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Contentious Challenges and Government Responses in Latin America

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This article examines how seven Latin American governments responded to 827 contentious political challenges. The research goes beyond most previous research by considering four governmental responses: concession, repression, toleration, and the combination of concession and repression. The results show that challengers can increase their chances of winning concessions by making limited demands and utilizing nonviolent occupations and hunger strikes. Violent challenges are ineffective and tend to result in repression. Governments also tend to offer concessions under democratic regimes or when they have recently been criticized for human rights abuses while also receiving substantial foreign aid and investment.

Keywords: *protest; political repression; political violence; contentious challenges; concessions*

Following a fraudulent mayoral election engineered by Mexico's dominant party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in the northern town of Monclova, over 100 members of the opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) occupied the town's city hall in December 1984 and refused to leave. In February 1985, officials from the PRI relented, agreeing to form a bipartisan city council with the PAN and select a mayor who would be agreeable to both parties. A few months later in Chile, parties opposed to Augusto Pinochet's authoritarian regime banded together to issue the National Accord for the Transition to Full Democracy and backed up their demands with a massive nationwide protest involving thousands. Pinochet curtly rejected the accord, and police responded to the protests repressively, resulting in around 800 arrests and the deaths of six protesters.

Governments confronted by contentious challenges face the choice of responding with repression, concessions, or the absence of either, which is labeled toleration. In addition, a fourth option, a combination of repression and concessions, must be considered as well. This article analyzes the factors that lead governments to choose among these four types of responses to contentious political challenges. There have been many prior theoretical and empirical works examining governmental responses to contentious challenges, but, as detailed below, none of them consider the full range of responses considered here. Thus, one innovation of this research is the consideration of all four responses and the development of a theoretical framework to explain why governmental leaders choose a particular response. A second innovation of this study is a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of different contentious tactics on these various government outcomes. Most previous studies fail to fully consider the importance of tactics by aggregating together large numbers of challenges with varying forms or by only considering the violent versus nonviolent distinction. These innovations are made possible by utilizing an original data set of 832 contentious challenges in seven Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Thus, the tactics of each particular challenge (along with its context) can be compared to the specific government response to that challenge. Examining a large number of challenges in seven countries allows the comparison of a great variety of challenges and contexts, and Latin America offers a varied environment that has been neglected in previous individual-level studies of contentious challenges. The results show that there is a complex array of factors that affect government responses, but a clear finding is that challengers' demands and the forms of contention they use have a major impact on government responses.

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Explaining Governmental Responses to Contentious Challenges

Challenger Strategy

The starting point for this research is a group that organizes a contentious challenge in support of a political goal. *Contentious political challenges* are defined as collective, unconventional acts taken by inhabitants of a country directed against or expressing opposition to their government, its policies or personnel, or the political regime itself. Unconventional acts take place outside of the officially accepted, institutionalized methods of conflict resolution. Wilson (1961, 292) argues that protesters attempt to achieve their goals by imposing "negative inducements (threats) that rely, for their effect, on sanctions which require mass action or response." Piven and Cloward (1977) and DeNardo (1985) make similar arguments, emphasizing that protesters must cause disruption to pressure political leaders to make concessions. Alternatively, a group can engage in challenges that appeal to other better connected actors, who can impose costs for inaction or offer benefits for concessions (Lipsky 1968). However, it is not always possible to find such allies, so disruption should remain an important aspect of leverage to many challengers. The problem facing challengers is that threatening or disruptive actions may result in governmental repression rather than concession. In fact, the literature on political repression makes it clear that more threatening or disruptive challenges are more likely to be repressed. Gurr's (1986) theory associates threat with various aspects of contentious challenges, such as their goals, level of participation, and tactics (especially the use of violence). Several studies have found empirical support for this logic (Apodaca 2001; Davenport 1995, 1996, 1999; Davis and Ward 1990; Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Franklin 1997; Gartner and Regan 1996; Poe and Tate 1994; and Poe et al. 2000; Shin 1983). Therefore, from the threat or disruption perspective, contentious challenges that are perceived as threatening are hypothesized to increase the probability of both repression and concessions. This potential dilemma has been mostly neglected in the above literatures since most of those who analyze concession ignore repression, and vice versa.

Governmental Responses

This research considers four governmental responses to contentious political challenges: (1) offering a concession (with no repression), (2) repressing the challenger (with no concession), (3) tolerating the challenge (i.e., no concession or repression), and (4) repressing the challenger while also conceding to demands. *Political repression* is defined here as the use of coercion by political authorities of a country against inhabitants of that country. Coercion includes both violent acts meant to do physical harm to the targets and nonviolent acts that restrain a target's freedom of action or impose economic penalties. *Governmental concessions* refer to actions taken by governmental authorities in response to a political challenge that are consistent with the demands and goals of the challengers. *Toleration* refers to an absence of either repression or meaningful concessions.

This analysis goes beyond most previous theories and studies that consider only two of these responses. One literature that deals with government responses examines whether social movements (or individual protests) are successful in reaching their political goals. This literature in effect attempts to explain only two outcomes: concession versus toleration. The literature on political repression, in contrast, examines repression versus toleration. A third set of works, Moore (2000), Goldstone and Tilly (2001), and Krain (2000), considers the choice between repression and concessions. While these theories lead to new insights on governmental responses, they do not explicitly address the option of governments to use neither repression nor concessions, or, in other words, to tolerate the challenge. Finally, there have been a few previous studies that have examined a wider range of government responses to particular contentious challengers (Kowalewski 1980, 1987; Kowalewski and Schumaker 1981; O'Keefe and Schumaker 1983; Shin 1983). However, most of these combine government responses into a single variable, and none of these analyze the full range of government responses as distinct outcomes. Therefore, the analysis presented here goes beyond the previous literature by considering each of the four governmental responses as distinct outcomes, comparing the probability of choosing each response over each alternative.

