

# The Decision to Repress:

## An Integrative Theoretical Approach to the Research on Human Rights and Repression

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## Abstract

Scholars have recently given considerable attention to finding why repression and human rights abuses occur. Drawing hypotheses from a wide variety of theories, they have succeeded in achieving an additive cumulation (Zinnes 1976) of empirical findings on why variations in these abuses occur. In this paper I improve theory development on these phenomena by integrating the numerous and at first seemingly disparate hypotheses and findings the repression into a single decisionmaking model. Then, to further illustrate the utility of the model, I will use it to find clues as to why some of the contradictory and negative empirical findings in this fast developing subfield have arisen. Finally, I will use it to gain insights into how we might gain a better understanding of the decisionmaking process that sometimes leads regimes to repress.

## Introduction

Beginning in the mid-seventies international relations, comparative politics, and public policy scholars began to build statistical models in order to answer the question of why countries abuse human rights and repress their citizens. This movement, spurred by the development and proliferation of international human rights law and reporting, and a growing popular interest and concern for human rights, has recently gained considerable momentum. Empirical studies and their findings have quickly accumulated.<sup>1</sup>

Still, as is almost always the case in any area of inquiry, much hard work remains to be done. The vast majority of studies conducted to date have adopted an approach consistent with that recommended by Blalock's *Theory Construction* (1969), whereby an inventory of hypotheses is compiled from a variety of theories that are then tested in a single multivariate model. This "scavenger hunt" approach has provided a very good base from which to work, as researchers have compiled empirical findings on the effects of many variables, thus achieving an additive cumulation of findings (Zinnes 1976) on why repression occurs. Unfortunately, a by-product of the nearly exclusive adoption of this approach is that the theoretical linkages between the many hypotheses, drawn from diverse and seemingly unrelated theoretical perspectives, are as yet quite unclear. Though we can identify several of the variables that influence levels of repression, no model has been put forward to tie them together. Therefore, here I shall concern myself with the task of integrating the hypotheses and findings extant in the empirical literature on human rights and repression into a single, process-oriented decisionmaking model, in order to achieve what Zinnes (1976) called "integrative cumulation."

In integrating these findings, this study will move forward our understanding of states' use of human rights abuses and repression in at least three ways. First, this unified model will be much less complex than the many diverse and seemingly unrelated theories that have been tested using the additive approach, and thus, much more parsimonious and easier to comprehend. Second, I will demonstrate that the model can provide analysts with theoretical insights as to why divergent and unexpected findings have arisen, thus indicating directions for their future queries. And third, as a result of the particular model I

adopt, from Most and Starr (1989), I will improve over previous research by moving toward a more process-oriented understanding of the dynamics underlying regimes' decision to repress, taking into account the logical difficulties posed by substitutability (Most and Starr 1984; 1989). Development of this approach could take researchers toward a more sophisticated, process-oriented understanding of why repression occurs.<sup>2</sup>

### The Most-Starr Decision-Making Model

My theoretical point of departure is a variant of the rational actor decision-making approach already adopted by others to approach the study of repression and dissent (e.g., DeNardo 1985; Lichbach 1987; Simon 1994; Gartner and Regan 1997).<sup>3</sup> I will employ a conceptual model first presented in Most and Starr (1989), and expanded upon by Starr and his colleagues (e.g., Starr 1994; Simon, Starr, and McGinnis 1994; Simon and Starr 1996). The model assumes that decisionmakers can be represented as "unified and value-maximizing actors who possess perfect information regarding all options and their consequences." (Most and Starr, 1989, 126). According to the domestic governmental model that relates most closely to my topic (presented in Table One) the main foci of decisionmakers who make domestic policy decisions are their perceptions of their regimes' political **Strength** in the domestic domain (S), and their perception of the probability that a domestic **Threat** (T) will topple their regime. Regime leaders are motivated (or willing) to take an action to increase their Strength, or decrease the Threat to their regime, posed by their political opponents in times of **alarm**, when they perceive the regime's strength is less than the threat " $S_{nt1} < T_{nt1}$ ", or if they perceive Threat is increasing relative to Strength, that is, " $[S_{nt1}/T_{nt1}] < [S_{nt0}/T_{nt0}]$ " (Most and Starr, 1989, 126-8).<sup>4</sup> The regime will be moved to take an action to the end of increasing the Strength/Threat ratio, if such willingness is present **and** if it is presented with the opportunity to do so. The axioms and postulates of the model that are most relevant to our undertaking are presented in Table One. Seen in light of this model, repression and human rights abuse are tools that can be used by leaders to respond when they are alarmed by the S/T ratio.

(Place Table One about Here)

One should be careful not to take as truth the rhetoric of government leaders and politicians. That being said, their public statements can sometimes provide a window to their perceptions or rationalizations. The rare statements made by officials in repressive regimes appear to indicate that such decisions focus on the strength of the regime vis-à-vis the perceived seriousness of the threat. For example a former Minister of Justice of South Africa, quoted in the work of the Rabie Commission constituted after the death of Steve Biko, was very forthcoming in his statement that, “Over the past almost thirty years, it was necessary, from time to time, to place statutory measures on the lawbook to counteract the constantly changing threats to the internal security of the republic.”(quoted in Foster and Davis 1987, 31). According to that official, the statutes (which did result in many of the human rights abuses borne by the black majority in South Africa) were put in place in reaction to threats *perceived* by the white minority in power. Or, put in terms of the model, a decrease in the S/T ratio was perceived as a result of the perception of an increase in Threat. Then repressive measures were enacted with an eye toward decreasing T, thus tending to increase the S/T ratio to what, from the regime’s standpoint, would be a more favorable value.

