

Repressive Agent Defections: How Power, Costs, and Uncertainty Influence Military Behavior and State Repression

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Abstract

Leaders are incentivized to repress in the face of mobilized dissent. However, leaders are unable to repress alone and rely on repressive agents, who can shirk the order and weaken the leader's control. I use a formal model to analyze when the leader can use repression strategically to avoid defection, based on leader type. Each type has incentives to repress to distort the leader's risk of removal and thus deter defection. Power, cost, and uncertainty are important in both the leader's and the agent's decision to repress. Testable hypotheses reveal how executive power and punishment influence the level of repression.