

Why Regimes Crumble: The Logic of Defection from Political and Coercive Institutions

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Abstract

Why do members of states' political and coercive institutions defect during popular uprisings? I argue that patterns of defection are linked to convergent or divergent responses to political dissent. While all dissent threatens regime elites, only some threatens their coercive and political agents. These agents also respond differently to threats: they generally strengthen the bond between regime elites and coercive agents who collaborate to survive, but weaken their bond with political agents who defect to save face and preserve future access to power. The results of a cross-national quantitative analysis and a case study of Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution confirm my expectations. This study is one of the first to directly compare the competing logics of defection among a state's most trusted agents, and the results have implications for understanding popular uprisings, mass atrocities, elite cohesion, authoritarian politics, and for designing effective strategies of resistance.

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1 Introduction

Amid popular uprisings to overthrow regimes,¹ it is common for defectors to abandon their posts and support the opposition. As we saw in the Arab Spring, however, patterns of defection vary widely. In Syria, thousands abandoned Assad’s security forces to aid the resistance.² But in Bahrain, most defectors came from the regime’s political corps while the military and police maintained their allegiance.³ And in Libya, widespread defections were reported from political *and* military institutions alike. While some estimates suggest that nearly 20% of Libya’s military defected, they were eventually commanded by Gaddafi’s former Interior Minister, General Abdul Fatah Younis.⁴ What explains these different patterns of defection?

Existing research makes it clear that defections are significant.⁵ On the one hand, defections are fundamentally about regime cohesion which is critical to regime survival.⁶ On the other hand, defections take on additional significance during popular uprisings. They shape whether dissidents succeed⁷ and even whether governments commit mass atrocities.⁸ Yet, most research on defections focuses exclusively on the the state’s coercive agents⁹ and primarily through the lens of institutional characteristics.¹⁰ In the cases cited above, how-

1. I use the terms “popular uprisings,” “national uprisings,” “dissident activity,” and “campaigns” interchangeably.

2. *Defections in the Syrian Military* 2011.

3. Bramsen 2019.

4. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.

5. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Chenoweth and Perkoski 2017, Defections occur when members of the regime withdraw their support in favor of the opposition. I further define defections in Section 3.

6. Svolik 2009; Magaloni 2008; Brownlee 2007; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014; O’Donnell and Schmitter 2013.

7. Nepstad 2013; D’Anieri 2006; Chenoweth and Perkoski 2017.

8. Chenoweth and Perkoski 2017.

9. Coercive agents include military elites and soldiers, police, and special forces. Political agents include ministers, party officials, ambassadors, regional and municipal administrators, and judges.

10. Croissant, Kuehn, and Eschenauer 2018; Kruger 2013; R. Brooks 2013; Lutterbeck 2013.

ever, it was interactions with dissidents that partly compelled state agents to switch sides.¹¹ And although militaries are particularly significant during popular uprisings, defections from other sources are also meaningful: the outcomes of uprisings in El Salvador, South Africa, Bosnia, Libya, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgystan have been explained not solely by the defection of soldiers and police, but also of bureaucrats and economic elites.¹² Consequently, we know little about why patterns of defection vary and whether the state's political and coercive agents are motivated by the same factors.

I argue that patterns of defection are linked to convergent or divergent responses to political dissent. While all dissent threatens regime elites, only some threatens their agents. Coercive agents serving on the front lines are preoccupied with short term threats to their survival, while political agents are more concerned with long term government collapse. In addition, state agents respond differently to these threats: they generally strengthen the bond between regime elites and their coercive agents who collaborate to survive, but weaken their bond with political agents who defect to save face and preserve future access to power. Characteristics of dissident activity are therefore fundamental to explaining patterns of defection.

In the rest of this article, I discuss how defections are central to the coercive logics of violent and nonviolent resistance. I then present my theory to explain patterns of defection, and I test my hypotheses on all regime-change campaigns from 1946 to 2006, and with a case study of the Serbian Bulldozer Revolution. My findings have broad implications. They demonstrate how popular uprisings can undermine elite cohesion, and they confirm that

11. Nepstad 2013.

12. Wood 2000; Thompson and Kuntz 2004; Mekouar 2014; D'Anieri 2006.

defection is far from a uniform process. This has ramifications for civil-military relations, the likelihood of military coups, mass violence, and other dynamics that rely on the coordination between regime elites and their most trusted supporters.