Cost–Benefit Framework of Governmental Responses

What is needed is a general framework to compare why governments would choose each option over the others. A useful approach is to compare the potential costs and benefits (from governmental leaders' point of view) associated with each type of response. The costs and benefits can be short term or long term. *Short-term* costs and benefits are contemporaneous to the current challenge being responded to and consider whether the

government response is likely to end the current challenge and what the current costs are. *Long-term* costs and benefits consider whether the government's response is likely to encourage or discourage future challenges. A straightforward model for these estimates is Klandermans's (1984) value-expectancy theory of movement participation, which proposes that individual participation in movements depends on the value one places on the movement's goal and the expectation of success in reaching the goal.

Challengers use contentious actions to impose costs on governments, either through disruption or through activating powerful allies, that they hope will lead the governments to offer concessions. From governmental leaders' point of view, these are the short-term costs associated with toleration of challenges. Authorities gain no obvious short-term benefits from toleration except that toleration allows them to defer the use of repression or concession, with their associated costs. However, in the long term, toleration should be more advantageous. Unless repression has been habitual, toleration of a challenge (i.e., no concession) should cause individuals and groups to lower their expectation of future success. Furthermore, toleration is unlikely to lead to the type of outrage associated with repression that can increase the value that people place on opposing the government. Therefore, a long-term benefit of toleration to the government is a possibility of discouraging future challenges.

Repression has the likely short-term benefit of ending the current challenge and its associated costs. In the long term, repression could discourage future challenges by lowering potential challengers' estimates of the likelihood of success, but repression could also lead to widespread outrage, causing individuals to place greater value in opposing the government. We can call this potential long-term negative effect of repression the *backlash potential*, which is defined as the possibility that repression will lead to declining support for the government among citizens or international actors, which is then manifested in increased internal challenges and external criticism or sanctions. This is consistent with Gartner and Regan's (1996) consideration of domestic and international constraints on repression. In addition, several studies (Francisco 1995, 1996, 2005; Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993; Khawaja 1993; Martin 2006; Rasler 1996) find that repression, at least over time or in certain situations, increases dissent. In addition to increasing dissent, repression can lead to international condemnation and sanctions (Gartner and Regan 1996; Hawkins 2002), and Franklin (2008) shows that human rights criticism, combined with greater dependence on foreign aid and investment, does tend to decrease repression.

Concessions carry short-term costs connected with the resources needed to provide the concession and the sacrificing of policy options preferred by the government or its supporters. On the other hand, it is likely to end the current challenge. However, in the long term, concessions are likely to encourage future challenges by increasing potential challengers' estimate of the likelihood of success.

The final option available to governments is to respond to a contentious challenge with both repression and concession. This is likely to end the current challenge (but with the cost associated with concession); however, it maximizes the likelihood of future challenges by increasing both potential challengers' value placed on opposing the government and their estimate of the likelihood of success.

This framework spells out general potential costs and benefits associated with the four responses governments can make to contentious challenges. In most cases, toleration should be the least costly response (especially in the long term), so it should be most preferred by governments. Repression and concession both carry potential long-term costs, but concession also carries short-term costs, so repression should be preferred over concession in general. The combination of repression and concession is clearly the worst option for governments responding to contentious challenges and is likely to be used by governments facing immense threats or internal conflict, or both. Data shown in Table 1 support these expectations.

However, which response is most likely in a particular case depends on the characteristics of each challenge as well as the national context. The next task, then, is to propose factors that are likely to affect government responses, based on the relevant literatures as well as this cost–benefit logic.

Challenge-specific Factors

Limited demands. One way in which challengers can affect the cost–benefit calculation of governmental leaders is by manipulating the demands associated with a particular challenge. Modest demands carry a lower cost, which should increase the likelihood of concession. A number of previous studies have supported this (Kowalewski 1987; O'Keefe and Schumaker 1983; Schumaker 1975; Shin 1983; Snyder and Kelly 1976). Furthermore, challenges with modest demands should result in less repression (Gartner and Regan 1996), as they may carry a larger backlash potential.

Table 1
Frequency of Governmental Responses to Challenges by Country

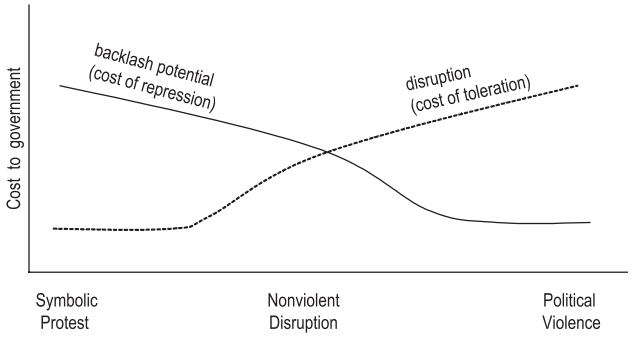
	Governmental Response									
	Toleration		Repression		Concession		Combined Concession and Repression		Total	
Country	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Argentina	79	63.7	23	18.6	14	11.3	8	6.5	124	100.0
Brazil	65	53.3	20	16.4	33	27.1	4	3.3	122	100.0
Chile	26	22.6	77	67.0	6	5.2	6	5.2	115	100.0
Guatemala	19	45.2	8	19.1	9	21.4	6	14.3	42	100.0
Mexico	170	60.5	51	18.2	53	18.9	7	2.5	281	100.0
Nicaragua	33	39.3	32	38.1	17	20.2	2	2.4	84	100.0
Venezuela	25	39.1	29	45.3	7	10.9	3	4.7	64	100.0
Total	417	50.1	240	28.9	139	16.7	36	4.3	832	100.0