For further evidence taken from the context of a totalitarian government, consider this quote from probably the worst violator of human rights in modern times, Adolph Hitler:

I shall spread terror through the surprising application of all means. The sudden shock of a terrible fear of death is what matters. Why should I deal otherwise with all my political opponents? These so-called atrocities save me hundreds of thousands of individual actions against the protesters and discontents. Each one of them will think twice to oppose us when he learns what is [awaiting] him in the [concentration] camp (Hitler, quoted in Gurr 1986, pp. 46-47).

In Hitler's eyes then, it seems that mass execution was but an expedient way of decreasing the threats that he perceived (whether they be real or imagined) increasing the S/T ratio by decreasing T. Finally, for an example from yet another region, statements by former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos cited by Ruiz (1989) also imply that his attention was on the S/T ratio, when he determined to enact repressive national security laws.

The model outlined in the table and discussed in the text is an amalgamation of two of the four models presented in the Most and Starr book dealing with regimes' decisionmaking processes in domestic and international level games (e.g., Putnam 1988). Underlying these models is the assumption that variables may exercise effects on repression and other policy outputs either because they constrain leaders' choices, i.e., environmental possibilism in the Sprout's terms, and/or because they are perceived by decision-makers and are therefore transformed into ideas or information that are considered and brought to bear in some way on decisions, as with environmental probabalism (Sprout and Sprout, 1969). For example, in the model dealing with the international level game, which is the major focus of the majority of Most and Starr's research, the use of force is conceived of as being but one option, or opportunity among many possibilities, or substitutable items on the menu (e.g., Russett and Starr 1992) of *some* decisionmakers to deal with their international security dilemma. In a similar way, repression is but one option of several courses of action that *can be chosen* by leaders to deal with their domestic dilemma: how to keep control when there are those who would threaten to topple the regime.

Though decisionmakers usually have the capability to repress and often believe repression to be a viable tool to use in dealing with this dilemma, there are almost certainly other tools at their disposal that could be used to accomplish that same purpose. To rehearse some examples, governments may make concessions in reaction to the opposition in the hope of diffusing the threat. In some cases decisionmakers may, by taking particular actions on a critical issue, be able to shift some portion of public support from the opposition to the government, thereby increasing Strength while decreasing Threat. Also, since they are involved in a two-level game, regime leaders may seek foreign aid from abroad with the idea of increasing their power in the domestic sphere.

Because such options are substitutable, Most and Starr point out, the results stemming from analyses using one item of the menu alone as the dependent variable (e.g., use of force, or repression) may prove misleading (1989). This is particularly true if we are looking for a generally applicable linear relationship between an independent variable and one policy output, as is typically done, since leaders may choose different options at different times and conditions in response to the same stimulus.

According to this line of reasoning, we should conceive of the problem more broadly, as is done in this model.

In the remainder of this essay I will briefly review the empirical literature on human rights and repression. Then I will use the model to bring some order to the many propositions and findings arising from this literature.

#### Previous Literature on Human Rights, Repression, and State Terror

It would be impossible to offer an in-depth and complete coverage and critique of the methodologies, operationalizations, designs, and findings of each empirical study of repression in the available space, and therefore such a review must be beyond the scope of this paper. That being said, though, an overview and characterization of the major attributes of these studies is in order.

In his recent review of the repression literature Davenport (1997) argues that empirical and theoretical research on repression tends to come from one of three separate traditions: human rights (e.g., Henderson 1991, 1993; Mitchell and McCormick 1988, Poe and Tate 1994; McNitt 1995; Regan 1995) state terror (e.g., Stohl 1984; Lopez 1984, 1986; Gurr 1986), and negative sanctions (e.g., Ziegenhagen 1986; Rasler 1986; Alfatooni and Allen 1991; Davenport 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; King 1997). A reading of these studies leads inexorably to the conclusion that the three veins of research do, in fact, have much in common, and that many of the differences are in terminology only. This becomes especially evident when one or more of the labels are used interchangeably (e.g., Gurr 1986; Poe and Tate 1994). Indeed, in spite of their rhetorical differences, most of the studies cited above refer to the dependent phenomenon at some point as “repression” (e.g., Pion-Berlin 1984; Davis and Ward 1990). I will therefore use that term to describe literature in each of these three veins throughout most of the remainder of the paper.

Though each research tradition deals with some aspect of repression, there are certainly nontrivial differences in the studies’ operationalizations of that phenomenon. The negative sanctions literature has adopted what Lopez and Stohl (1992) have called an events-based approach to measurement. These

studies use a simple count of the number of repressive events, or negative sanctions, occurring in a particular country during a chosen time frame to represent repression. Most often used are measurements that tap the number of instances of censorship and political restrictions, including restrictions on the media and instances of limitation and/or restrictions of political parties or individuals (e.g., Davenport 1995b). Thus this approach is primarily concerned with government actions that take away civil and political liberties, and it assumes that the number of events during a chosen time frame is a theoretically interesting indicator of repression.

