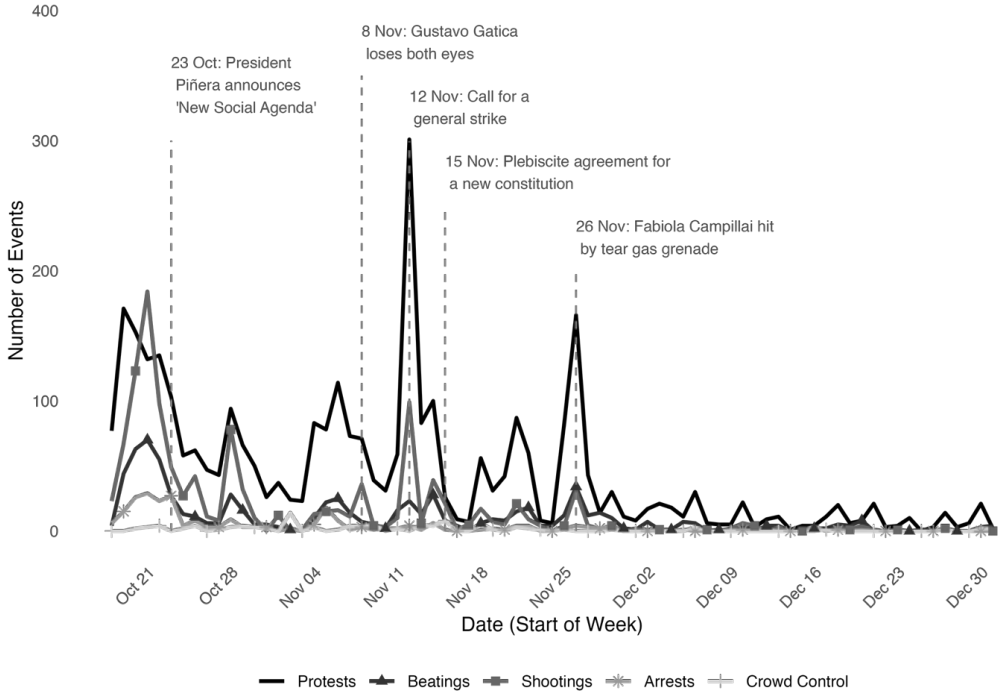
After the return of democracy following the 1988 plebiscite that ended the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, multiple social movements developed in Chile, the most emblematic being the student movements of 2006 and 2011. Even though the student movement achieved significant political victories, such as the repeal of the General Education Law (*Ley General de Educación* in Spanish, LGE), and maintained steady protest activities throughout almost entire academic years, neither the 2006 nor the 2011 movement matched the level of protest frequency and sustained turnout of the 2019 *Estallido*. What unfolded over almost six months was a sustained routine of protest activity with little to no top-down organization. In Santiago, people gathered almost every afternoon in Plaza Baquedano, one of the most crowded places in the city, with Fridays being the most popular days for protests. Similar dynamics occurred in other cities. According to data provided by the national police (*Carabineros*), over 2,500 protest events occurred across the country during this period (see E.3 in the online appendix, available at https://github.com/frcastrog/police-repression).

The protests and riots started in the capital after the announcement of an increase in public transportation fares of 30 Chilean pesos, but they quickly spread to other cities. After the announcement of the tariff increase, students from several public high schools in the capital organized mass evasions of public transport, specifically in subway stations (Baeza 2019). During the following week, police officers were constantly monitoring the entrances of the stations, closing accesses to have greater control over the transit of pedestrians. The most critical stations were closed for several hours per day, especially during the evenings, when most people get off work. On the afternoon of Friday, October 18, the situation escalated after thousands of people were unable to commute from their jobs to their homes. During that night, multiple subway stations were set on fire. While most demonstrations remained peaceful, some protesters engaged in tactical escalation, including barricades, stone-throwing, and arson. These dynamics created a cycle where property destruction often preceded intensified police responses (Somma et al. 2020).

Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the distribution of protest events over time, alongside several key political moments that shaped the opportunity structure for mobilization. Two critical government responses—the announcement of the *Nueva Agenda Social* and the November 15 agreement to hold a plebiscite—marked attempts to address the growing unrest through institutional concessions. While these represented significant political opportunities, neither succeeded in diminishing protest activity. The November 15 agreement, though securing a path to constitutional reform, appeared to sustain mobilization by demonstrating the effective-ness of protest tactics. This persistence of protests suggests that institutional responses that fell short of addressing fundamental structural demands may have actually reinforced protesters' resolve.

As a response to the fires in the subway stations, President Sebastián Piñera declared a state of emergency and a subsequent curfew that started on October 19. Riots occurred in other parts

Figure 1. Nationwide Distribution of Protests and Repression Events with Key Events



Note: Based on the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (2020) protest data and INDH (2020) data on repressive events.

of the country during that weekend, and the repressive actions of the police exacerbated social unrest. These actions by Carabineros, while extreme, were consistent with their historical pattern of excessive force, a legacy of their institutional culture dating back to the dictatorship period. Government support for police actions ultimately translated into more social unrest and discontent. Despite the constant pressure from the Government to 'return to normality,' the feeling that their measures were not aimed at structural reforms, coupled with high levels of repression, ultimately generated a constant state of skepticism and anger among the population. Protests and riots lasted until the COVID-19 outbreak in mid-March 2020, when strong restrictions on gatherings were imposed.