Tactics. Theories on the strategy of protest (DeNardo 1985; Piven and Cloward 1977; Wilson 1961) as well as theories on threats and political repression (Gurr 1986) share the premise that tactical differences in the forms, goals, and other features of particular contentious challenges have a major impact on government responses. This is in keeping with Tilly (1978, 106), who asserted that "governments respond selectively to different sorts of groups, and to different sorts of actions." Despite these theoretical reasons to analyze tactics in depth, Schock (2005) argues that the prominent political opportunity approach to social movements neglects tactics. Also, the typical designs of studies in these literatures make it difficult to accurately study tactics because they aggregate together all of a group's contentious challenges over an extended period of time (e.g., Gamson 1990), or they aggregate together all challenges occurring within a country in a year. These considerations underline the importance of using the contentious challenge as the unit of analysis so that we can compare across separate challenges, each with its own distinct tactics and outcomes. As mentioned above, a few previous studies have examined individual challenges in this manner (Kowalewski 1980, 1987; Kowalewski and Schumaker 1981; O'Keefe and Schumaker 1983; Shin 1983). These studies often measure tactics in a dichotomous way (e.g., violent vs. nonviolent) or with a continuum ranging from peaceful forms to militant forms of contention. However, this is problematic if actions at median levels of "militancy" are most effective, which I argue below.

Naturally, we can distinguish violent and nonviolent forms of contention, but scholars of nonviolent direct action, such as Sharp (1973), also distinguish nonviolent protests that are mainly symbolic (e.g., demonstrations) from nonviolent actions that impose sanctions on the target (e.g., strikes, sit-ins, and civil disobedience). I refer to the former as symbolic protest and the latter as nonviolent disruption. Prior theory, mentioned above, suggests that more disruptive forms of contention increase the likelihood of gaining concessions, but these threatening actions are also argued to increase repression. However, backlash potential is also an important consideration because repression of nonviolent challenges is likely to cause much greater outrage than repression of violent challenges. The combination of these considerations is shown in Figure 1. Here, we see that symbolic protests are less likely to lead to government concession because of the low level of disruption, and the high backlash potential should deter repression. Thus, symbolic protest will most likely result in toleration. Violent challenges are most likely to result in repression because of the combination of high disruption and low backlash potential. Nonviolent disruption is most likely to result in concession, being disruptive enough to raise the costs of toleration while carrying a high enough backlash potential to discourage repression. Using slightly different terminology, Tarrow (1998, 98) comes to a similar conclusion. He argues that the intermediate form of contention, disruption, is the "strongest weapon of social movements," whereas conventional actions (e.g., demonstrations and strikes) are too easily ignored and violence divides potential supporters and generates strong repression.

Participation. As mentioned above, threat is a key concept for understanding governmental policy

Figure 1
Costs to Government Associated with Different Types of Contentious Challenges



concessions to challenges. DeNardo (1985, 35) argued that in regard to opposition movements "there always seems to be power in numbers." Contentious challenges with high participation send a statement of broad support for the challengers' goals, which should affect governmental leaders (Lohmann 1993). It is no coincidence that challengers and authorities often dispute the size of protests. The threat associated with high participation could increase repression, as is argued by Gurr (1986) and Lichbach and Gurr (1981), but on the other hand the cost–benefit logic predicts that challenges with high participation might discourage repression since they are logistically more difficult to repress and carry a higher backlash potential. Thus, the two theories diverge, preventing a clear expectation.

Duration of challenge. The power of challengers is not solely based on numbers. Relatively small numbers of challengers can apply more pressure with a particular contentious challenge by extending its duration (Lichbach and Gurr 1981). Authorities may prefer to simply tolerate challenges that are likely to end soon. However, when challengers are able to continue the challenge, authorities should eventually feel compelled to act with either concessions or repression, or both.

Part of a campaign. This study examines governmental responses to individual challenges, but we certainly should not assume that each challenge is completely independent of all others. It is well known that challengers combine actions into campaigns and ultimately movements. Several scholarly works on cycles of protest suggest that repression and concessions tend to rise and fall in response to the rise and fall of protest (Brockett 2005; Koopmans 1993; Tarrow 1998). The logic here is similar to the logic for participation. Challenges that are part of a campaign of contention may carry more force and should be more threatening than individual acts, which would make them more likely to receive both concessions and repression. However, the greater force and publicity that build around a campaign can lead to a higher backlash potential. Thus, there are conflicting expectations.

Elite support. Following the logic of Lipsky (1968), challenges that are backed by third-party elite groups should be more successful than challenges that do not have such backing. Elite groups here refers to groups with positions within the state, religious authorities, and foreign governments. The support of elite groups increases the backlash potential for repression, and it could increase the cost of toleration as well, making concessions more likely and repression and toleration less likely.

Contextual Factors

There are other factors beyond the peculiarities of specific challenges that could affect political leaders' decision-making calculus on how to respond. These contextual factors are expected to affect the relative costs and benefits of the four government responses.

Democracy. It is nearly universally proposed that political leaders in democratic regimes are less likely to use repression in response to contentious challenges. Gartner and Regan (1996) see democracy as an institutional constraint on repression, and, following the cost–benefit logic presented here, democratic leaders who use repression should face a greater backlash potential. Several studies empirically support this negative relationship between democracy and repression (see Davenport 1995; Henderson 1991; Poe and Tate 1994). Furthermore, leaders in democracies, constrained in the use of repression, should be more likely to respond with concession or toleration.

Executive support. Some authors see the strength of political leaders' position as an important factor in how they will respond to challenges. Gurr (1986) suggested that weak governments are more likely to use repression, while Krain (2000) and Tarrow (1998) see weak governments as more likely to offer concessions. Perhaps both positions are partially correct. The cost–benefit logic described above suggests that toleration is a preferable option for governments in the long term. However, governments with little

support among elites or the public probably are more concerned with the short term, making them more desperate to end challenges using either repression or concession. Governments with stronger support, however, may be better able to "wait out" the current challenge, increasing the likelihood of toleration.