Statistical studies from the human rights literature, by contrast, have tended to use standards-based measures. These measures are generated by having trained readers code human rights and/or governmental agencies' human rights reports on the world's countries. Those readers then categorize countries based on a predetermined set of criteria. The bulk of human rights studies have focused primarily on violations of personal (or physical) integrity, where persons are imprisoned, tortured, executed, or disappear either arbitrarily or due to their political views (e.g., Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Henderson 1991, 1993; Poe and Tate 1994; McNitt 1995; Regan 1995; Gartner and Regan 1996; Poe, Tate and Keith 1997; Richards and Cingranelli 1997, Carey 2000; Richards et al., 2001). Somewhat different coding criteria have been employed by the various researchers, but they have commonly used one of two sources of information; the annual Reports of Amnesty International (e.g., 1996) and of the U.S. State Department (e.g., 1997). Though there are few statistical studies which explicitly choose the state terror terminology the most commonly used measure in the human rights literature is the Political Terror Scale (Gibney and Dalton 1997) which was originally gathered by Michael Stohl, a scholar who has written articles using both the human rights and state terror terminologies (e.g., Stohl, Carleton and Mitchell 1984; Mitchell, Stohl, Carleton and Lopez 1986; Lopez and Stohl 1992). This makes sense, since one could argue as Poe and Tate 1994 did, that state terror and serious abuses of the human right to physical integrity are but two sides of the same coin, since human rights violations are the result of regimes' terrorists acts. More closely related to the negative sanctions literature are empirical human rights studies using the Freedom House scales (e.g., Gastil 1989),



standards-based measures which capture the degree to which a broad range of political rights and civil liberties are realized around the world (e.g., Strouse and Claude 1976; Park 1987; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Meyer 1996).

Clearly the measures used by the negative sanctions and the human rights\state terror approaches differ, but put in terms of the domestic model there is an underlying similarity; each taps decisionmakers' choice of repressive actions from the menu of behaviors, both repressive and nonrepressive, that can often be employed by regimes with an eye toward dealing with perceived threats. Therefore, the commonality in hypotheses and findings which appear in these literatures (to be discussed in greater depth later) is to be expected.

Another similarity is that the vast majority of these studies employ similar methodologies. With but a few exceptions they use O.L.S. multiple regression, which allows the researcher to isolate the effects of one variable on repression, while holding the effects of other factors constant and assuming linear relationships.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of research designs have a cross-national component (meaning they are either cross-national or pooled cross sectional time series studies), though there are some exceptions which analyze exclusively time series data (e.g., Pion-Berlin 1984; Davis and Ward 1990; Rasler 1986).

#### Toward an Integrative Cumulation of Findings on Repression

A necessary first step toward integration is to take inventory of the hypotheses that have been tested and the findings which have accumulated. When one examines these studies, one is struck by the variety of hypotheses that have been tested. Though findings are mixed on a number of hypotheses, research seems to have reached a consensus on the effects of several variables. Multivariate research conducted with both events and standards-based approaches strongly supports the conclusion that past repression influences current levels of repression (Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995, 1996a; 1995a Poe, Tate and Keith 1997; Richards et al., 2001). The clear majority of findings from each of these approaches indicate that democratic political institutions are associated with less political repression (Henderson 1991, 1993; Davenport 1995b, 1996a, 1996b; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe Tate and Keith 1997; Richards

1997).<sup>6</sup> Economic development has generally been found to be associated with somewhat fewer negative sanctions and less human rights abuse (Strouse and Claude 1976; Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995b; McNitt 1995; Meyer 1996; Poe, Tate and Keith 1997) once other relevant factors controlled (but see Davenport 1996a and Henderson 1993). Research with standards-based human rights measures strongly support the conclusion that countries' involvement in international war is associated with greater repression (Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate and Keith 1997) as does a study using a negative sanctions approach, focusing on the twentieth century United States (Rasler 1986). Finally, quite consistent with the axioms and postulates of the Most and Starr (1989) model, hypotheses linking the presence of various forms of threats and dissent with increased repression have received quite strong support in quantitative analyses using both events and standards-based repression variables (e.g., Ziegenhagen 1986; Davis and Ward 1990; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Alfatooni and Allen 1991; Davenport 1995; 1996a 1996b 1997; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate, Keith and Lanier 1997a, 1997b; Poe, Tate and Keith 1999, Carey 2000) and the existence of an important linkage is widely accepted (Davenport 1995b). Some analyses with standards-based measures indicate that population size is an important determinant of repression (Poe and Tate 1994, Poe, Tate and Keith 1997). Finally, the results provide some support for the hypothesis that military presence in government is associated with repression (McKinlay and Cohan 1975, 1976; Ziegenhagen 1986; Davenport 1995b; Poe and Tate 1994; McNitt 1995; Poe Tate and Keith 1999).

More mixed findings have been yielded with regard to the effects of numerous other variables, including population growth (e.g., Henderson 1993, Poe and Tate 1994, Poe, Tate and Keith 1997), economic growth (Strouse and Claude 1976, Poe and Tate 1994, McNitt 1995; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999), British cultural influence (e.g., McCormick and Mitchell 1988; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe, Tate and Keith 1997), leftist government (McCormick and Mitchell 1988; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Davenport 1995b; Poe and Tate 1994; McNitt 1995; Poe Tate and Keith 1997), international trade and investment variables (Meyer; Smith et al., Richards et al.; Harrelson-Stephens and Callaway 1998), cultural diversity (Walker and Poe 2002) and a variety of external, international environmental

variables (e.g., Pion-Berlin 1984; Ziegenhagen 1986; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Davis and Ward 1990; Henderson 1995; Meyer 1996; Davenport 1995b; Keith and Poe 1996).