According to data provided by Carabineros, almost five million people took part in the protests between October and December 2019.[5] Despite this high turnout, demonstrators were severely repressed. The level of repression, exercised mostly by Carabineros but also by other law enforcement institutions such as the military and the marines, was unprecedented in the democratic history of the country. International organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International acted as observers and continuously called out the disproportionate use of force against protesters and persistent noncompliance with protocols, which resulted in thousands of people suffering eye injuries caused by rubber bullets (Amnesty International 2020). The severity of the accusations against Carabineros and their practices caused considerable outrage among the population. Abuses were not limited to the streets but also occurred in other places. Media reports highlighted several cases of detainees being undressed in police stations (INDH 2019), along with other instances of gender-based violence, such as rape threats (Rojas 2019). Given that the frequency and participation levels of protests remained relatively stable over the following months, despite the variety and intensity of repressive actions being committed, it is worth examining the effect of these repressive actions and whether they were linked with an increase in protest activity.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I use data on protest occurrences collected by the Social Conflict Observatory (Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies 2020), a research initiative to systematically identify conflicts in Chile through detailed press analysis. This measurement considers contentious actions as the primary unit of study, defined as how an actor, group, or social movement articulates collective grievances in the public sphere at a particular time and location. The Observatory surveys a range of media sources, including national newspapers and regional dailies, to ensure comprehensive coverage of various types of conflict, with a particular focus on those affecting local communities. I included all events classified as contentious activities during the period from October 18 to December 31, 2019.[6] The data also include the specific locations of municipalities and the dates of each occurrence.

I complemented the protest occurrence data with information on repressive actions by law enforcement, provided by the Chilean Institute of Human Rights (INDH). The INDH is an autonomous public entity, and although it is publicly funded, it does not depend on any state power. During the 2019 protest cycle, the INDH was a key actor in documenting and reporting wrongdoings by law enforcement officers. The INDH produced an extensive database containing all judicial actions by civilians who claim to have been subjected to any type of abuse, excessive violence, or violation of basic rights by state agents. The fact that this database was compiled based on civil lawsuits reduces the risk of reporting bias since it is not at the discretion of the administrative entity which cases to record and which to omit.[7] The original database includes twenty-two types of repressive actions, of which I considered only the four with the highest occurrence[8], comprising over 85% of the total repressive events (see table A.1 in the online appendix). For each of these actions, I recorded the total number of repressive events in each category, by municipality, on a specific date. Details about the full set of categories and their distribution are available in appendix A online.

By integrating these two sources of information, I constructed a time-series database covering 346 municipalities over 74 days, resulting in a final dataset of 25,604 observations. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of repressive actions and contentious events by region (metropolitan and the rest of the country), month, and type of repressive action.

Table 2. Distribution of Repressive Actions and Contentious Events

Region	**Repressive Actions**	**Protest Events**
Metropolitan Region	34.19 (787)	22.39 (743)
Other Regions	65.81 (1,515)	77.61 (2,575)
Type of Repressive Action		
Arrests	11.21 (258)	
Beatings	32.58 (750)	
Crowd Control (Tear Gas/Water Cannon)	4.47 (103)	
Rubber bullet shootings	51.74 (1,191)	
Month		
October 2019	56.26 (1,295)	36.68 (1,217)
November 2019	38.01 (875)	54.07 (1,794)
December 2019	5.73 (132)	9.25 (307)
Total (N)	2,302	3,318

Note: Entries in percentages with N in parentheses.

Estimation

Following Sudduth and Gallop (2023), I use a generalized linear mixed model to address overdispersed protest and police repressive event data, as well as the presence of zeros caused by municipalities that did not have protests or repressive events on a given day, leading to rows

containing only zeros.[9] This approach enables me to account for specific dispersion parameters in the dependent variable.[10] Additionally, following the literature on temporal dynamics in contentious politics, I included lagged explanatory variables for both protest events and repressive actions. While lagged variables help capture immediate temporal relationships, it is important to acknowledge the methodological challenges they present for count models with overdispersion (Beck and Katz 2011; Brandt et al. 2000). Although the zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) approach employed here addresses overdispersion and excess zeros (Sudduth and Gallop 2023), including lagged dependent variables in such models might not fully resolve issues of temporal dependence. To assess the robustness of findings to different specifications of temporal dynamics, I conducted additional analyses that exclude lagged dependent variables (see table B.2 in appendix B).

The outcome $Y_{i,t}$ is the observed count of protest events for municipality i on day t, which follows a distribution of $Y_{i,t} \sim ZINB(\psi_{i,t}, \lambda_{i,t}, \phi)$. $Y_{i,t}$ is a structural zero with probability $\psi_{i,t}$ (the zero-inflation component), or otherwise, a count with expected value $\lambda_{i,t}$ and overdispersion ϕ to estimate the count component $log(\lambda_{i,t})$. Therefore, the estimated models have the following structure:

$$\text{Protest Events}_{i,t} \sim \text{ZINB}(\psi_{i,t}, \lambda_{i,t}, \phi) \qquad (1)$$

where:

$$\psi_{i,t} = \text{Logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_m Z_{i,t-k} + \mu_i) \qquad (2)$$

and:

$$\log(\lambda_{i,t}) = \gamma_0 + \gamma_n X_{n,i,t-k} \qquad (3)$$

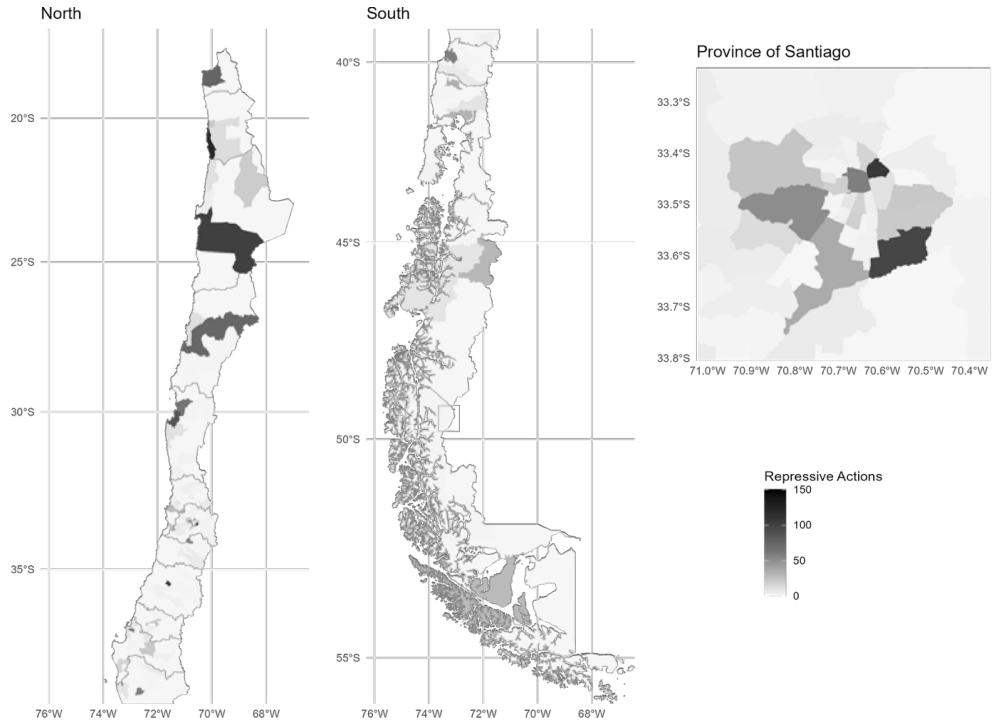
In Equation 2, β_0 is the intercept in the zero-inflation model, representing the baseline log odds of a protest event being a structural zero. βm represents the coefficients corresponding to each zero-inflation predictor represented by $Z_{i,t-k}$ for each municipality i lagged by $t - k$.[11] In Equation 3, γ_0 is the intercept term in the count component model, representing the baseline log count when all predictors are at their reference levels, and γ_n are the coefficients corresponding to each count component predictor with $X_{n,i,t-k}$ being the count component predictors for each municipality i lagged by $t - k$. Finally, ϕ represents the overdispersion parameter in the ZINB distribution, which is critical for modeling the extra variability in the count data.

RESULTS

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of repressive actions across the country, spanning from October 18 to December 31, 2019. These actions are notably concentrated in the metropolitan region, especially within the Province of Santiago. This pattern corresponds closely with the high density of protests observed in this region. The question arises: Is there a relation between the distribution of repressive actions and subsequent protest activities?

Since I am interested in exploring how previous acts of repression affect subsequent protest events, I estimated the ZINB models with three main specifications. The first model includes lagged independent variables for the day before the protests, both for the type of repression and for the protests that occurred the day before. The second model includes the accumulation of repression and protests for the three days prior. Finally, a third model includes the accumulation of the seven days prior.[12] The full models are available in the online appendix, table B.1. To ease interpretation, I present plots of the predicted effects at different levels of repressive actions based on these models.

Figure 2. *Number of Repressive Actions by Municipality*

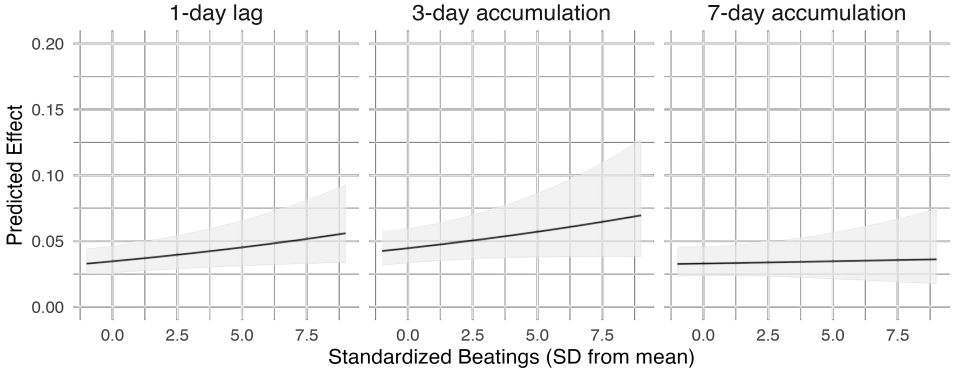


Beatings (High Severity, High Selectivity)

Beatings represent a particularly severe form of repression, as they involve direct physical force that can result in serious injury. Unlike widespread crowd control methods such as tear gas, beatings typically require close-range contact and target specific individuals rather than dispersing crowds. This tactical choice reflects both high severity in its potential for harm and high selectivity in its targeted application. Drawing on the theoretical framework presented earlier, we would expect such a high-severity, selective tactic to primarily generate deterrence rather than backlash.

Figure 3 reveals a more complex reality, showing how beatings influenced subsequent protest frequency across different time intervals. In the immediate term (one-day lag), beatings had

Figure 3. Predicted Impact of Beating of Demonstrators on Protest Frequency



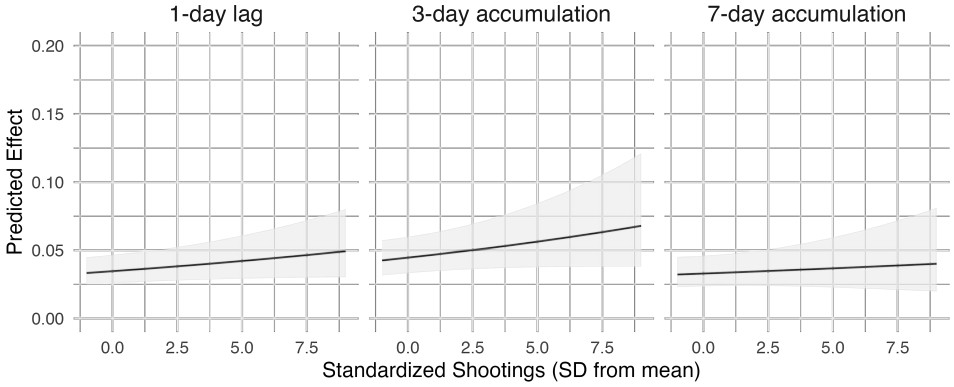
Note: Predicted effect based on models available in online appendix table B.1. C.I. at 95%.

a modest positive association with protest activity, contrary to the theoretical expectation of deterrence. This mobilizing effect became slightly more pronounced when examining cumulative beatings over the three-day period. However, the relationship notably flattens in the seven-day window, with the predicted effect remaining relatively constant regardless of beating frequency. This pattern suggests that while beatings generated short- term protest mobilization, potentially due to moral outrage and solidarity responses, their effect neither escalated nor diminished substantially over longer periods.