Civil war. Two of the countries examined here (Guatemala and Nicaragua) experienced civil wars, and while revolutionary challenges have been omitted, the presence of a civil war could change how officials deal with nonrevolutionary challenges. Schock (2005) discusses the positive radical flank effect in which the leverage of moderates is strengthened by the presence of radicals, but he also mentions the possibility of a negative radical flank effect in which a radical challenge can lead to greater repression for moderates. Perhaps this is similar to the situation with weak governments cited above, in that governments facing the pressure of civil war are more likely to use both repression and concession and have less patience for waiting out challenges with toleration.

Human rights criticism. As mentioned above, part of the backlash potential of repression involves criticism or sanctions of the government in regard to human rights abuses. A government that has been recently criticized for human rights violations should be especially concerned about this backlash potential of repression. Several scholars argue that transnational pressure is an important factor in reducing repression (Brysk 1993; Hawkins 2002; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999; Sikkink 2005). However, in a previous study (Franklin 2008), I found that previous human rights criticism corresponds with higher levels of subsequent repression because it indicates governments that have a history of using repression. Consistent with arguments of Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Risse and Sikkink (1999), though, I found that prior human rights criticism reduces subsequent repression for governments that are more dependent on foreign aid and investment. Therefore, I expect that prior human rights criticism will correspond with a higher probability of repression, but human rights criticism combined with foreign capital dependency is expected to decrease the likelihood of repression and instead make toleration and concession more likely.

Prior responses. A final aspect of the context concerns how authorities have previously responded to challenges. It has been argued that repression can become institutionalized (Gurr 1986), suggesting that leaders who used repression in the past will be more likely to use it in the present. This relationship has been supported in previous studies (Davenport 1995; Davis and Ward 1990; Poe and Tate 1994). Using a similar "bureaucratic inertia" logic, we could say that a history of making concessions will make it more likely that governments will respond with concessions to future challenges. This could be because of governmental weakness or a period of reform. Moore (2000), alternatively, proposed that authorities will alternate between repression and accommodation based on how challengers responded to their previous actions.

In terms of the context, a number of other economic and governmental variables, such as GDP per capita, GDP growth, inflation, tax revenue per capita, and armed forces per capita, were also tested in earlier analyses and were found to have very little impact on outcomes of challenges. Therefore, in the interest of parsimony, they are not included in this model.

Research Design

This study adopts the contentious political challenge as the unit of analysis. Thus, each contentious challenge, with its distinctive demands, tactical form, level of participation, duration, and government responses, is compared to all other challenges. Furthermore, contextual variables are coded for each individual challenge. Using contentious political challenges as the unit of analysis allows precise comparison of tactics and outcomes that is not possible in aggregate studies that combine all protests that occur over a particular time frame (often a year). The inclusion of multiple countries allows greater consideration of certain contextual variables, such as regime and economic characteristics, than possible in studies of a single movement in a single country.

This study is based on contentious political challenges that occurred in seven randomly selected Latin American countries–Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.[1] Using full-text news wire reports from dozens of wire services indexed on LexisNexis, and the news archives Keesing's Record of World Events and Facts on File, I recorded all available information for all contentious political challenges mentioned between 1981 and 1995 for each country. This process resulted in a sample of 1,318 challenges in these seven countries that were relatively well reported.

This sample is not an exhaustive list of all contentious challenges that occurred in these countries. Rather, these are all the contentious challenges covered in these news services with sufficient detail to

categorize the type of challenge, the general demands or focus of the challenge, and the governmental response. An important concern is whether news coverage itself increases the probability of concession, leading to oversampling of this response. Likewise, repression is dramatic and news worthy, so challenges that were repressed might also be oversampled. It is impossible to give a definitive assessment of sampling bias, but perusal of Table 1 shows that challenges that were tolerated by the government make up just over half the sample. Toleration is the least news worthy of the governmental responses, so it is reassuring that it is the most common response according to these data. Furthermore, as described below, the distribution of governmental responses is consistent with theoretical expectations.

One final step was taken to reach the final sample analyzed here. Challenges coded as revolutionary—that is, seeking to overthrow the government and put challengers into power—were omitted. While this reduces the variety of actions somewhat, it is necessary for two reasons. First, concessions are much less of an option in response to revolutionary actions since political leaders are typically "unwilling to cooperate in their own demise" (Gamson 1990, 49). Second, and more important, most of the revolutionary challenges in the sample took place in the context of civil wars in Guatemala and Nicaragua. With waves of scattered attacks, repression tends to be broader and less reactive, utilizing large military offensives in Nicaragua against contra insurgents and a brutal scorched earth campaign of civilian massacres in Guatemala designed to destroy active support for leftist guerrillas (see Schirmer 1998). It is problematic viewing these actions as repressive reactions to any particular attacks. However, for nonrevolutionary challenges, concessions and acts of repression are more directly reactive in nature and, with a few reasonable rules, can be linked with particular challenges.[2]

Measurement

Governmental Response to Contentious Challenges

The dependent variable measures whether governments responded to contentious political challenges with (1) concession (alone), (2) repression (alone), (3) toleration (no repression or concession), or (4) repression and concession. This, of course, required measures of concession and repression. In most cases, news accounts explicitly made the connection between challenges and concessions. Otherwise, governmental actions that were consistent with challenger demands and that occurred up to two months following the relevant challenge or challenges were coded as concessions. Thus, a single concession could apply to several challenges that made demands consistent with that concession and that occurred within the prior two months.

Most of the 175 instances of governmental concessions in this data set can be placed in the following categories. The most common concession involved giving material benefits, such as pay increases to striking public employees. Second, there were broad economic policy concessions, such as reversing unpopular austerity policies. Third, there were social reforms, such as land redistribution. Fourth, there were concessions related to democratization, such as agreeing to make electoral reforms. Fifth, there were human rights concessions such as releasing political prisoners. Sixth, there were actual changes in or actions against government officials in response to contentious challenges, such as dismissing officials or impeaching a president. Finally, there were educational reforms, concerning university leadership or policies.