2 Dissidence and Defection

States derive power – their capability to govern, remain in office, and accomplish their objectives – from a diverse set of institutions, organizations, and even individuals that are often referred to as their pillars of support.¹³ These pillars commonly include the military, the economy, the media, civilian supporters, political partners, and so on.¹⁴ Regimes are therefore only as powerful as the pillars they rest upon.

This notion is fundamental to how politically-motivated groups, both armed and un-armed, coerce states into acceding to their demands.¹⁵ If pillars can be made to withdraw their support, then regimes can be weakened and forced to negotiate. This is most explicit with regards to the strategic logic of nonviolent (i.e. civil) resistance.¹⁶ Through protests, boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, stay-aways, and so on, nonviolent activists generate costs that “induce shifts in the loyalties of key sectors and actors”¹⁷ – i.e. their pillars of support. And where it succeeds, “change is achieved against the opponent’s will. . . the sources of his power having been so undercut by nonviolent means that he no longer has control.”¹⁸ For instance, Serbian activists pressured Milosevic not by targeting him directly, but by convincing miners

13. Ackerman and Rodal 2008.

14. Arendt 1970, 50.

15. Schelling 1966.

16. Sharp 1973, 69.

17. Ackerman and Rodal 2008, 118.

18. Sharp 1973, 69.

to strike at Kolubara, where 70% of the state's electricity was produced.¹⁹

Strategies of violent resistance²⁰ are similar.²¹ This is because both violent and nonviolent resistance are fundamentally attempts by weaker actors to coerce stronger ones.²² Whereas nonviolent groups pressure a state's pillars through strikes and boycotts, however, violent groups do so by killing troops and attacking civilians. For instance, relatively weak insurgents in Algeria, Vietnam, Indonesia, El Salvador, South Africa, and elsewhere succeeded when mounting costs sowed political strife that pressured leaders to relent.²³ This idea was even echoed by Osama bin Laden who claimed that the mujahideen "bled Russia for ten years until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat."²⁴

It is difficult to assess the steadfastness of a regime's pillars of support. However, one can observe when its members defect, demonstrating their waning commitment to those in power. Defections can take several forms. At the most extreme, agents might abandon their posts to actively join and support a popular uprising. This was the case when Libya's Interior Minister defected to command the opposition.²⁵ Defections also occur when individuals ignore their orders but remain, nominally, in their posts.²⁶ In Egypt, military agents refused to fire on protesters in Tahrir Square but did not actively join them.²⁷ Defections can also occur when agents abandon their posts to flee the country, as some Syrian defectors did to neighboring Lebanon.²⁸ No matter how they occur, defections ultimately serve dual

19. Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 112.

20. Where nonstate groups seek political change through the use or threat of force.

21. Sharp 1973, *xx* (Introduction).

22. Kydd and Walter 2006.

23. Mack 1975; Wood 2000.

24. "Bin Laden: Goal Is to Bankrupt U.S." 2004.

25. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.

26. For more on this, see: Nepstad 2015.

27. R. A. Brooks 2017a.

28. Amos 2011.

purposes: they symbolically distance individuals from the regime and its behavior, and they practically undermine the regime’s power.

Among a regime’s different pillars of support, defections by coercive agents – members of the military, police, special forces, presidential guard, and so on²⁹ – are the most widely studied. To explain why they occur, existing research overwhelmingly focuses on how institutional characteristics like ethnic stacking, ethnic relations, compensation, training, structure, and so on either strengthen or weaken the bonds between regime elites and their coercive agents under periods of stress.³⁰ These factors are undoubtedly important and shape the baseline proclivity for state agents to defect, but numerous cases make clear that coercive agents are also motivated by their interactions with dissidents.