Rubber Bullet Shootings (High Severity, Lower Selectivity).

Rubber bullet shootings represent another high-severity repressive tactic, as they can cause serious physical injuries, including permanent eye damage, particularly a salient issue during the Chilean protests where thousands suffered eye injuries. However, unlike beatings, rubber bullets are typically fired into crowds rather than at specific individuals, making them less selective. According to the theoretical framework, this combination of high severity and low selectivity should produce a strong backlash effect through increased grievances and solidarity among protesters.

Figure 4. Predicted Impact of Rubber Bullet Shootings on Protest Occurrence



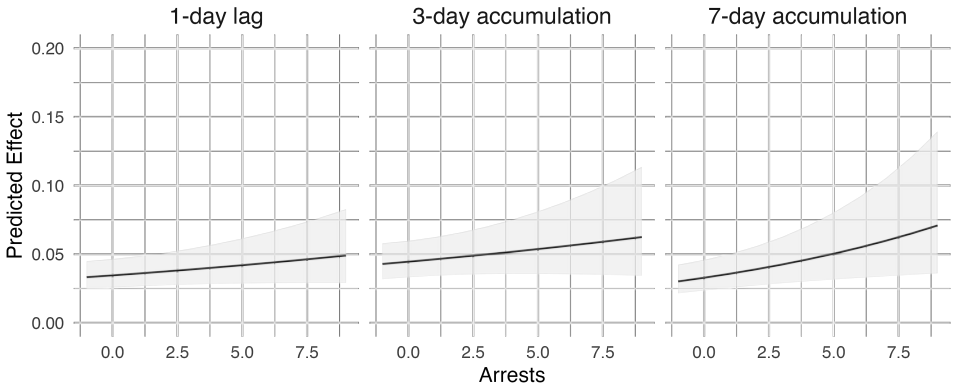
Note: Predicted effect based on models available in online appendix table B.1. C.I.s at 95%.

Figure 4 shows how rubber bullet shootings influenced subsequent protest activity across different time windows. In the immediate term (one-day lag), shootings had a modest positive association with protests; this mobilizing effect strengthened over three-day periods. However, the relationship flattens considerably in the seven-day window, suggesting the mobilizing impact of rubber bullet incidents diminished over longer periods. This pattern likely reflects protesters' tactical adaptation to this form of repression. As the protests evolved, participants increasingly came prepared with protective gear like safety goggles, helmets, and makeshift shields, reducing the deterrent effect of rubber bullets. While the observed short-term backlash aligns with theoretical expectations, the modest size of these effects and their quick diminishment suggest that protesters' defensive innovations and the normalization of this repressive tactic reduced its impact over time.

Arrests (Low Severity, High Selectivity).

Arrests represent a low-severity form of repression in the Chilean context, particularly as most protest-related arrests did not result in warrants or long-term legal consequences (see Section E.4). While arrests can impose social and temporary legal costs, they typically do not cause immediate physical harm like beatings or rubber bullets. Arrests are generally highly selective, as law enforcement must identify and apprehend specific individuals rather than acting on crowds

Figure 5. Predicted Impact of Arrests on Protest Frequency



Note: Predicted effect based on models available in online appendix table B.1. C.I. at 95%.

indiscriminately. Based on the theoretical framework, this combination of low severity and high selectivity should produce modest deterrent effects.

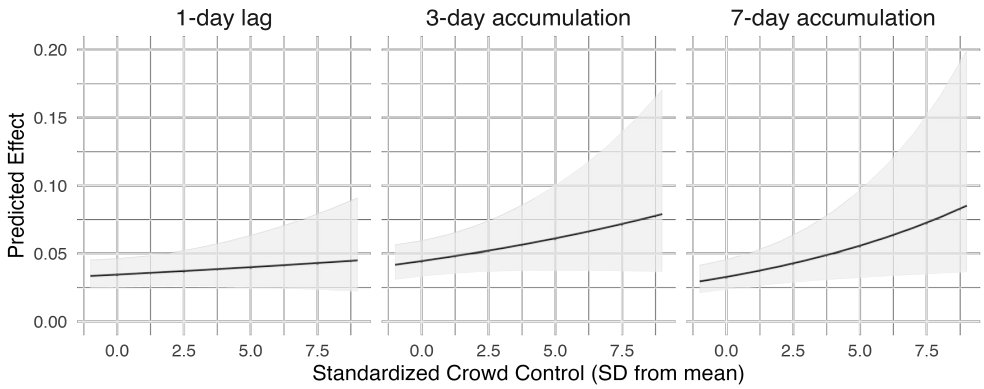
Figure 5 reveals a pattern that contradicts these theoretical expectations. The one-day lag shows a slight positive relationship between arrests and protests, which strengthens over the three-day accumulation period. Most notably, the seven-day window shows the strongest positive relationship, suggesting that arrests actually enhanced mobilization over longer time periods. While confidence intervals widen with longer time windows, the consistently positive and strengthening relationship suggests that arrests, despite their selective nature, contributed to sustained protest activity rather than deterrence.

Crowd Control Techniques (Low Severity, Low Selectivity).

Crowd control techniques like tear gas and water cannons are classified as low severity because they typically cause temporary discomfort rather than lasting harm when applied according to protocols.[13] These methods are also low in selectivity, affecting broad areas of demonstrations without distinguishing between participants; tear gas, for instance, spreads through the air and affects anyone in its vicinity. According to the theoretical framework, such low-severity and low-selectivity tactics should have minimal impact on protest behavior.

