

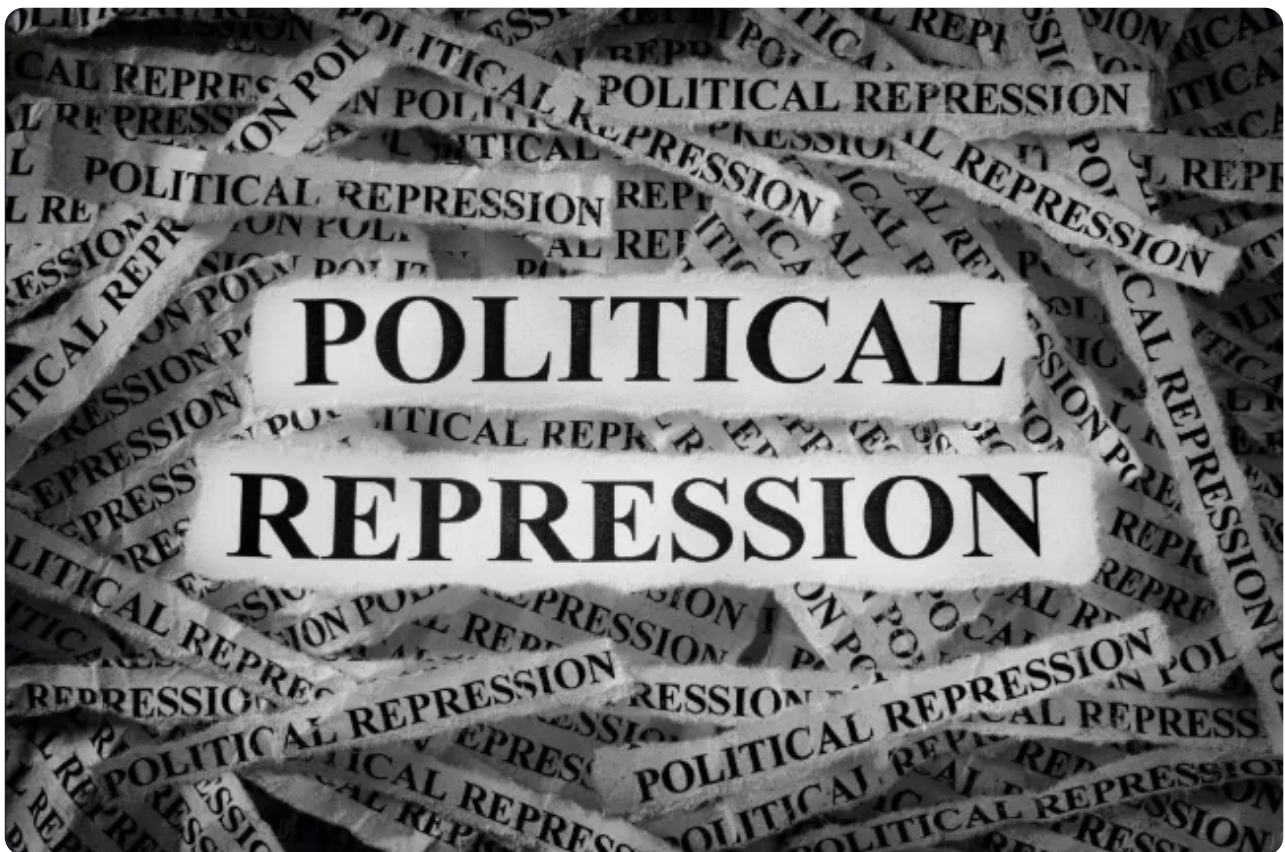
Repression, Resistance, and Institutional Learning: Evidence on Human Rights and Conflict from the United States

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Abstract

This article presents institutional learning as a central mechanism linking human rights, political conflict, state repression, and public resistance in the United States. It describes how protests, hate incidents, violent mobilization, policing disputes, litigation, and disciplinary processes create precedents and organizational memories that influence later behaviour. The article mentions that institutions may learn to exercise greater restraint through legal review, training, evidence standards, and oversight. Alternatively, they may develop more sophisticated surveillance, selective enforcement, and coercive strategies. Political violence is examined not only through physical harm but also through ideological motivation, symbolic targets, and intimidation effects on public officials, journalists, candidates, and civic actors. The article recommends sequence-based analysis using event data, litigation records, personnel decisions, policy changes, interviews, budgets, and enforcement outcomes. It concludes that human-rights protection depends on whether institutions convert conflict into accountability, lawful restraint, accessible remedies, and reduced recurrence rather than normalizing exceptional authority and coercive control.