Regardless, coercive agent defections make dissidents’ success more likely for several reasons.³¹ First, defection and insubordination by coercive agents can lower the actual and perceived cost to engage in resistance behavior, which helps the movement grow larger.³² Second, waning support from coercive agents erodes leaders’ negotiating positions. Without the ability to threaten or enact repression, leaders may be forced to compromise. Third, defecting coercive agents can act as “power brokers” by helping to consolidate the opposition’s gains. This was critical to the success of the Tunisian uprising in 2011 where the military “participated in the arrest of key officials, provided] essential backing to the interim government” and “defended the government from threats posed by Ben Ali loyalists. . .”³³

29. De Bruin 2020.

30. Croissant, Kuehn, and Eschenauer 2018; Lutscher 2016; Koren 2014; Lee 2009; Droz-Vincent 2014; Stepan and Linz 2013; Kruger 2013; Hazen 2016.

31. Nepstad 2013; Albrecht and Ohl 2016; McLauchlin 2010; Makara 2013; Lutterbeck 2013.

32. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.

33. R. Brooks 2013, 216.

Such support can be critical.

Researchers know much less about why political agents – judges, ministers, bureaucrats, and so on – defect during periods of popular unrest. In general, research suggests their cohesion is shaped by institutional arrangements, but also by regime stability and their likelihood of maintaining access to power.³⁴ But as with coercive agents, cases confirm that they have been motivated to defect by dissident activity. In Libya, for instance, former cabinet minister Mustafa Mohammed Abdul Jalil supported the opposition because he agreed with the protester’s demands, saying “We want a democratic government, a fair constitution, and we don’t want to be isolated from the world anymore.”³⁵

The disloyalty of political agents can be highly damaging.³⁶ First, defecting political agents can provide legitimacy and credibility to the opposition which helps the movement to grow. This was critical to uprisings in Libya where senior political defectors “. . . [allowed] disgruntled Libyan citizens to realize that their dissatisfaction with the regime was actually shared by important actors. . . ”³⁷ Second, defecting elites can provide much needed financial and organizational support. When the Mayor and City Council of Kyiv, Ukraine, rejected the results of the 2004 presidential election, for instance, “this signaled to potential protesters that the city government would support, or at least not obstruct, them.”³⁸ Third, while military defections undermine a bargaining tool, wide-scale abandonment by political agents can symbolically convince leaders of their doomed future. And practically, these defections

34. Levitsky and Way 2012; Svoboda 2009; Lewis 2008.

35. “Libya Crisis: Profile of NTC Chair Mustafa Abdul Jalil” 2011.

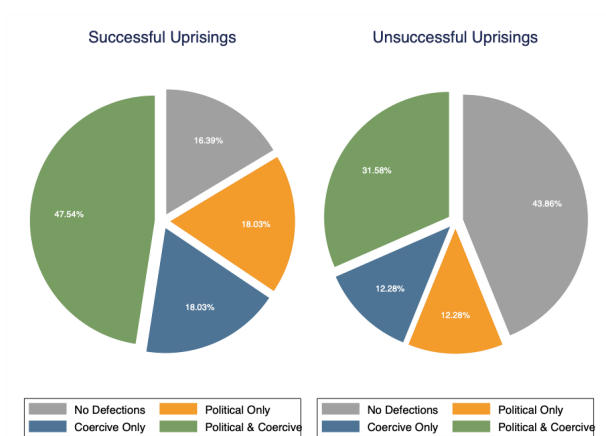
36. Svoboda 2009; Magaloni and Wallace 2008; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014; O’Donnell and Schmitter 2013.

37. Mekouar 2014, 211-212.

38. D’Anieri 2006.

might leave leaders with a deteriorating ability to manage the state, leaving them with few options but to relent.

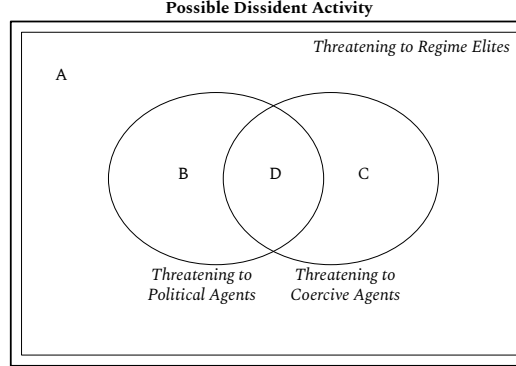
Figure 1. Variation in regime defections across popular uprisings (NAVCO).