Figure 6 shows how these tactics influenced protest frequency. The one-day lag reveals a modest positive relationship, with protest probability increasing slightly as crowd control intensity rises. This relationship becomes more pronounced over longer periods—both three-day

Figure 6. Predicted Impact of Crowd Control Techniques on Protest Frequency



Note: Predicted effect based on models available online in table B.1. C.I. at 95%.

and seven-day accumulations show steeper positive slopes. These findings suggest that, rather than having minimal effect as theoretically predicted, crowd control techniques generated increasing mobilization over time, with the strongest effects appearing in longer time windows.

Robustness Checks

A key mechanism through which repression might affect protest behavior is media coverage, which can amplify the visibility of repressive actions beyond their immediate location. As discussed earlier, visible repression can incite further protests by creating shared awareness of state aggression and intensifying grievances beyond those directly affected. In this way, media coverage makes repressive actions observable to a wider audience, potentially transforming passive observers into active participants. To examine this mechanism, I analyze how media-reported incidents of state violence against civilians influenced subsequent protest activity. The media analysis helps capture cross-municipal spatial dynamics of repression effects that complement the local-level analysis. Although local repression data capture immediate tactical interactions between protesters and police, media coverage reveals how information about repression spreads and influences protest behavior across municipal boundaries over time. Compared to the previous analysis, which relied on INDH administrative data based on individual complaints, this analysis uses ACLED data (Raleigh et al. 2023), which capture events reported in national news media. Using this data source, I consider events when they are coded as violence against civilians and, in addition, when they occur in the framework of political disorder events and involve state actors (police or military) against civilians.

Table 3 reveals that media coverage of police violence had an increasingly positive relationship with protest occurrence over time. The effect is most pronounced in the seven-day accumulation window, where each additional reported incident is associated with an 18.8% increase in expected protest occurrence,[14] holding other factors constant. This suggests that media coverage may have helped create the shared awareness of repression theorized to drive protest mobilization, particularly by making repressive actions visible across different localities.

The strong positive effect of media-reported violence on civilians in the context of demonstrations helps contextualize the findings from the INDH administrative data. While both data sources show that repression generated protest mobilization, the INDH data reveal more varied temporal patterns across different tactical choices. The fact that similar mobilizing effects appear in both individual complaints (INDH) and media coverage (ACLED) strengthens confidence in the overall finding that repression increased rather than deterred protest activity during this period. However, the larger effect size in media-reported incidents, compared to the more modest effects found in the INDH data, suggests that widely publicized acts of repression may have been particularly powerful in generating protest mobilization, aligning with theoretical expectations about the importance of visibility in shaping protest responses to repression.

Table 3. Estimated Regression Coefficients for Media Reports of Violence Against Civilians on Protest Occurrence

	1-Day Lag	*3-Day Accumulated*	*7-Day Accumulated*
Violence against Civilians (t-1)	−0.125 (0.166)		
Violence against Civilians (3-day)		0.099 (0.111)	
Violence against Civilians (7-day)			0.172** (0.088)
Number of Observations	22.422	21.816	20.604
R^2 Marginal	0.053	0.050	0.026

Notes: Models' controls include past protest events, police deployment per 100,000 inhabitants, rain, temperature above 30 degrees Celsius, a binary variable that indicates a weekday or weekend, and distance of the municipality to the regional capital. All continuous variables are standardized (mean = 0, SD = 1). Weather variables and weekday categories remain in their original units. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses. Full models available in online appendix table C.1.

Political Opportunities and Movement Resources

The effects of repression on protest behavior likely depend on the broader mobilization context in which they occur. Social movement theory has long recognized that political opportunities and organizational resources fundamentally shape collective action capacity and strategic responses to state actions (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1994). To examine how contextual factors condition repressive tactics' effects, I incorporate key measures of both dimensions into the analysis. For political opportunities, I use progovernment vote share from the last presidential election, as lower government support signals greater opportunities for challengers who face reduced legitimacy constraints (Klein and Regan 2018; Su 2015). For movement resources, I include three indicators at the local level: labor strike count, number of tertiary educational institutions, and opposition party representation in municipal councils. [15] Labor strikes reflect organized working-class mobilization capacity; educational institutions serve as organizational hubs for student and youth activism; and opposition representation in local government reflects pre-existing political networks that can facilitate mobilization. This approach aligns with research showing that organizational presence and prior mobilization effectively capture the accumulated experience, tactical knowledge, and informal networks that facilitate collective action (Chenoweth and Belgioioso 2019; Larson et al. 2019). By incorporating these variables as both controls and interaction terms, I assess whether the effects of specific repressive tactics are conditional upon political environment and local mobilization capacity.

Results from table C.2 in online appendix C confirm that while these factors influence protest dynamics, the main repression effects remain robust. Labor mobilization strongly predicts protest activity, and government electoral support in the last election reduces it. The interaction models reveal that beatings generate less protest where labor mobilization is stronger, crowd control techniques are less effective where opposition presence is high, and both tactics generate more protests in historically progovernment areas. These findings indicate that while resources and opportunities shape protest dynamics, they do not explain away the backlash effects of repression identified in the main analysis.

Last, as mentioned earlier, to address the methodological concerns about temporal dependence raised in the count data literature (Brandt and Williams 2001; Brandt et al. 2000), table B.2 in appendix B presents alternative specifications that exclude lagged dependent variables. The results from these models maintain the same substantive patterns as the main specifications, with some notable differences in effect magnitudes. Without conditioning on previous protest levels, the coefficients for repressive tactics are generally larger, suggesting that including lagged protests may produce more conservative estimates of repression's effects. However, the key findings remain unchanged: (1) beatings and rubber bullet shootings show significant positive associations with protests in the immediate term, (2) crowd control techniques demonstrate increasing effects over longer time windows, and (3) arrests exhibit stronger mobilizing effects over longer periods. This consistency across model specifications strengthens confidence in the core findings about how severity and selectivity shape protest responses, regardless of how temporal dependence is addressed.