An additive cumulation of findings is clearly present, but what is lacking is a theory to integrate them, thus making them easier to comprehend. The Most and Starr domestic decisionmaking model provides us with just such a theoretical tool, as each of the many hypotheses outlined above can be integrated into it in at least one of four possible ways. First, variables may affect repression because they increase or decrease the levels of threat perceived by decisionmakers. Second, variables may affect repression because they increase or decrease leaders' perceptions of Strength. Third, they may affect the kinds of opportunities that are available to decisionmakers who are acting in response to their perceptions of the Strength\Threat ratio. Fourth and finally, variables may affect regime leaders' willingness to adopt the option of repression as opposed to other available options on the menu, once those leaders are alarmed. To illustrate the utility of this model as an integrative device I will focus mainly on the variables that have received support as determinants of repression.

*Entry Point One: Variables that Influence Perceptions of Threat*

One of the most frequently examined and strongly supported linkages in the literature is the connection between democracy and repression. Though it is not reflected in the statistical models tested thus far, descriptions of the theoretical underpinnings of the democracy hypothesis often appear to posit the effect for that variable to travel through the intervening variable of Threat. Consider, for example, the following quote from Henderson (1991):

Democracy "offers a meaningful alternative for handling conflict if leaders choose to use it.

Democracy should not be viewed as an idealistic process, but as a realistic way to accommodate demands with a minimum of conflict [citations omitted]. With a large measure of democracy, conflict should not grow so sharp as to invite repression (Henderson 1991, 123-24).

Other variables found to be important by past studies seem likely to influence repression levels through their impact on perceived threat. These are contextual factors such as economic development, and population size and population growth. With regard to the effect of population growth, Henderson

argues that countries burdened with large population growth rates are apt to be confronted with "burgeoning demands" (1993, 4), that we would expect would lead to a greater probability of threats occurring, other factors being equal. With regard to population size, it has been argued that large numbers of people tend to place a stress on resources and, as a matter of probability, that a larger number of citizens increases the probability that entrepreneurs will be present to successfully form dissident movements (Poe and Tate 1994). So we expect that these variables, like democracy, would tend to increase the level of threat, and therefore exercise an indirect effect on the probability of increased repression.

Economic development has been one of the variables most commonly linked to repression by previous empirical works.<sup>7</sup> In presenting their theoretical reasons for posing this hypothesis, Mitchell and McCormick suggest the importance of threat as an intervening factor, arguing that "The poorest countries, with substantial social and political tensions created by economic scarcity, would be most unstable and thus most apt to use repression in order to maintain control" (1988, 478). Along the same lines, Henderson argues that "[i]t is only logical to think that, with a higher level of development, people will be more satisfied" (1991:1226). This, of course, would tend to decrease levels of threat, as it is unlikely that those who are satisfied will mobilize against the regime.

External threats, in the form of participation in international wars, may affect internal dissent and therefore levels of domestic threat perceived by regime leaders, consistent with the logic of Putnam's (1988) two-level game. Though an initial rally-around-the-flag effect may occur in some instances, it is likely that as losses mount the populace will tend to tire of war efforts (e.g., Mueller 1973). This would increase the probability that movements against the regime will arise, increasing T, decreasing S/T, and therefore increasing the probability that the regime will choose to enact repressive responses.

Finally, decisionmakers' belief systems enter the model through their effect on leaders' perceptions of reality. The model leaves open the possibility (or perhaps more accurately the strong likelihood) that decisionmakers' perception of an increased threat are in part the result of their viewing events through the filter of ideology. Hitler's Nazism identified Jews as a serious threat, both internally

and internationally. This accepted state ideology played a part in the horrific human rights violations in part because it led Hitler and his followers to *perceive* Jews to be a serious threat to his regime, whether they were one or not (see Arendt 1951). Similarly, military regimes in Latin America may have been moved to undertake coups in part by ideologies that emphasize their positions as defenders of national security against threats, both at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Argentina, this sort of worldview, which Pion-Berlin and Lopez (1991) call the "National Security Doctrine" was combined with a free market ideology. Perhaps as a result the Dirty War was undertaken to eviscerate the alleged threat--members of particular unions that were "perceived by the government to have obstructed its achievement of economic and security goals," (Pion-Berlin and Lopez 1991, 63).

*Entry Point Two: Variables that Influence Perceived levels of Strength*

The second path by which variables may affect levels of repression is by decreasing the strength of the regime in decisionmakers' minds, thereby decreasing the Strength/Threat ratio. It is more difficult to find implicit evidence of this path being important in existing theoretical discussions. Still, several of the variables found to be important in explanations of repression (as well as some variables whose effects have not been supported so well by the literature, to be discussed later) may affect Strength and/or regimes' perceptions of Strength. For example, economic development is one variable that would tend to affect both Threat and Strength. Its impact on Strength is apt to be positive, because a strong economy allows the demands made by the populace to be better accommodated. Also, leaders' perception of their own strength would tend to be greater in economically developed countries in part because their countries are typically perceived to be better risks by investors and financial institutions at home and abroad. This means that the regime of a developed country is apt to be able to obtain more capital from other sources than it would if it were a less developed country.