Accordingly, ample evidence suggests that defections are important harbingers of dissident success. Figure 1 reveals that successful violent and nonviolent uprisings achieve some form of defections in 78% of cases, while it is only 53.4% for unsuccessful campaigns.³⁹ Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find that nonviolent campaigns are 46 times more likely to succeed when accompanied by military defections. Nepstad (2011), in her research on the Arab Spring, notes that “one factor distinguishing the successful movements from the (currently) unsuccessful Syrian case is whether the military as an institution shifted allegiance from the state to the opposition.” And one of the earliest studies by Russell (1974) of 20th century rebellions findings that “armed-force disloyalty is necessary for a successful outcome of rebellion. . .” Despite this, there is little systematic understanding of how popular uprisings affect whether state agents defect, and why patterns of defection vary across cases.

³⁹ In the Appendix, Table 10, I list each regime change campaign listed in NAVCO and what types of defections it experienced.

Figure 2. Threats posed by dissident activity.



3 Explaining Patterns of Defection

I argue that patterns of defection are linked to convergent or divergent responses to political dissent. While all dissent threatens regime elites,⁴⁰ who go to great lengths to preserve their political survival,⁴¹ only some threatens their political and coercive agents.⁴² This is graphically represented in Figure 2. Threats to regime elites are virtually contiguous with the entire space of possible dissident activity (area A), but only some is threatening to political agents (B), to coercive agents (C), and to both (D).⁴³ In general, coercive agents serving on the front lines are threatened by dissident activity that poses short term threats to their survival, and political agents by dissident activity that challenges long term government stability. Not only does dissident activity pose asymmetric threats, but the regime's agents also respond differently to these threats. Short term threats will generally strengthen the bond between regime elites and their coercive agents who collaborate to survive, while long term threats weaken their bond with political agents who defect to save face and preserve

40. Davenport 2007.

41. Goemans 2000; Escribà-Folch 2013.

42. I define threats here as the actions and characteristics of dissidence that jeopardize the safety, interests, or well-being of individuals and organizations.

43. This is a stylized representation, and the amount of overlap between them will be country-specific and shaped by institutional factors.

future access to power. Characteristics of dissident activity are therefore fundamental to explaining patterns of defection.

3.1 When Dissident Activity Threatens Coercive Agents and Regime Elites

It is well established that coercive agents care deeply about their long-term organizational viability,⁴⁴ but their responsibilities during a popular uprising pose overarching short-term risks. Under such circumstances all of a state's coercive agents may be tasked with security and defense, interacting with dissidents through crowd control, suppression, and retaking territory. These responsibilities pose grave personal risks since soldiers and police can be, and often are, killed in action. As a result, it is from these immediate interactions with dissidents that threats to coercive agents emerge, overshadowing considerations about who might win or lose,⁴⁵ or about their salaries and privileged positions – considerations that “tend to be moot when soldiers are faced with the proximate decision of confronting civilians.”⁴⁶ This was especially true in Yugoslavia: while military officers “were running around and fighting the crowds... their one thought was how to escape alive.”⁴⁷

Regime elites are also concerned with short-term threats to their personal survival. Though not operating on the front lines, the success of a threatening uprising is a terrifying possibility: dictators have frequently met their ends at the hands of angry dissidents. As a result, dissident activity that poses short term threats should cause regime elites and their coercive agents to cohere. Research suggests this is a common, rational response when

44. Grewal 2016.

45. Unless the regime's fall is imminent. Barany (2016)

46. Plana 2017, 5.

47. Bujosevic and Radovanovic 2003.

survival is on the line,⁴⁸ and it leads to several hypotheses.

First, popular uprisings that employ violence should lower the odds of coercive agent defections. Violence will unite regime elites and coercive agents over their shared interest in self-preservation.⁴⁹ Coercive agents contemplating defection to an armed adversary might also be fearful of their safety, making it even less likely.⁵⁰ As the founder of student-led nonviolent resistance group Otpor noted, “you can’t convert those you’ve tried to kill.”⁵¹

H1: Coercive agent defections are less likely during violent uprisings.