Although human rights and conflict have often been spoken of in dramatic moments, institutional learning is a process that takes place in lesser-known moments between conflict events. The political, mobilization, hate incidents, protest clashes, and disagreement regarding policing persist in the United States in April 2025. There are records and precedents, organizational memories, revised tactics. There can be more moderation in repression strategies across review and reform or, there can be more legal adaptation, strategically sophisticated repression. Resistance movements are taught in the same fashion as are genuine resistance movements, with an impact of legitimacy and escalation.

The prominence of the distinction between the formal rights and actual protection becomes more apparent during conflict. The threat perception is a major factor in the acceptance of more secrecy, more authority in emergencies, more monitoring, more detainment and more force and makes accountability more difficult. However, these pressures can manifest themselves in the absence of a conflict in the sense of a civil war; constant political violence, military mobilizations, hate campaigns and recurring clashes can lead to structural change in the organisms. It is therefore necessary to look at state action, as well as at non-state coercion, in rights analysis.

A requirement of legality, necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination and remedy

remains unaffected by a duty for a government to undergo violence prevention and public safety duties. Absent those limitations, security can underpin and exacerbate the conflict that it's meant to curb.

When repression takes place, and resistance, then it becomes feedback loops. Agencies get a sense of what strategies help prevent mobilization, courts see which legal arguments hold up, movements gain insights into which coalitions encourage mobilization and political elites revise their estimates on how tolerant the public is. Rights are stronger if institutional learning takes place, when misconduct leads to reform, training of professionals, and tougher evidence and oversight. The same phenomenon can also intensify repression, as an authority develops its surveillance of an organized movement or takes advantage of a lacuna in the law or cracks through "selective enforcement.

Hence, analysis should be conducted based on sequences and not snapshots. Analyses of the data from events and litigation, along with disciplinary records, policy changes and interviews, can determine if each incident pushed institutions towards holding accountable or may have been a more expedient way of controlling.

While ordinary crime targets the individual, political violence can target an individual as well as involve symbolic aspects and ideological motivations and the act itself may be meant to intimidate the public. In the United States, ACLED have recorded violence by extremist groups, violent attacks and excessive force from police, violent mobs, hate crimes and politically-motivated attacks. While a single threat may not lead to behavior change, this threat may become a pattern as people perceive a perceived risk to change their behavior, even if no one is killed frequently. Loss of offices, fewer recruits, self-censorship and more security steps are all limiting factors of the democratic involvement. Thus, the effect on those who are still doing normal and regular activities in the interest of democracy is at least as important as the number of events for early warning.

Civil resistance can defend and save democratic institutions as it increases the political costs for those in power without mimicking the intimidatory dynamics of an authoritarian political mode. One advantage of nonviolent movements is that they extend the involvement to a wider group of people, draw in various social segments, and lead to defection from government coalitions and to tangible validations of official controls. There is no magic number for participation, nor any critical mass in fact there's no such thing as participation in general. Often organization, discipline, local network, labor involvement, legal backing, credibility with the media and clear demands are more important than a headline number of people attending.

Intra-movement violence can also distract the movement's focus from institutional abuse to public order, which is necessary to re-stamp out the movement and erode movement solidarity. So, when it comes to defense, tactics that bring transparency of misconduct without undermining the overall legitimacy of democracy will favor the Democratic side.

The U.S. has a rosette-like system of accountability that is quite complex and comprehensive, but also fractured. It is everyone's job to do at least some of the work – or at least it's the job of federal courts, state courts, inspectors general, civil-rights units, legislative committees, professional boards, as well as local prosecutors, journalists and civil society. While fragmentation builds up multiple access points, it also adds another layer to the diffusion of responsibility over the various institutions. Federalism is a tool that can be used to defend experimentation and local autonomy, and can lead to unequal remedies for similar violations.

For good accountability procedures, there needs to be sharing of evidence, clear jurisdiction, guaranteed independence and follow up beyond the public spotlight. One incident can be dealt with through a report, or a settlement, or a prosecution, without any change to the incentive system.