The fact that a particular country is ruled by a military regime that took power through a coup, probably also decreases Strength in that country for a couple of reasons. In some cases, their taking power through the use of force or the threat to use force has led parties in the international environment to question the legitimacy of the regime, and in some cases even to enact sanctions that would tend to

decrease Strength. Further, the fact that the regime gained power through extra-constitutional means would not be completely lost on members of the regime, either, for they would often realize that they would enjoy greater legitimacy, and therefore strength, if they had put in power by the will of the people. Perhaps this is one reason why military coups are often followed by increases in repression, as was the case in Argentina and Chile in the mid-seventies.

Finally, it would seem that involvement in an international war is another factor that would tend to decrease Strength, either because limited resources are spent on the war effort, or because of losses in manpower and capital in connection with that war effort.

*Entry Point 3: Variables that Affect the Alternatives that Appear on the Decisionmakers Menu*

One of the contributions of the Most and Starr model to our understanding of repression is that it reminds us that a consideration of opportunities is a necessary step in the decisionmaking process. Surely all countries have the capability to undertake some repressive measures such as by stabbing opponents with a pointed stick, or imprisoning them for political purposes, but some countries may not have the security forces necessary to undertake large-scale human rights violations against the entire citizenry. A certain level of military or police strength and government control of that strength is thus a necessary condition for higher levels of repression to occur. The statistical analyses that have been conducted in the literature thus far, however, are not very well suited to finding necessary conditions, because they assume a general linear relationship, inconsistent with the logic of the likely effects of a necessary condition (Davenport 1995a; 1996a).<sup>9</sup> Perhaps methods better suited to isolating necessary conditions (Braumoeller and Goertz 1997) would yield more supportive statistical results.

Structural dependence may be another factor entering the decision-making process at this point. As Mason and Krane (1989) point, dependent development may leave countries without the institutions or the political machinery to address demands from opposition elements through accommodation. Thus the accommodative options on their decisionmaking menus are constrained, and perhaps, repressive measures made likely. They find support for this proposition in a case study of El Salvador. Similarly, the lack of

sufficient economic development (perhaps as a result of dependence) may decrease decisionmakers ability to choose accommodation over repression.

*Entry Point 4: Variables that Affect the Choice Among the Alternatives on the Menu*

Fourth and finally, the factors hypothesized to impact levels of repression may affect the likelihood that the regime will adopt particular options as opposed to others once it is in a state of alarm, and thus has the willingness to take an action. Consider again that repression may be but one of several tools available to decisionmakers to increase the Strength/Threat ratio in a particular country at a given moment in time. Being in a state of alarm, a regime is willing to take an action, but may have several alternatives on its menu from which to choose. Here the decisionmakers' perception of the consequence of repression as compared to the perceived results of other available options, is highly relevant. The type of political system, and the attributes of political culture have an effect in the definition of the pay-off structure that decisionmakers face, and therefore on the option(s) that will be apt to lead to an increase of the S/T ratio. So too, the campaigns by International Non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, and coordinated efforts between groups and foreign governments in the form of Transnational Advocacy Networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) may lead a regime to perceive an increase in the costs associated with repression, thus leading them to be more moderate in their actions than they would otherwise be. Later case studies seem to support this claim (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999), but thus far no statistical analyses have been conducted on this issue.

Other variables that would seem to enter the decisionmaking process here, as well at previously discussed entry points, include previous levels of repression, democracy and military control, and economic development. Previous levels of repression have been shown to be an extremely important determinant of present personal integrity abuse. That bureaucracies tend to make decisions incrementally, using past decisions as a baseline for the present, is well known and widely held. Further, organizations are held to have an inertia because they tend to resist change (e.g., Allison 1971; Bendor and Hammond 1992). For both of these reasons there is apt to be less cost associated with repression when it is already being used as a tool in the prior period, other things being equal. Further, if repression has not been used

in the previous period the choice of this option is apt to be more costly than it would otherwise be, other factors being equal.

Apart from its effects that enter at points one and two, democracy also puts in place an incentive structure that is apt to discourage the choice of repression by government officials. As Dixon (1995) maintains, both the citizenry and the leaders of a democracy are socialized into democratic norms that conflicts should be resolved peacefully, through bargaining and negotiation instead of violence, in a system that adheres to the rules of “bounded competition”. The presence of these norms, coupled with the use of elections to choose key decisionmakers means that leaders are apt to be forego repression as a tool. If they do not, they are apt to be punished for the excessive use of repression when people go to the polls. Elections thus give citizens of democratic governments a check on leaders that is not present when a nondemocratic government is in place, a key difference in the incentive structures of democratic and nondemocratic leaders.

Whether the decisionmakers are a part of a military regime might also enter the decisionmaking process at this point. Recent findings indicate that military government may have some effect on states’ propensities to repress basic human rights (Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995a; Poe, Tate and Keith 1997a). Military governments are, of course, non-democratic governments, so we would expect that military governments would be more repressive than others, *ceteris paribus*, for this reason. If that were the only reason to pose the military government-human rights hypothesis, we should not expect military government to exercise an impact on repression independent from that of democracy. However, the existence of militarily controlled government might also serve to remove obstructions to the use of force which would be present in civilian governments, thus decreasing the cost of repression relative to other available options.