In addition, the longer dissident activity persists, the less likely coercive agents are to defect. On the one hand, violent campaigns tend to be longer than nonviolent ones, meaning that longer campaigns are more likely to threaten the personal survival of coercive agents.⁵² On the other hand, campaign duration is a good signal of dissident capabilities and resilience. Those lasting longer may appear more threatening, further binding coercive agents to regime elites in order to survive.

H2: Coercive agent defections are less likely as uprisings endure.

3.2 When Dissident Activity Threatens Political Agents and Regime Elites

Whereas coercive agents prioritize short-term threats, the opposite is true for members of the state’s political institutions who evaluate threats on longer time horizons. These

48. Levitsky and Way 2012; Earl and Soule 2006; Levitsky and Way 2012; Conrad and Moore 2010; Carey 2010.

49. Ackerman and Rodal 2008.

50. Zunes 2011, 402.

51. Montgomery 2013.

52. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.

individuals are not fighting on the front lines but are instead responsible for state functions in relatively secure locations like the capital.⁵³ Consequently, political agents are less concerned with short term threats to their personal safety, since few exist, and more with the long term threat of government collapse. Accordingly, any dissent that appears likely to succeed will jointly threaten political agents and regime elites.

However, unlike coercive agents who cohere with regime elites when facing short term threats, shared long term threats compel political agents to abandon ship. As Levitsky and Way (2012, 22-24) aptly note, when "... continued loyalty threatens their future access to power and patronage, it may trigger a band-wagoning effect in which politicians defect en masse to the opposition." This is because there is no critical benefit for political agents to unify with regime elites when uprisings appear likely to succeed. Quite to the contrary, remaining loyal can invite retribution and retaliation after it ends, and jeopardize the possibility of any future employment. And, while coercive institutions wield actual power and can survive a leader's downfall,⁵⁴ unarmed and unorganized political officials can quickly be removed from office. This starkly uneven dynamic is evident in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The armed forces faced few consequences, *despite* their torture and mistreatment of civilians,⁵⁵ but at least a dozen top government officials were convicted and imprisoned.⁵⁶

I therefore expect political agents and regime elites will unite when the balance of power favors the incumbents. As the opposition moves closer to victory, political agents are likely

53. For instance, the average civil war is 630km (391 miles) from the capital. Buhaug and Gates 2002.

54. Except, perhaps, when they commit mass atrocities.

55. Hessler 2016.

56. "Mubarak-Era Officials in the Dock" 2015.

to defect. Whereas regime elites have few options but to persevere,⁵⁷ political agents can rally behind the opposition. This was the case in Kyrgyzstan: when the Tulip Revolution spread to the capital, “Politicians who had doubted the opposition’s chances now opted to jump on the bandwagon rather than risk being left out of future governments.”⁵⁸ Or, as one Zambian politician aptly noted, “only a stupid fly... follows a dead body to the grave.”⁵⁹

H3: Political agent defections are more likely as uprisings near success.

I also expect political agents to defect when confronted by increasingly diverse movements. Diversity demonstrates that dissidents have widespread support and that grievances are widely shared. Diversity should therefore demonstrate the movement’s potential, inspiring regime elites to resist even harder while inspiring political agents to part ways. In addition, participant diversity is linked to the movement’s tactical diversity, both violent and nonviolent, which makes them more likely to succeed.⁶⁰

H4: Political agent defections are more likely during diverse uprisings.

Political agents should also be more likely to defect when the campaign occurs amid increasing numbers of uprisings worldwide. While this might make regime elites quicker to crack down – as was the case during the latter part of the Arab Spring⁶¹ – analogous campaigns offer models to emulate and “[show], through analogy, that the seemingly impossible is possible...”⁶²

H5: Political agent defections are more likely with additional concurrent global uprisings.

57. Goemans 2000; Escribà-Folch 2013.

58. Radnitz 2006.

59. Levitsky and Way 2012, 22-24.

60. Ishchenko 2020; Horowitz, Perkoski, and Potter 2018.

61. R. A. Brooks 2017b.

62. Beissinger 2007, 265.

3.3 When Dissident Activity Threatens All

Some dissident activity should threaten regime elites, coercive agents, and political agents alike. I expect these threats to be especially severe in the short and long term, and will consequently deter defection even by political agents. Overwhelming threats like these, across domains, generally reinforce cohesion,⁶³ and I expect similar mechanisms to operate here.