Political repression is measured as the application by governmental agents of violent or nonviolent sanctions against suspected challengers. The latter include arrests, detentions, dismissals from public sector jobs, and cases of forced exile. Governmental agents include both official security personnel and unofficial groups, such as death squads, that are reported by human rights groups to be connected to the government. For this study, repression was simply coded dichotomously, based on whether a challenge was met by any repression or not. The combination of these two indicators defined the four possible outcomes for governmental responses.

Table 1 shows the distribution of governmental responses by country across the 832 challenges in this sample. The relative frequencies for the sample as a whole are consistent with the expectations from the cost–benefit logic presented above. Toleration is the modal response by governments to challenges (50.1 percent of the sample). This supports my argument that toleration is likely to be least costly for governments in the long term. Still, this is somewhat surprising when we consider that this sample includes some of the most notoriously repressive regimes in modern Latin American history, such as the military regime installed in 1976 in Argentina, the Pinochet regime in Chile, and the Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt governments in Guatemala. As expected, governments were more likely to respond with

repression (28.9 percent of challenges) than concessions (16.7 percent of challenges). Finally, consistent with my conclusion that the combination of repression and concessions is the most costly response, only 4.3 percent of challenges were met with both repression and concessions.

In addition to these samplewide differences in frequencies, there are different country-level patterns, as shown in Table 1. The most distinctive country is Chile, in which repression was by far the most common response to contentious challenges. A partial explanation for this is the relatively high frequency of violent protests in Chile, but this also surely reflects a preference for repression under the Pinochet regime. It will be interesting and important to study country-level patterns in future studies, but it is beyond the scope of this study.

Explanatory Variables

The first factor concerns whether challengers seek narrow benefits. One aspect of narrowness is the degree of change demanded. It should be less costly for leaders to provide a one-time payoff in benefits or to offer talks or information than to offer new rights or change policies. A second aspect of narrowness is the number of beneficiaries. Demands that refer to a delimited group are less costly to concede to than demands that apply to the general populace. A *limited demands* variable was constructed, identifying cases in which challengers made at least one demand that concerns the well-being of a particular group or demands for information or talks. Challenges based on such limited demands were coded as 1, and all others were coded as 0.

Tactics are measured according to the form of contention utilized in a challenge. Forms of contention were measured using several dummy variables. First, following the logic in Figure 1, *symbolic protest* includes demonstrations and similar nonviolent actions that do not apply direct sanctions on the government. Three distinct types of nonviolent disruption are considered: *noncooperation* (including strikes and boycotts), *hunger strikes,* and *nonviolent occupation.* Finally, *violent challenges* were measured with a separate dummy variable.[3] Of course, a single event could combine several forms of contention. When information on participation and outcomes was specific enough, these were separated into separate challenges. For example, a protest march supporting a strike was coded as a separate challenge from the strike itself. If information was not specific enough, challenges were coded according to the most severe category that applied (with symbolic protest being least severe and organized violence being the most severe). Furthermore, a demonstration that involved any level of violence used by challengers was coded as a violent challenge. Table 2 lists the frequency of various tactics of contention for this sample.

Table 2
Types of Contentious Political Challenges in Sample

	Frequency	
Type of Contentious Challenge	*n*	%
Nonviolent protests (e.g., demonstrations)	369	44.4
Noncooperation (e.g., strikes and boycotts)	151	18.2
Hunger strikes	35	4.2
Nonviolent occupations	48	5.8
Violent challenges (e.g., violent protests, riots, armed attacks, deadly bombings)	150	18.0
Other (taking of hostages, armed occupations, blockades, actions that destroy property but do not harm people)	79	9.5
Total	832	100.0

Note: These figures omit 486 revolutionary actions for reasons discussed in the text.

A third factor is based around the concept of participation in contentious challenges. One possible way of measuring this would be to include the actual number of participants. However, estimates of participation are often rough estimates, and sometimes they use nonspecific terms such as "hundreds" or "thousands." Therefore, *participation* is measured using an ordinal scale that varies from 1, defined as fewer than 20 participants, to 8, indicating 100,000 or more participants. A more detailed description of the levels can be found in Franklin (2008).[4]

The *duration* of a contentious challenge is measured in days. A *campaign* variable was constructed that is coded as 1 if another challenge making the same demand on behalf of the same group occurred within one month before or after a particular challenge and 0 otherwise. A number of other indicators, based on the number of challenges occurring prior to a particular challenge, were examined in previous analyses but were found to have little effect on government responses.

Elite support measured whether elites were mentioned in news accounts as endorsing or participating in a particular challenge. The term *elite* here refers to individuals or groups with disproportionate political power or influence, including governors and mayors,

military junta members, high-ranking officials in the Catholic Church, and representatives of foreign governments. Any challenges that were endorsed by any of these individuals were coded as 1 for elite support. In addition, there were several actions in the sample undertaken by military or police forces. These were also considered elite groups because of their power and traditional influence in Latin American politics. Therefore, challenges undertaken by these groups were also coded as 1 for the elite support variable.