Another variable that may enter the picture at this point is economic development. Consistent with the argument of Mueller (1990), one might argue that developed nations have evolved to the point where certain behaviors are proscribed as being inhumane. If, as Mueller argued, major war has become unsavory to decisionmakers in those countries, and thus is unlikely in the future, then we would surely



expect that major human rights abuses would be viewed with similar disdain by those at the helm of the same regimes. Though repression may be on the menu of the decisionmakers of those countries, leaders may be less willing to undertake it than in countries where no such norms are in place, other factors being equal.<sup>10</sup>

### Resolving Existing Puzzles

Though still other linkages of the model to other hypotheses might be made, I have by now illustrated that the Most and Starr model provides us with a means to integrate the empirical findings in the repression literature into a single theoretical structure. What remains to be seen, though, is whether this model will be a useful tool in helping to resolve empirical contradictions and puzzling findings existing in this field of study. A complete explanation of all of the negative and ambiguous findings in the repression subfield is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, in the section that follows, I will further demonstrate the utility of the Most-Starr model by addressing two of the problems in the field, pertaining to the effects of economic growth, and foreign aid allocations, on repression.

#### *The Effect of Economic Growth*

One of the variables on which mixed and puzzling findings have been yielded is economic growth. Previous studies have yielded contradictory findings, including coefficients that are statistically insignificant in both unexpected and expected directions (Poe and Tate 1994; McNitt 1995) and coefficients in an unexpected direction that would be statistically significant if two-tailed significance tests had been used (Poe, Tate and Keith 1999).

Some of the variables discussed in the sections above (e.g., democracy, economic development) may reasonably be expected to affect Strength and Threat in opposite directions, leading one to the expectation (consistent with empirical findings) that the Strength/Threat ratio will either increase or decrease in response to changes in those variables. However, a complication may arise in the case of economic growth because an increase in that variable could reasonably be expected to simultaneously increase both Strength and Threat. Mancur Olson's theoretical work would lead us to expect economic

growth will tend to increase the probability of dissent, and therefore threats, both because it rarely is rapid enough to outstrip the growth of expectations that is also occurring, and because it increases the number of *déclassé* individuals and groups that are most prone to promote instability (Olson 1963, Gurr 1970, Poe and Tate 1994). According to these lines of reasoning we would expect that economic growth would increase dissatisfaction with government, and therefore, threat to the government and the probability of greater repression. Alternatively, though, we might expect that economic growth would serve to strengthen the regime in the eyes of the economic and military elites and others not dislocated by the growth at home, and in the view of foreign governments, corporations, and financial institutions abroad. If this is indeed the case, then economic growth would lead to a regime's perceiving increased Strength, which might well make up for the increases in perceived levels of threats, such that  $[S_{nt1}/T_{nt1}] \geq [S_{nt0}/T_{nt0}]$ . Thus we should not necessarily expect that leaders will be alarmed by economic growth, and thus be willing to enact measures such as repression with an eye toward decreasing Threat. Considered in this light, it is not too surprising that repression studies have found mixed evidence on this variable's effect. An important linkage of repression to economic growth could be missed if both of these effects are present in a sample, weighing differently depending on the country and their different circumstances.

#### *The Impact of Foreign Aid on Repression*

Much research has been done on the linkage between human rights and foreign aid, asking the question of whether donor nations take into account human rights when allocating their aid moneys (e.g., Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Stohl and Carleton 1987; McCormick and Mitchell 1988; Poe 1992; Poe 1991, 1992; Poe and Sirirangsi 1994; Blanton 1994; Poe, Pilatovsky, Miller and Ogundele 1994; Poe and Meernik 1995; Sterken 1996; Apodaca and Stohl 1997). Given the amount of research on the effect of human rights considerations on foreign aid, it is somewhat surprising that little research has been conducted on the policy relevant question of whether the donation or revocation of aid influences human rights in recipient countries. In the first published multivariate quantitative study on this question of which I am aware, Regan (1995) examined a cross-national data set including 32 less developed

countries, using multiple regression, to ascertain whether changes in U.S. foreign aid allocation result in changes in their respect for human rights. From the results of these analyses he concludes that the lagged effect of aid on human rights conditions, though statistically significant in the context of a multivariate model, is rather small and unimportant. In a second study, William Meyer (1996) investigates the effects of U.S. aid allocated in 1983 and 1987, as one of a variety of economic variables explaining variations in the Freedom House Civil Liberties and Political Rights scores, for the years of 1985 and 1990, and samples of 52 and 39 developing countries, respectively. His findings show positive relationships between aid and levels of respect for human rights, statistically insignificant for the 1985 analyses, but statistically significant or bordering on statistical significance for the year of 1990. Taken together, these studies appear to show that U.S. aid might have a small effect on human rights practices, or on changes in repression levels, though those effects are at best only minuscule. I will argue, however, that though these analyses are useful first explorations of the issue, because they tend to show that aid doesn't have much of an effect on repression generally, they fail to provide us with evidence sufficient to confidently conclude that foreign aid is "not an effective mechanism for altering the human rights records in recipient countries" (Regan 1995, 625).