MECHANISMS

The results reveal a consistent pattern of protest mobilization across different forms of repression, though with varying temporal dynamics and intensities. While the severity-selectivity framework introduced earlier provided initial expectations about when repression should generate backlash versus deterrence, the empirical findings suggest a more complex reality shaped by two additional factors: the visibility of repressive acts and their temporal accumulation.

First, high-severity selective tactics like beatings produced mobilization rather than the expected deterrence. Although these tactics are directed at specific individuals, presumably to

neutralize key activists, beatings generated short-term increases in protest activity.[16] This deviation from theoretical expectations might be explained by the particularly outrageous nature of beatings in democratic contexts: while some degree of crowd control or arrests might be seen as within legitimate police functions, direct physical violence against civilians represents a clear violation of police duties. Such violations could generate stronger moral outrage, spread more rapidly through social media, and trigger broader solidarity responses that overwhelm the intended deterrent effect of targeting specific individuals.

High-severity, less selective tactics like rubber bullet shootings partially confirmed theoretical expectations of backlash, showing mobilizing effects in the short and medium term. However, the flattening effect over the seven-day accumulation suggests these tactics may lose mobilizing power as protesters adapt to heightened risks. This adaptation was visible in protesters' increasing use of protective equipment like safety goggles, helmets, and makeshift shields, which reduced the tactical effectiveness of rubber bullets. This temporal pattern indicates that while indiscriminate severity can trigger an immediate backlash, its influence on sustained mobilization may be more limited than theory would predict as protesters develop defensive innovations.

These findings are robust to alternative data sources. A comparison with official police ammunition records from Santiago Province, which accounts for approximately 25% of all documented repressive actions, reveals similar patterns, though with stronger effect sizes than those captured in civilian reports (see online appendix C). This is particularly noteworthy for crowd control techniques like tear gas and water cannons, which are routine police responses that civilians might be less likely to formally report to human rights organizations. This suggests that while the INDH data may underestimate the magnitude of repression's impact due to underreporting of routine tactics, it accurately captures the directional effects of different tactics. The fact that I find significant effects even in potentially underreported civilian data strengthens confidence in these patterns.

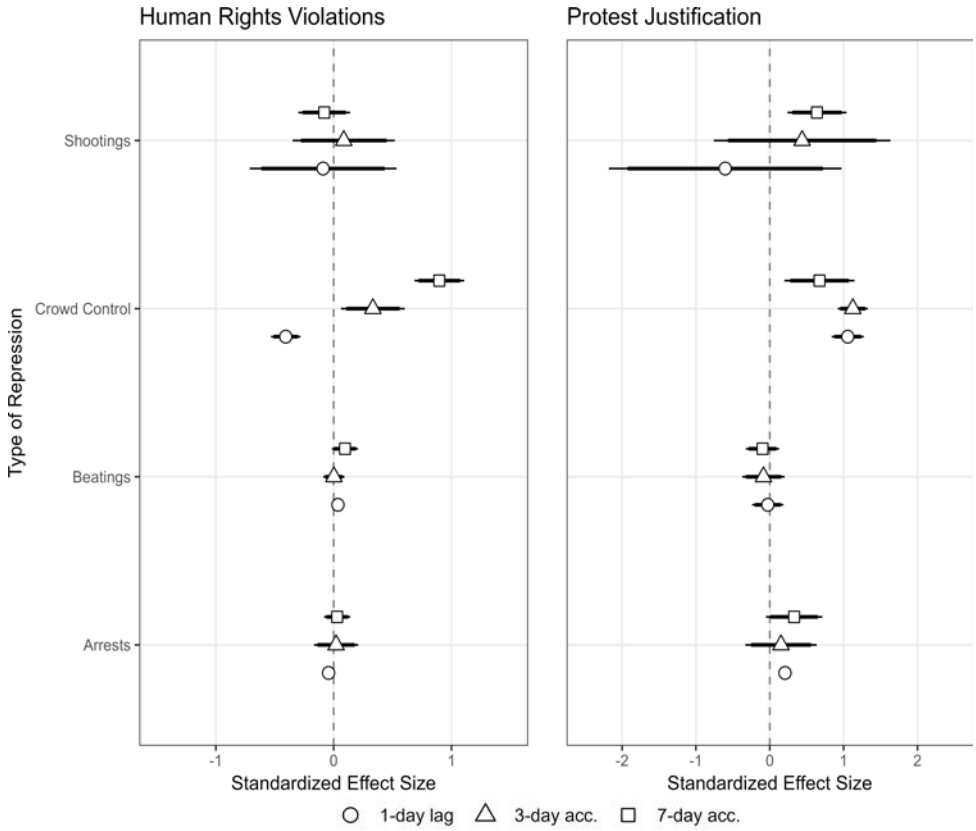
Perhaps most surprisingly, low-severity tactics generated significant mobilization regardless of their selectivity. Indiscriminate crowd control techniques showed gradually increasing mobilizing effects over time, suggesting that even mild repression, when applied broadly and persistently, can accumulate grievances and trigger collective action. Similarly, selective arrests produced increasing mobilization over longer periods rather than the expected deterrence through strategic disruption. This pattern suggests that ongoing arrests may highlight systemic repression and encourage strategic movement adaptation rather than demobilization.

While the municipal-level analysis demonstrates how different repressive tactics influenced subsequent protest activity, it cannot directly reveal why these tactics generated mobilization rather than deterrence. To explore these mechanisms, I analyze how exposure to repressive events in respondents' municipalities shaped their attitudes, using data from the CEP National Public Opinion Survey (Centro de Estudios Públicos 2020, survey details available in online appendix D).

Figure 7 examines how the frequency of repressive events in a respondent's municipality influenced two key attitudes: their perception of how often police committed human rights violations during the crisis, and their views on protest justification. These two measures capture distinct potential mechanisms through which repression might affect protest behavior. Perceptions of human rights violations reflect how repression shapes views of state legitimacy, while protest justification indicates whether repression makes people supportive of contentious action as a political tool.