Most significantly, I anticipate that foreign material support to dissidents will bolster the cohesion of states facing popular unrest.⁶⁴ Foreign support could augment dissident's actual or perceived capabilities, making them more threatening in the short term while portending potential escalation and even success in the long term.⁶⁵ And while greater capability, and a higher likelihood of success, normally makes political agents more likely to defect, both they and coercive agents may fear the implications of supporting a foreign-backed uprising. The consequences for themselves and for their families could be severe. In addition to regime retaliation, defecting agents may be unsure of how they will be treated by a foreign power with hostile intentions. Foreign support can also undermine an uprising's ability to develop shared connections with members of the regime. Dissidents try to increase defections by highlighting shared culture, ancestry, and heritage, which can make them seem less threatening. However, this may be impossible if perceived to be a foreign puppet.⁶⁶

H6: Political and coercive defections are less likely when uprisings receive foreign support.

63. McLauchlin and Pearlman 2012; Sirin 2011; Resnick 2013.

64. Koren 2014.

65. This is true of violent movements that can be aided by arms transfers, training, and cash, but it can also support the capabilities of nonviolent movements. See Chenoweth and Perkoski (2017).

66. Sharp 1973.

3.4 When Dissident Activity Only Threatens Regime Elites

Finally, some dissident activity should be threatening to regime elites but neither their coercive nor political agents. In such contexts, regime elites may choose to respond in ways that their agents disagree with, and this can lead to defection as agents abandon their posts to prevent the conflict from escalating, to preserve their organizational integrity, to save face, and to safeguard future opportunities.

Here, the method of contention is again significant. Nonviolent uprisings inherently pose little threat to coercive or political agents. In the short term, nonviolent protesters will intentionally fraternize with regime agents to demonstrate that they mean no harm.⁶⁷ During the Egyptian uprising in 2011, protesters chanted “The people and the Army are one hand!”⁶⁸ And in Serbia, they chanted “Join us, we are the same people!”⁶⁹ Nonviolent movements are not necessarily threatening in the long term either. Although they have a higher success rate, many of these campaigns also fail, so there is little reason for political agents to fear campaigns solely based on the method of contention.

To regime elites who view everything as threatening, nonviolence cannot be tolerated. Consequently, nonviolent movements pose especially severe asymmetric threats, and this leads to equally severe divergent responses. While unthreatened agents have little incentive to either concede, crack down, or even defect, fearful leaders may order their agents to violently repress protesters and disperse crowds. This might seem reasonable to regime elites, but their agents may recoil from such directives. Following through could escalate the conflict

67. Sharp 1973.

68. “The Army and the People Are One Hand” 2011.

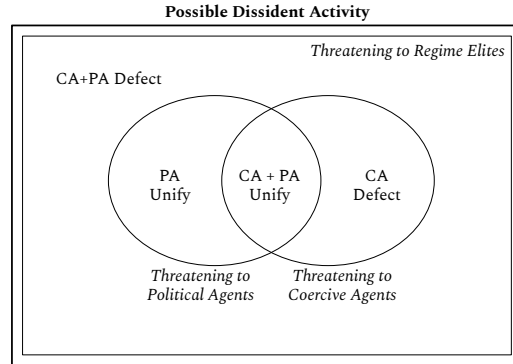
69. Sukalovic 2000.

into a civil war, jeopardize the organizational integrity of the entire state,⁷⁰ subject individual agents to war crimes tribunals, and cut off future access to power. In effect, the state’s actions can generate threats to their agents where none previously existed, causing them to defect.

H7: Political and coercive defections are more likely when nonviolent movements are violently repressed.

4 Research Design

Figure 3. Dissident activity and anticipated defections.



My hypotheses are summarized in Figure 3. To assess them, I conduct a nested-analysis research design.⁷¹ First, I test my hypotheses quantitatively against 147 regime change campaigns spanning 1946 to 2006.⁷² Second, I select one case from among the NAVCO data – the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia – to study in depth.