To illustrate, let us first assume that the U.S. decreases a country's aid package by 20 million dollars. What effect would this be likely to have on the S/T ratio, and therefore the likelihood of increases or decreases in repression, in a particular recipient country? The most reasonable answer to this question, with the information given is "It depends." That is, the effect of such a decrease on the S/T ratio might be either great or negligible, depending on a set of factors not yet considered in the analyses conducted to date. One such factor is the degree to which a country is dependent on the foreign aid being cut. We might expect that a decrease of this magnitude would have a greater effect on the S/T ratio of a regime that is highly dependent on that aid, as compared to one where the aid is not that important to the regime. In the more dependent of the two countries the likely immediate result of the decrease in aid would be a corresponding decrease in the Strength of the regime. If other factors are held constant, this would have the effect of alarming the regime,  $[S_{nt1}/T_{nt1}] < [S_{nt0}/T_{nt0}]$ , giving leaders the willingness to

take action to increase the S/T ratio. Thus, ironically, the model suggests that the cut-off of aid sometimes undertaken due to human rights concerns would likely result in a condition of alarm in the targeted nation, which would in some cases lead to greater repression.<sup>11</sup>

When might foreign aid be used as a tool to improve human rights? A credible threat by the donor nation to take away the twenty million dollars might affect the decision-making calculus of an aid-dependent offending regime, making the costs of repression greater than the costs of other instruments to deal with alarming situations (entry point 4). Or if the donor offers aid under the condition that repression levels are decreased, the recipient regime might be led to decrease its abuses in the expectation that the increase in Strength associated with aid will compensate for any increase in Threat due to its decreased use of repression. Another factor not considered by the analyses conducted to date, then, is that the donor must communicate to the recipient that it has expectations regarding the recipients' human rights practices for the revocation to have any effect. If not, then there is no reason to expect that the aid will affect levels of repression in the recipient country. For a concrete example, consider the serious human rights violations undertaken by the Salvadoran regime and their surrogates when U.S. aid was at very high levels to that country in the early eighties. The Reagan administration framed El Salvador as a Cold War battlefield, of vital importance to U.S. security interests in the Western hemisphere. Perceiving this, the Salvadoran regime was not apt to take very seriously either the complaints regarding their crimes heard in the halls of Congress, or the statutes that body had passed years before, tying U.S. aid to human rights concerns. Had the issue been framed differently by the administration, and if there had been a believable threat that the aid would have been cut-off, then perhaps the expectations of that regime would have been different, and its repressive policies moderated more quickly.

What becomes clear from the above discussion is that the communication process between the donor and recipient, the messages sent, and their strategic interactions are apt to be important to our understanding of the linkage between aid and repression overlooked by the analyses conducted to date. A better understanding of the effect of foreign aid on human rights would be gained if we were to use

models that would allow us to better grasp the strategic interaction between donor and the recipient regimes, across time.

Another insight we have gained from our application of the Most and Starr model to this problem is that conditional relationships may exist, where the effect of foreign aid on human rights conditions is contingent on other factors that, as yet, may have been unspecified in statistical analyses. More apt to bear fruit would be empirical searches for domain-specific “Nice Laws” (Most and Starr 1989) dependent on the degree of dependence of country’s on U.S. foreign aid.

### Summary and Conclusions

Numerous studies of the determinants of repression have been conducted, a variety of hypotheses have been tested, and a plethora of empirical findings have accumulated. As a result of these studies we can confidently identify several variables that are apt to affect the likelihood that regimes will choose repression. What has thus far been lacking, though, is a theoretical tool that allows researchers to tie together the various, seemingly unconnected hypotheses. What Zinnes called “integrative cumulation” (1976) has been lacking.

In this paper my goal was to achieve integrative cumulation by using a decisionmaking model developed by Most and Starr (1989). This model did in fact show us that each of the hypotheses and findings present in the field can be integrated into a single, parsimonious decisionmaking model, in which the regime’s perception of its strength and the threats to its rule are key foci. Secondly, the model helps us to draw theoretical insights regarding the processes behind some of the mixed and negative findings that have arisen to date. Drawing on these insights it should be possible to conduct new empirical analyses that will better explicate the nature of the effects of factors such as economic growth and foreign aid.

This exercise also showed that there is good reason to believe that important relationships are being hidden because most analysts search exclusively for general laws, holding across all cases. Our understanding of repression might be moved forward if we were to look for laws that hold in particular domains, defined by factors that as yet are unspecified in statistical models.

Finally, the examples illustrated that a better understanding of the effect of foreign aid on human rights (and perhaps other international factors such as economic sanctions, or efforts of Transnational Advocacy Networks) rests on our adopting models that allow researchers to move beyond simply identifying factors that have linear effects on repression, to models that can capture the dynamic effects of these variables on regimes' decisionmaking processes as they unravel across time. The model we adopted has certain advantages in this regard, because in it is imbedded the element of time.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps in future work it can be adapted further, to help us to grasp the interactions between two or more international actors.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> (e.g., Strouse and Claude 1976; McKinlay and Cohan 1975, 1976; Park 1987; Ziegenhagen 1986, Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Boswell and Dixon 1990; Davis and Ward 1990; Alfatooni and Allen 1991; Cingranelli 1992; Henderson, 1991, 1993; McNitt 1995; Poe and Tate 1994; Regan 1995; Fein 1995; Meyer 1996; Richards 1996; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1997; Poe, Tate, Keith and Lanier 1997a, 1997b; King 1997; Gartner and Regan 1997; Richards 1999; Cingranelli and Richards 1997, 1999; Davenport 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b; Smith, Bolyard and Ippolito 1999; Keith 1999; Zanger 2000; Richards, Gelleny and Sacko 2001, Walker and Poe 2002.

<sup>2</sup>See Panning (1983, pp. 484-490) for a cogent argument that our understanding of political phenomena could be improved if we were to aim toward building process-oriented models, as opposed to merely collecting generalizations.