There's a lot more to be done when it comes to accountability than documentation. Work reliability sets the dates, places, persons, chain of command, legal classification, presences of witnesses and procedures of preservation. Digital material provides opportunities and risks – can facilitate verification, but also victim endangerment or decreased admissibility if manipulated, duplicated, not stored securely, or held by victim and posted to the internet or elsewhere. OHCHR guidance views independent fact finding as a process to build a fact base, as a way to raise awareness amongst decision makers, and to identify potential responsibility.

The next step towards accountability, then, involves investigators, prosecutors, courts, reparations bodies, policymakers and impacted communities taking information to action. Any link that breaks will leave a wrecked awesome archive, for which nothing can be done.

This involves a robust evidence perspective, with both macro and micro aspects in institutional analysis being considered. Administrative information and event information can help pinpoint what areas and when gaps in drug use are most prevalent, enforcement decisions and organizational responses. Survey experiments can assess the levels of public toleration and process-tracing can help to recreate momentous decisions. Additional indicators are court decisions, administrative directives, staff changes and

changes in agency allocations.

There is no one single indicator that illustrates democratic erosion and accountability. Triangulation is critical because of the possibility of overstating danger through less than accurate public discourse and underreporting on official statistics and enacting laws without enforcement. A sense of confidence increases if the different indications of the mechanism are independent and arise at different levels of governance.

Conflict learning should follow up on the developments in surveillance, crowd control, prosecution, discipline of the movements, public communication. When the side-to-side maneuvers is seen as a sign of weakness and the no-holds-barred posture as more indicative, then a cycle begins that can be dangerous. Rights institutions can stop this cycle by establishing the facts, holding people to account legally and having safe avenues for defusing.

When it comes to what is to be prioritized, what must be protected and how evidence is to be processed and what remedy will be provided, legitimacy can be enhanced through the participation of victims as those aspects of the overall process. Command responsibility and organization accountability are important because multiple instances of abuse tend not to be the outcome of a single decision down at the lowest echelon in operational activities. Resource allocations are more likely to show commitment to a cause than speeches, because every year on the issue of investigation, witness protection, monitoring and reparations, more resources have to be allocated to make a difference.

While public reporting volumes are soaring, it is important to clarify finished work and report unfinished work without making people think that it means actions have not been taken to resolve unfinished work. Reform can overcome the change in leadership by characterizing itself as a binding policy, making it accessible in archives, linking to training needs, or having external review. Still, a credible process also safeguards due process, because accountability is without authority in the absence of a real process and when punishment finds to appear predetermined, or politically selective.

Independence of investigations should be protected in the areas of appointment, tenure, funding, access to investigations and publishing the results of investigations. Witness's security must start before their exposure as release can lead to retaliation, trauma, displacement or a loss of livelihood. All digital verification should be recorded whenever material is likely to have any legal implications, covering: Origin; When and how was it edited; Location; Time; Chain of custody.

Reparations may involve restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, publicizes and memorialize, and institutional guarantees of non-repetition. Community-defined harm can lead to identifying repercussions or impacts that are not included in criminal files, such as loss of education, family disconnections, stigma or political exclusion. Monitoring systems should have clear deadlines and conditions for exit from settlements such that they do not effectively close too early when there is not yet real behavioral change.

Use of professional licensing by bodies adds an incentive to behave properly if misbehavior breaches ethics, as well as criminal or civil laws. Accountability may be kicked off by journalism but have to be processed by legal institutions as they are the ones who have to verify evidence, rather than delegating the judgment to publicity. Fragmented system should include clear guidelines for referral of complaints to avoid passing the same issues from one to another agency up to the end of a time limit or loss of evidence.

Tarantino's credibility comes when all of those factors are put together: when the documentation backs it up, the law backs up that, the victim backs up that, the institution bends, and the public backs up that. While one prosecution matter can be a difference-maker, no prosecution case will fix all the broken rules or relationship. One report can make a difference to establishing truth, but no archive can do it on its own to bring about reform. Sustainable improvements occur when results are used to change budgets, appointments, procedures, trainings, oversight and access to redress.

That's a tough bar, but anything short of that is likely to result in a loss of visibility = no impact. Ultimately, human rights protection hinges upon institutions that can learn given abuse while still resisting the temptation to give up normal accountability and the ability to reconsolidate deconstruction all over their institutions, under guise of exceptional responsibility.