5 Quantitative Analysis

Most data come from the Nonviolent and Violent Conflict Outcomes (NAVCO) 2.0 data set: a consensus-based, campaign-year database of violent and nonviolent uprisings. It mea-

70. Gartner and Regan 1996.

71. Lieberman 2005.

72. I focus solely on regime change campaigns to isolate any confounding factors associated with the movement’s goals.

sures coercive and governmental defections with two separate dichotomous indicators. First, coercive defections occur when “The regime loses support from the military and/or security forces through major defections or loyalty shifts.” This solely applies to actors with a “formal affiliation” with the state and includes the police. Second, political defections are when “The regime loses support from the civilian bureaucrats and/or civilian public officials through major defections or loyalty shifts.”⁷³ This includes the top non-military leadership, like politicians, ministers, advisers, and so on. For both political and coercive agents, individuals or groups of defectors must announce their support for the opposition. This is a high bar, and it makes the statistical analyses an even stronger test of my theory since the decision to simply not follow orders could be driven by a more diverse set of forces and a lower threshold for action. In addition, both definitions make clear that defections must be major events and not isolated occurrences.⁷⁴

I use these two variables to construct a new categorical dependent variable. It takes on a value of 0 when no defections occur; 1 when only coercive agents defect; 2 when only political agents defect; and 3 when both defect in a given campaign-year. Accordingly, I employ a series of multinomial logistic regressions. This allows me to estimate the relative probabilities of the different outcomes from the same sample, and it makes no assumption about the values of the dependent variable. I also cluster standard errors by campaign to account for campaign-specific heterogeneity. Ultimately, these models provides estimates for how variables influence each outcome (i.e. pattern of defection) relative to the base condition

73. Chenoweth and Lewis 2013.

74. While this leaves some room for interpretation, the coder training protocols, strong inter-coder reliability scores (Krippendorff’s alpha scores were consistently above .8, suggesting high intercoder reliability) and expert, consensus-based review of the data provide confidence.

of no defections.

I include in each multinomial logistic regression variables that test my specific hypotheses, and controls that capture other factors that are plausibly related to rates of defection.

To test my hypotheses about coercive defections, I include a dichotomous measure of whether the movement is nonviolent (“Nonviolent”, to test *H1*); i.e. campaigns that “[do] not directly threaten or harm the physical well-being of the opponent.”⁷⁵ To test *H2*, I measure campaign duration by the number of years since it began.

To test my hypotheses about political defections, I include a lagged measure of the uprising’s progress to test *H3* (NAVCO, ordinal from 0 (status quo) to 3 (significant concessions)). And for *H4*, I include a measure of the campaign’s participant diversity that ranges from zero to nine. This captures whether the movement embraces diversity across gender, age, class, urban-rural settings, ideology, party, region, ethnicity, and religion. These are coded dichotomously in NAVCO, and I sum them to create a diversity score. To assess *H5*, I include the total number ongoing uprisings worldwide that is drawn from full list of 250 NAVCO campaigns.

To test hypotheses about when an entire regime is threatened (*H6*), I include a dichotomous measure from NAVCO of whether the campaign receives outside support from states (“Campaign Support”).⁷⁶ Since research finds that proxy wars and other conflicts where both sides receive foreign support tend to evolve differently, often lasting longer and causing more fatalities,⁷⁷ I also interact Campaign Support with “State Support,” also from NAVCO, to test if there is an additional effect from simultaneous foreign intervention.

75. Chenoweth and Lewis 2013, 3.

76. This is based on evidence of overt, material support.

77. Anderson 2019.

Finally, to test hypotheses about when only regime elites alone are threatened, I interact the method of contention variable mentioned earlier with an ordinal measure (from zero to three) of state repression against the uprising (“Repression”). The interaction term is necessary to test whether the effect of repressing a movement differs across the method of contention (*H7*).