Another factor concerns whether the regime in place is democratic or nondemocratic. *Democracy* was measured using the familiar polity variable from the Polity IV project. This measures regime type ranging from –10 (absolutely authoritarian) to 10 (absolutely democratic). The strength of a leader's position certainly depends on many factors, but one important aspect is the apparent breadth of support for the leader. *Executive support* is measured, first, by a president's path to office, coded as 1 for elected presidents or revolutionary leaders, –1 for explicitly interim leaders, and 0 otherwise. This score is applied at the beginning of a president's term in office, and it is then adjusted based on events that indicate a narrowing of the president's support base. These include coup attempts, military mutinies, a party or faction that had previously supported the president moving into opposition, impeachment proceedings, or a presidential election in which the current president loses or does not run. Any of these events subtract one from the president's executive support score. A *civil war* variable was coded as 1 for Guatemala for the entire time period of this study and for Nicaragua up until February 14, 1989, when a general peace accord was reached. Furthermore, *prior repression* measures whether repression was used against the previous challenge, and *prior concessions* measures whether the government responded to the previous challenge with policy concessions. Both are dummy variables.[5]

Finally, *human rights criticism* is measured using all statements or reports concerning a country's human rights performance that were mentioned in the news archives Facts on File and Keesing's Record of World Events. As further described in Franklin (2008), a dummy variable was created coding whether the government corresponding with each challenge was criticized for its human rights record in the month leading up to the challenge. In the previous study, I found that such criticism occurring one month prior to challenges is an important factor in repression, but the effect weakens when examining longer periods. *Foreign capital dependency* combines measures of foreign development aid and foreign direct investment compiled by the World Bank. To test the possible interaction, these variables are multiplied together to create the *human rights criticism* $\times$ *foreign capital dependency* variable.

Analysis and Results

Sorting out this wide variety of factors for 827 cases requires a quantitative analysis. The dependent variable, *government response to contentious challenges,* can take on four distinct categories, making multinomial logit regression the appropriate technique. This technique estimates coefficients for the impact of explanatory variables on particular outcomes of the dependent variable, relative to a baseline outcome.[6] For the multinomial logit coefficients shown in Table 3, toleration is the baseline category. Thus, in the first column, positive coefficients indicate that higher values of that variable increase the likelihood of concession over toleration.[7] Overall, the model correctly predicts government responses to almost 68 percent of the challenges examined.

One challenge with interpreting multinomial logit results is the sheer number of coefficients. To simplify things, I assess whether each factor is, from the challengers' point of view, *effective* (i.e., increases the likelihood of concession over other responses) and/or *safe* (i.e., decreases the likelihood of repression or combined concession and repression relative to other responses) versus *ineffective* and/or *dangerous.* A second difficulty is interpreting the meaning of the actual logit coefficients, and this is facilitated by comparing the change in probabilities of the four governmental responses that result from changing the values of a particular explanatory variable while holding the other variables constant. These changes in predicted probabilities are shown in Table 4.[8] This table also indicates whether the confidence interval for each prediction excludes zero, which speaks to the statistical reliability of the prediction. For instance, from Table 4 we see that limited demands are predicted to decrease the probability of repression by 10.9 percent. The superscript *b* shows that we can be 95 percent confident that the effect of limited demands on the probability of repression is indeed negative.

Challenges associated with limited demands are both effective and safe. Examining changes in predicted probabilities, challenges based on limited demands are 6.5 percent more likely to win concessions and 10.9 percent less likely to be repressed than are challenges with

Table 3
Multinomial Regression Results for Governmental Responses to Contentious Challenges

	Government Response, with Toleration as Baseline Category					
	Concession		Combined Concession and Repression		Repression	
Variable	Coeff.	*SE*	Coeff.	*SE*	Coeff.	*SE*
Limited demands	0.66**	0.24	–0.12	0.43	–0.50**	0.16
Symbolic protest	–0.03	0.73	–2.40**	0.77	–1.26**	0.41
Noncooperation	0.37	0.69	–0.22	0.87	–0.95**	0.36
Hunger strike	0.81*	0.44	–32.87**	1.41	–3.79**	0.59
Nonviolent occupation	0.74*	0.36	–1.05	1.49	–0.41	0.61
Violent challenge	–0.24	0.70	3.08**	0.86	3.16**	0.68
Participation	–0.03	0.05	–0.04	0.15	–0.25**	0.04
Duration	0.03**	0.01	0.04**	0.01	0.01	0.01
Campaign	0.37*	0.18	0.76*	0.44	0.05	0.26
Elite support	0.97**	0.31	0.79	1.01	–0.01	0.76
Democracy	0.04	0.03	–0.02	0.07	–0.08	0.05
Civil war	0.21	0.14	1.69**	0.42	0.14	0.71
Executive support	–0.17	0.12	–0.42*	0.22	–0.17	0.17
Human rights criticism	–0.07	0.35	1.47**	0.44	1.20**	0.32
Foreign capital dependency	0.02**	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Human rights criticism × foreign capital dependency	0.09**	0.03	–0.28	0.19	–0.12	0.10
Prior repression	–0.17	0.44	0.41	0.31	0.46*	0.20
Prior concession	1.65**	0.44	1.65**	0.52	0.54	0.44
Constant	–2.41**	0.46	–3.50**	1.24	0.67	0.61
% correctly predicted	67.8					
% error reduction	35.4					
N	827					

Note: The values listed are multinomial logit coefficients, with standard errors adjusted for country-level clustering.
*$p < .05$, one-tailed. **$p < .01$, one-tailed.

more ambitious demands. Based on the confidence intervals, we can conclude that these estimates are both statistically reliable. These findings are also consistent with the theoretical expectations.

The effects of five different forms of contention were analyzed using dummy variables. The results here show the effect of each form of contention compared to the reference category. This reference category, which can be assessed by the regression constant, is a residual category including blockades, actions in which hostages are taken but released unharmed, and actions that destroy property but do not harm people.[9] The results for the various forms of dissent largely support the hypotheses derived from Figure 1.

Symbolic protest is safe but not very effective, as symbolic protests are significantly more likely to be tolerated than repressed, but it has no impact on the choice between concession and toleration. Examining changes in predicted probabilities, the two strongest effects of symbolic protests are to decrease the probability of repression (by 19.4 percent) and increase the probability of toleration (by 19.1 percent) over the reference category of challenges. Symbolic protest increases the probability of concession by only 1.7 percent.

