

Government Rhetoric as Repression: When Do States De-Legitimize Opposition?

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Abstract

When do states engage in targeted de-legitimation of opposition movements? This paper develops the idea that a government needing to suppress mobilization, can rely on certain public statements to do so. By engaging in this strategy, the regime is able to frame itself so that it reinforces public support and harms the legitimacy of the dissident movement it opposes. Relying on detailed events data, I test for both the conditions that make states more likely to engage in this strategy and provide an early examination of how rhetoric is used in relation to state repression. I find that, while overall regime structures tell little about the use of repressive rhetoric, this behavior increases in those states that have open informational environments, where contemporary civil resistance is highest, and where state-owned media is more prevalent.