Figure 7's coefficients represent how a one-standard-deviation increase in repressive events affected these attitudes over different time windows, controlling for demographic characteristics and municipality-level effects. Only crowd control techniques show consistent and significant impacts across both outcomes. For perceptions of human rights violations (left panel), exposure to crowd control methods has a positive effect that becomes stronger over longer time periods, suggesting these tactics increasingly shape views of police misconduct. Similarly, for protest justification (right panel), crowd control techniques show positive effects that grow stronger over time, indicating these tactics may increase rather than decrease public support for protest activity. Other forms of repression—beatings and arrests—did not systematically influence public attitudes in either direction. The exception is shootings, which show a significant positive effect

Figure 7. Estimated Regression Coefficients for Police Repression on Public Attitudes



Note: Points represent standardized coefficient estimates. Thick lines represent 90% C.Is and thin lines represent 95% C.Is. Each coefficient represents a change in the dependent variable per SD increase in the repressive tactic used by police. The dependent variables are the perceived frequency of human rights violations by police (measured on a 5-point scale from 'never' to 'very frequently' during the crisis that began in October 2019) and protest justification (measured on a 5-point scale from 'never justify' to 'always justify' participation in protest marches). All models include demographic controls (age, gender, education) and municipality effects with standard errors clustered at the municipality level. Full models available in the appendix, tables D.1 and D.2.

on protest justification in the seven-day accumulation window, suggesting that sustained exposure to this severe tactic may increase public support for protests even when it does not significantly affect perceptions of human rights violations. These findings align with recent work by Disi Pavlic et al. (2025), who found that spatial and temporal proximity to actively policed protests in Chile significantly increased people's willingness to justify violence against police, particularly affecting centrist voters.

The survey evidence helps explain the relationship between repression and protest mobilization observed in the municipal-level analysis. While crowd control techniques consistently shaped both perceptions of human rights violations and protest justification, other tactics showed more limited effects on public attitudes despite influencing protest behavior. This suggests different forms of repression may operate through distinct mechanisms. As Somma and colleagues (2020) show in the Chilean context, sustained low-level repression can shift public sentiment over time, while more severe tactics may deepen political crises without achieving deterrence. The latter point is reinforced by González and Prem (2024), who found that even lethal repression during the Chilean student movement produced only small, temporary decreases in protest activity among those most directly affected. Together, these findings suggest that while repression may work through public opinion channels in some cases (as with crowd control), other tactics may influence protest through different mechanisms—such as emotional responses or solidarity networks—even when they do not significantly alter broader attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Why do specific repressive actions increase the occurrence of protests when they are supposed to do exactly the opposite? Tilly (1978) argued that state coercion increases the costs of collective action and, therefore, repression should have negative effects on mobilization. More recent studies have also shown that people engage less in street protests when their perceptions of risk and potential violence increase (Dave et al. 2020; Steinert-Threlkeld, Chan, and Joo 2022). Recognizing that this association is very context-dependent, this paper examined how varying forms of police repression used in democratic regimes shape protest mobilization. By developing an approach that distinguishes among different levels of severity and selectivity, this paper aimed to uncover the mechanisms through which repressive tactics can both deter and trigger dissent.

This study examined how the interaction between severity and selectivity of repressive tactics shapes protest behavior in democratic contexts. Drawing on the 2019 Chilean *Estallido*, I found that the theoretical expectations about deterrence and backlash effects were only partially confirmed. Contrary to expectations that selective, high-severity repression would deter protests through targeted disruption, tactics like beatings generated short-term surges in mobilization, likely due to their severe and visible nature. Similarly unexpected, low-severity tactics produced significant mobilization regardless of their selectivity, with crowd control techniques showing gradually increasing mobilizing effects over time, suggesting that even mild repression can accumulate grievances when applied persistently. This pattern suggests that, even when repressive measures are mild, repeated applications can accumulate grievances and erode public trust, thereby fostering increased dissent. Survey evidence revealed that exposure to crowd control techniques consistently shaped both perceptions of human rights violations and protest justification, while more severe tactics like rubber bullet shootings influenced protest behavior through other mechanisms, such as emotional responses or solidarity networks, even if they did not generate widespread shifts in public attitudes. This relationship between repression and protest is further complicated by protesters' own tactical choices, as some protests involved property destruction and violent confrontations with the police.

Assessing the consequences of such repression poses significant challenges for social movement scholars. Most sources only consider broad categories based on dichotomous classifications, such as police presence or lethal versus nonlethal tactics, limiting our understanding of how specific police actions impact protesters (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). The scarcity and difficulty in accessing reliable data on police repression, compounded by endogeneity problems, where the propensity for dissent is influenced by repression itself, make it a complex field to navigate (Ritter and Conrad 2016). By developing a theoretical framework centered on severity and selectivity and focusing on both spatial dynamics and immediate responses to police repression, this study provides more detailed characterizations of police tactics. Such granularity allows for a better understanding of the distinct impacts of different forms of repression on protest dynamics.

A key strength of this study lies in its use of multiple complementary data sources—the Observatory's press-based protest data, INDH civilian complaints, and official police records—which helps address potential measurement challenges. While the Observatory's methodology ensures comprehensive coverage of protest events, some underreporting likely remains, particularly for routine forms of repression like tear gas and water cannons that civilians might not formally report. The comparison with police ammunition records reveals stronger effect sizes than civilian complaints, suggesting the main analysis provides conservative estimates of repression's impact while accurately capturing directional effects. Additional analyses incorporating political opportunities and movement resources confirm the robustness of these findings. Even when accounting for factors such as labor movement strength, institutional infrastructure, and local political context, the core patterns of how repressive tactics influence protest behavior remain consistent, giving confidence to the validity of the identified severity-selectivity dynamics.