The results for noncooperation, hunger strikes, and nonviolent occupation show the importance of distinguishing among different types of nonviolent disruption. Acts of noncooperation (most of these are strikes) mostly tend to discourage repression and increase the likelihood of toleration more than concession. Hunger strikes and nonviolent occupations are more effective at winning concessions. Staging a nonviolent occupation increases the probability of concession by 7.3 percent and staging a hunger strike increases the probability of concession by 11.9 percent, compared to the reference category. A difference between hunger strikes and occupations is that the former decreases the likelihood of repression much more than the latter. Thus, nonviolent occupations are effective and moderately safe, while hunger strikes are both highly effective and very safe.

Table 4
Changes in Predicted Probabilities for Government Responses to Contentious Challenges

Variable (Range)	Change in Predicted Probability of Government Response Resulting from Shifting Independent Variable from Minimum to Maximum Value			
	Toleration (%)	Concession (%)	Combined Concession and Repression (%)	Repression (%)
Limited demands (0–1)	4.4	6.5[a]	0.0	–10.9[b]
Symbolic protest (0–1)	19.1[b]	1.7	–1.3	–19.4[b]
Noncooperation (0–1)	12.2	4.4	0.0	–16.5[b]
Hunger strike (0–1)	19.5	11.9[b]	–1.5	–29.9[b]
Nonviolent occupation (0–1)	3.1	7.3[a]	–1.0	–9.4
Violent challenge (0–1)	–54.2[b]	–5.5	2.4	57.2[b]
Participation (1–8)	33.9[b]	2.3	0.5	–36.6[b]
Duration (1–130)	–56.1[b]	23.2	45.5[b]	–12.6
Campaign (0–1)	–3.4	2.3[a]	1.6	–0.4
Elite support (0–1)	–6.2	8.2	1.5	–3.5
Democracy (–8–9)	23.1	6.0	0.0	–29.1
Civil war (0–1)	–6.9	0.6	5.7	0.7
Executive support (–6–1)	31.6	–3.8	–9.7	–18.2
Human rights criticism (0–1)	–27.0[b]	–2.6	2.4[b]	27.3[b]
Foreign capital dependency (0.05–72.34)	–13.9	8.6	–0.2	5.5
Human rights criticism × foreign capital dependency (0–30.53)[c]	–28.8[b]	60.2[b]	–1.6	–29.8[b]
Prior repression (0–1)	–9.3[b]	–1.7	0.4	10.6[b]
Prior concession (0–1)	–21.5[a]	14.5	3.6[a]	3.5

Note: These probabilities are calculated holding all other independent variables either at their mean or at 0 for dummy variables.
a. The 90 percent confidence interval for this estimate excludes 0.
b. The 95 percent confidence interval for this estimate excludes 0.
c. Because this is an interaction variable, the estimated changes in probabilities are based on changing this variable from its minimum (0) to its maximum (30.53) while simultaneously changing human rights criticism from 0 to 1 and changing foreign capital dependency from 0 to 30.53.

Violent challenges tend to favor repression over other responses, as shown in Table 3. Table 4 shows that violent challenges increase the likelihood of repression by a whopping 57.2 percent over the reference category. They increase the probability of combined repression and concession slightly (2.4 percent), but overall violence is highly dangerous and on balance ineffective for challengers.

Examining the results across these tactic variables generally supports the prediction that actions that are nonviolent yet disruptive are most effective at extracting governmental concessions, while violence tends to lead to repression and symbolic protest increases the likelihood of toleration.

Challenges with high participation are much safer for challengers. Table 4 indicates that challenges with the highest participation are 36.6 percent less likely to be repressed and 33.9 percent more likely to be tolerated than challenges with the lowest level of participation. However, challenges with high participation are not very effective, as challenges with over 100,000 participants are only 2.5 percent more likely to receive concessions than are challenges with fewer than 20 participants, holding other variables constant. In contrast to DeNardo's (1985) statement that there is power in numbers, the results here suggest that the more accurate statement would be that there is *safety* in numbers.

Extending the duration of a challenge is a somewhat effective but rather dangerous tactic. Table 4 shows that duration has a substantial effect on the probability that governments will respond with concessions, as the probability of concessions improves by 23.2 percent as a challenge increases from 1 day to the maximum duration observed for this sample, 120 days. However, there is a great deal of uncertainty with this estimate, shown by the 90 percent confidence interval that ranges from –6.9 percent to 53.3 percent. Furthermore, this probability increases quite slowly, as increasing the duration of a challenge from 1 day to 21 days increases the probability of a concession by only 3.2 percent. Increasing

duration to the upper limits dramatically increases the probability of combined concession and repression (by 45.5 percent) while greatly decreasing the probability of toleration, and these estimates are much more statistically reliable. This suggests that challengers that are persistent enough to maintain their challenge for the long haul can often force concessions, but they are also likely to receive repression, which is consistent with the theoretical expectations.

Challengers can also increase the pressure on governments by organizing campaigns of contentious challenges, but, as measured here, campaigns only weakly increase the probability of concessions (yet we can be 90 percent confident there is a positive effect).

Challenges with elite supporters are perhaps more effective and slightly safer than are challenges without such supporters. Having elite supporters increases the overall probability of winning concession by 8.2 percent, but the confidence interval shows a lot of uncertainty. Having elite supporters also decreases the probability of repression by 3.5 percent.

Certain aspects of the context are also important in government decisions over how to respond to contentious political challenges. The democracy variable does not have any statistically significant impacts in Table 3, but the probabilities in Table 4 suggest that democracy provides a context that is somewhat safer and more effective for challengers. Countries with the highest *democracy* scores are predicted to be 29.1 percent less likely to use repression and 6.0 percent more likely to grant concessions than countries with the lowest democracy scores. Surprisingly, the effect on concessions is more statistically reliable.