<sup>3</sup>Some of the discussion in this section is necessarily similar to that in Poe, Tate, Keith, and Lanier (1997a; 1997b) when they presented the same model.

<sup>4</sup> The term alarm is mine.

<sup>5</sup> But see Gartner and Regan (1996) and Fein (1995) for exceptions. Also see Richards 1999 and Richards et al., 2001, for examples of studies using an alternative methodology.

<sup>6</sup> Fein (1995) presents bivariate statistical results which indicate that there may be “more murder in the middle”; that the transition of non-democracies to democratic states may be paved with greater human rights abuse. Though this topic cannot be dealt with in much depth, here, I believe that insight into these findings can be gained with the Most and Starr model. Countries in transition periods might be apt to have more threats occurring, and new leaders may be apt to perceive greater threats until their rule is consolidated (and the S/T ratio increased to remove the state of alarm). If this is the case, the curvilinear, bivariate relationship uncovered by Fein may be the result of the alteration of the governing arrangements as opposed to the move toward democracy in particular.

<sup>7</sup> A dissenting voice is the Richardson et al., 2001 study. However, this study included only less

developed countries, thus constraining the variance on the independent variable. This would seem to be the likely reason behind the difference in results.

<sup>8</sup>Of course such ideologies are preceded by sets of interests, and they may be developed as a rationalization for giving the armed forces more power and to take control. Even if this is the case, though, the diffusion of such destructive ideologies to rank and file members of the police and military forces, and to the public would still make repression more likely, by affecting the decision-making calculus in other ways. Ideologies would enter the decisionmaking process at entry points three and four, at entry point three by constraining security forces' willingness to question the regimes' repressive actions, thus, perhaps, increasing the menu of feasible repressive options available to the regime. If such ideologies were adopted by members of the public at large, this would be apt to decrease the cost of repression relative to other choices on the menu, since persons subscribing to such ideologies would not be apt to question the governments repressive actions.

<sup>9</sup> Davenport tested models in which a variable tapping coercive capacity (Defense expenditures/Total government expenditures) was employed, and statistically insignificant results were yielded. Still that variable is certainly an important part of the story of why repression occurs and should be considered in our future efforts to build process-oriented models of decisionmaking processes.

<sup>10</sup> Here I should note that the republican governmental systems of most developed countries may be an important reason why such norms are developed, and thus there may be some difficulty in disentangling, empirically, the effects of democracy and development.

<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, though, the withheld aid could decrease Strength to the extent that the old regime falls (i.e., Schoultz 1981, Regan 1995) ushering in either a more repressive or a less repressive revolutionary regime.

<sup>12</sup>Clearly the variables in this literature could have been integrated to other sorts of frameworks. For example, we might have adopted a "levels of analysis" approach similar to that of Waltz (1954) or Levy (1996). However useful such categorizations are as heuristic devices, they do not have this advantage.



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Table One: A Most-Starr Unified Actor/Governmental Stability Model

"Axiom 1: The decision makers of an nth state are--or can be treated as--unified and value-maximizing actors...<sup>1</sup>

Axiom 2: At any given point in time, the decision makers in an nth state perceive that their government has a certain degree of political strength ( $S_{nt}$ ) and is confronted by some degree of threat that it will be toppled by domestic forces ( $T_{nt}$ ).

Axiom 3a: The decision makers of an nth state are motivated or willing to establish the following inequality:

$$[S_{nt} > T_{nt}]$$

Axiom 3b: The decision makers of an nth state are motivated or willing to establish the following inequality:

$$[S_{nt}/T_{nt}] \geq [S_{nt-1}/T_{nt-1}] \text{ (p. 127)}"$$

The postulates of the model most relevant to our undertaking are the following:

Postulate 1: Only if the decision makers of an nth state command the necessary objective capability or opportunity (O) to adopt some unilateral policy initiative, then the adoption of that initiative.

Postulate 2: If the decision makers of an nth state perceive that their government's strength has been neglected or allowed to deteriorate between  $t_0$  and  $t_1$  they will perceive that  $S_{nt0} < S_{nt1}$

Postulate 3: If a given domestic opponent of the government increases its capacity between  $t_0$  and  $t_1$  and the decision makers in an nth state perceive that action as a threat to their government, they will perceive that  $T_{nt0} < T_{nt1}$ .

Postulate 4a: If  $[S_{nt1} < T_{nt1}]$  then the decision makers of the nth state will be motivated to adopt some policy initiative which is designed to increase  $S_n$  and/or decrease  $T_n$  at  $t_2$ ."

Postulate 4b: If  $[S_{nt1}/T_{nt1}] < [S_{nt0}/T_{nt0}]$  then the decision makers of the nth state will be motivated to adopt some policy initiative which is designed to increase  $S_n$  and/or decrease  $T_n$  at  $t_2$ ."

Postulate 5: If and only if the decision makers of an nth state command the necessary capacity (or opportunity) to adopt some unilateral policy alternative and they are motivated (or willing) to do so, then the adoption of that initiative.

<sup>1</sup>This is an amalgamation of Models 3 and 4, presented in Most and Starr (1989, pp. 126-128). Some of the notation has been changed, but the postulates and axioms are essentially identical to those presented in that source, with one exception. Part of Axiom 1 that assumes perfect information has been left out, because that is an assumption I do not wish to make here.