These measurement issues point to broader limitations in studying repression and protest dynamics. Replicating this study in other contexts might be challenging, particularly where

limited media independence and state control over media networks prevent reliable accounts of both protests and repression. Also, this study's insights may not fully extend to authoritarian regimes or countries experiencing democratic backsliding, given the relative legitimacy of Chile's national police and the moderate risks faced by protesters compared to places where severe repression is more common. Additionally, while this study identifies a backlash effect in protest occurrence, it does not capture variations in protest size, which could exhibit different patterns in response to state violence (Steinert-Threlkeld, Chan, and Joo 2022), leaving unanswered questions about the characteristics of protests that follow repressive acts. The severity-selectivity framework helps explain why conflicting results in the literature may emerge when different repressive actions are grouped together, highlighting the importance of context-specific data collection. Despite these constraints, the results offer valuable insights into the effects of police strategies on protests, providing a launching point for further investigation into the relationship between state actions and public response and adding to existing research on the effects of the *Estallido* (Castro and Retamal 2024).

Future research should incorporate a geographical comparative lens to investigate potential regional variations in protest responses to repression. In Chile, conflict dynamics have historically been regionally distinct: the south is known for the Mapuche conflict, while environmental issues predominantly spark contention in the central and northern regions. Examining how these geographical distinctions influence responses to police violence could provide valuable insights. Additionally, the surprising finding that selective high-severity tactics generated mobilization rather than deterrence suggests the need to better understand the emotional underpinnings of state coercion, particularly how repression can generate outrage and, in turn, fuel mobilization, especially in democratic contexts where expectations about appropriate police behavior may heighten public responses to violence. Future studies should aim to identify which specific forms of repression are most likely to provoke these strong emotional reactions and the underlying reasons for these responses, acknowledging that conceptualizing backlash solely in terms of protest frequency simplifies its complex nature. Important dimensions such as shifts in tactics, protester demographics, movement sustainability, and broader expressions of resistance (Ellefsen 2021; Hager and Krakowski 2022) remain understudied, pointing to the need for more comprehensive analyses of repression's manifold consequences.

NOTES

[1] Mass Mobilization Protest Data (Clark and Regan 2016) shows an upsurge in protest occurrence after 2013, as illustrated in figure E.1 in the online appendix at https://github.com/frcastrog/police-repression.

[2] ACLED data (Raleigh et al. 2023) reveal a substantial rise in violence against civilians by state forces in recent years (see figure E.2 in the online appendix).

[3] Refer to Davenport (2005) and Earl (2011) for comprehensive reviews.

[4] While there is a risk of creating martyrs that could inspire further mobilization due to heightened grievances and perceptions of injustice (Hess and Martin 2006), the targeted nature of the repression often limits widespread public backlash. By focusing on key figures rather than the general populace, authorities minimize the collateral damage that typically provokes mass dissent. In democratic contexts, such tactics are more feasible within legal frameworks (e.g., arresting individuals on specific charges) and can be justified as enforcing the rule of law, thereby maintaining the state's legitimacy while effectively deterring core activists.

[5] These data were provided in response to a request through the Transparency Law (see appendix E.3, table E.2). Attendance is calculated based on a methodology used by Carabineros, which considers two different counting mechanisms: for low-turnout protests, the calculation is according to the assessment of the police personnel present at each event; for protests with high turnout, the calculation is based on the use of drone images and a geographical function application that divides the territory into polygons based on the density of attendees and the area in square meters.

[6] For this measurement, the Social Conflict Observatory only included protests until 2019. This poses a temporal limitation since, in actuality, protests continued until March, when they began to decline due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the largest number of protests occurred between October and December, primarily because students are less active during the summer months (January-February) compared to the school period.

[7] Underreporting is still possible, considering that not all victims of police abuse decide to report and file a complaint. This underreporting could lead to false negatives, where incidents are not recorded, thus underestimating the true extent of repressive actions. However, there is certainty that the events included in this database did indeed occur at the time and place that was reported.

[8] Even when they were originally five categories, for the analyses I use four categories since tear gas and water cannon were grouped in the category "crowd control techniques."
[9] The analysis was conducted using the glmmTMB package (Brooks et al. 2022), which is designed to handle over-dispersion and excess zeros in the data.
[10] For instance, protests are more frequent during weekdays than during weekends. Climate conditions, such as extreme temperatures (which are likely to occur during the summer), can also deter protests and/or police activity. Given that the data mostly include spring days and the start of summer, this has to be taken into account.
[11] The zero-inflation component requires identifying and including predictors ($Z_{i,t-k}$) that explain the presence of structural zeros, i.e., those that might arise due to specific conditions that effectively prevent the event from occurring, regardless of the underlying rate of occurrence. Therefore, in the context of protest events, I include the following predictors for the zero-inflation component: extreme weather conditions (temperatures over 30°C) and rainfall.
[12] The reason for including the three-day accumulation is that it captures dynamics that happen on weekends, from Friday to Sunday, and also potential delays in the reporting of repression by the media. The seven-day accumulation was constructed to capture weekly dynamics.
[13] Of course, this classification assumes proper application. During the protests, there were cases of severe injury from tear gas canisters, most notably Fabiola Campillai, who lost both eyes when a canister was thrown directly at her face.
[14] Calculated as $[\exp(0.172) - 1] \times 100 = 18.8\%$
[15] Information on labor strike count was obtained from the Labor Strike Observatory (Observatorio de Huelgas Laborales) from COES. For more information, visit https://coes.cl/observatorio-de-huelgas-laborales/. The number of tertiary educational institutions was obtained from official data from the Chilean Ministry of Education. Opposition party representation in municipal councils was calculated using data from the 2016 municipal council elections (concejales) obtained from the Chilean Electoral Service (SERVEL). Council members were classified as government or opposition based on their party coalition affiliation, and the proportion of opposition representatives was calculated for each municipality.
[16] A predicted effect of 0.03 protests indicates an expectation of approximately three protests per 100 days under similar conditions, reflecting a long-run empirical expectation rather than a literal fractional event.[1]

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