The civil war and elite support variables both have their most statistically significant impact in Table 3 on combined concession and repression. The presence of a civil war increases the probability of this combined response by 5.7 percent, and presidents with strong support are 9.7 percent less likely to use the combined concession and repression response. Such presidents are also somewhat less likely to make concessions. However, the estimated effects in Table 4 are not very statistically reliable.

As expected, the results for the human rights criticism and human rights criticism × foreign capital dependency variables are in opposite directions. As discussed above and in Franklin (2008), the level of human rights criticism acts as another indicator of past repression, and indeed it is a better predictor of repression than the use of repression for the prior challenge. Countries that have been highly criticized for human rights are 27.3 percent more likely to use repression against subsequent challenges. The combination of widespread human rights criticism with high foreign capital dependency decreases the probability of repression by 29.8 percent while increasing the probability of concessions by a whopping 60.2 percent. This is consistent with theory, but the magnitudes are still surprising. Therefore, challenges that occur in countries that receive much foreign aid or investment and that have recently been criticized for human rights violations tend to be safer and much more effective. Foreign capital dependency encourages concessions and repression, though at more moderate levels than the human rights variables, and the effects are less statistically reliable.

Finally, two contextual variables, prior repression and prior concession, allow us to judge the effect of past responses on current responses. The bureaucratic inertia argument suggests that government behavior is consistent over time, so that prior concessions lead to future concessions and prior repression results in future repression. An alternative perspective is Moore's (2000) substitution model, which holds that political leaders will alternate between repression and concessions over time in response to challenges. The results generally support the bureaucratic inertia argument, as prior use of repression and recent human rights criticism increase the likelihood that governments will respond with repression again, while prior concessions increase the likelihood that governments will concede to a subsequent challenge. The effect of prior concessions on future concessions, though, is not statistically reliable.

Conclusions

This research examines how governments respond to contentious political challenges, considering four options: concession, repression, toleration, and combined concession and repression. Previously, these responses have mostly been studied separately, but it is important to consider all in a unified fashion. Surely a government's decision on whether to repress a challenge cannot be divorced from its decision on whether to concede to the challengers' demands. The theory presented here begins with a basic cost–benefit framework considering the potential costs and benefits, both short term and long term, of each of the possible governmental responses to contentious challenges. This logic suggests that, all else being equal, toleration is the least costly option for governments, followed by repression and then concession, with the combination of concession

and repression clearly being the most costly. The distribution of government responses for the 832 challenges examined here is consistent with these expectations, as toleration was the most common response, followed by repression, then concession, and finally the combination of concession and repression.

I then examined challenge-specific and contextual factors that are theorized to affect government responses to contentious challenges. One particularly important issue that arises when we combine relevant literatures is that challenging groups seem to face a dangerous dilemma: tactics that are argued to be effective in gaining concessions for challengers are also argued to increase the likelihood of repression. Is this really the case? Evidence from this sample of 827 contentious challenges and governmental responses in Latin America suggests that for the most part there is no dilemma. All challenge-specific factors that increase the likelihood of concessions decrease the likelihood of repression. The only exception is that increasing the duration of challenges increases the probability of gaining concessions but also substantially increases the probability of a combined concession and repression response.

Theoretically, these findings underline the importance of giving greater consideration to the role of contentious tactics. The results show that acts of nonviolent disruption—especially occupations and hunger strikes—are both effective and safe for challengers. Hunger strikes and nonviolent occupations apply more pressure than do other more symbolic acts, so they are harder for authorities to ignore. However, repression of these challenges carries a relatively high backlash potential for the government, which discourages repression and increases the likelihood of concession. In contrast, symbolic protests encourage government toleration but have little impact on winning concessions, and violent challenges are much more likely to be repressed and are somewhat less likely to win concessions. These findings support the theoretical logic presented in Figure 1, and the premise for this research, that governments must weigh the costs of concession against the costs of toleration and the costs of repression. These findings also underscore the importance of using multiple measures of contentious tactics. If this study had analyzed only violence versus nonviolence, as most previous studies have, the impact of nonviolent disruption would not have been found.

From a practical standpoint, this analysis reveals that challengers can increase their effectiveness without raising the risk of repression by centering challenges around limited demands and utilizing either nonviolent occupations or hunger strikes. On the other hand, not all groups can frame their demands in such a limited way without selling out their entire purpose for challenging the government. Furthermore, hunger strikes and occupations may be appropriate in only certain circumstances, and Tarrow (1998) warns that such acts of disruption are difficult to sustain. Of course, the context is important too, as groups tend to be more effective under democracy, and especially when recent criticism of the government's human rights record combines with greater reliance on foreign aid and investment. Therefore, a combination of choosing proper tactics and identifying advantageous opportunities can maximize the likelihood of success for challengers.

Notes

1. For more information on the sampling process, see Franklin (2008).

2. An analysis was also conducted including revolutionary challenges, and the results were quite similar. Of the twenty-six significant factors from Table 3, all of them were also significant and in the same direction for the full sample.

3. Earlier analysis separated violent protests from armed attacks, but the results were quite similar, so they were combined.

4. Participation was estimated for a few cases (about 3 percent of the sample) through comparison to similar types of challenges that occurred in the same country. A full description of these estimates is available on request.

5. Adding these lagged variables results in the loss of five challenges in which there is no information on prior repression or concessions, which explains why the analysis uses 827 cases.

6. Descriptions of tests for the independence of irrelevant alternatives can be found in the online supplementary materials at http://prq.sagepub.com.

7. Because the data set includes multiple challenges from each country, the standard errors were adjusted for clustering by country. This provides robust standard errors.

8. Changes in predicted probabilities and confidence intervals are computed using the "prvalue" command for Stata developed by Long and Freese (2006).

9. Different reference categories were tested, and this offered the most balanced results between violent and nonviolent tactics. See the supplementary materials for further details.

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