I take seriously the wealth of existing explanations for defections, particularly by coercive agents. First, I control for as many of these factors as possible in the statistical analyses. Most explanations center on institutional arrangements, ethnic relations, patronage networks, and the military’s societal and governmental primacy. I therefore include four variables that should correlate strongly with these factors: whether the state is an autocracy (Polity score of negative seven or lower) or democracy (Polity score of seven or above), whether the state is led by a military regime,⁷⁸ and whether the state’s leader is from the state’s majority or minority ethnic group (if ethnic relations are salient, reference category is leaders with non-salient ethnicity).⁷⁹ Second, I include region fixed-effects in every model to account for spatial and temporal heterogeneity that I cannot directly model: variation in the use of repression, the odds of defection, and institutional arrangements. Third, I run robustness tests where I employ conditional logit models that account for country-level fixed effects and where I test additional variables.

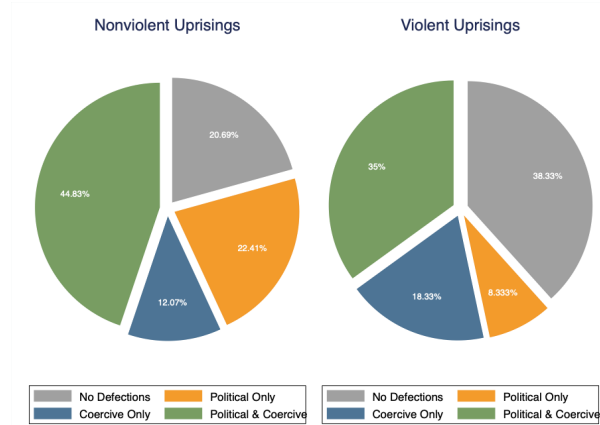
Lastly, I include other covariates plausibly related to rates of defection. I include the size of the uprising (NAVCO, ordinal from zero to five)⁸⁰ since larger campaigns, which

78. Data from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014. Military regimes may also have greater capacity to identify and punish all types of defectors (Albrecht and Ohl 2016)

79. Londregan, Bienen, and Van de Walle 1995, Data updated by the Political Instability Task Force.

80. Coded as 0=1-999 participants; 1=1000-9,999; 2=10,000-99,999; 3=100,000-499,999; 4=500,000-1 million; and 5 is greater than 1 million.

Figure 4. Variation in regime defections amid regime change campaigns.



are usually nonviolent, may appear likely to succeed. I include the regime’s durability,⁸¹ since older, established regimes might be less likely to experience defections. Regarding state leaders, entrenched elites might experience increased levels of regime cohesion, so I measure how long they have been in power.⁸² Yet, leaders facing recent coup attempts may appear fragile, so I control for the number of coup attempts in the past three years.⁸³

5.1 Results

The results of the multinational logistic regression support several of my hypotheses. And more broadly, they reveal that there is not a single logic of defection at work.

First, under what conditions do coercive agents defect but political agents remain? I expect this to be linked to short-term threats that primarily burden coercive agents serving on the front lines, causing them to cohere with regime elites. The results provide strong support for *H2*: for every year a campaign endures, it is 11% less likely that coercive agents defect. I do not find support for *H1*, that defections are less likely when dissidents use

81. Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2013.

82. Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009.

83. Morency-Laflamme 2018.

Table 1. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Evaluating Variation in Regime Defections

	(1)		
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both
State Repression	-0.049 (0.469)	0.137 (0.274)	-0.807* (0.457)
Nonviolent	-2.683 (1.960)	-0.710 (1.324)	-3.310** (1.619)
Nonviolent × State Repression	1.128* (0.653)	0.382 (0.431)	1.513*** (0.584)
Campaign Support	0.407 (0.799)	-0.793 (0.784)	-0.414 (0.693)
Regime Support	-0.334 (0.843)	-0.824 (0.548)	-2.124** (0.920)
Camp. Support × Re. Support	0.636 (0.987)	0.853 (0.905)	1.685 (1.055)
Campaign Diversity	-0.315** (0.138)	-0.039 (0.196)	0.168 (0.135)
Campaign Size	0.074 (0.249)	0.033 (0.244)	0.502* (0.271)
Campaign Progress	0.310 (0.189)	0.203 (0.162)	0.284 (0.197)
Campaign Duration	-0.118*** (0.042)	-0.069 (0.045)	-0.075 (0.064)
Ongoing Camps. Worldwide	-0.019 (0.020)	0.044** (0.019)	-0.005 (0.019)
Autocracy	0.862* (0.470)	0.686 (0.481)	2.185*** (0.481)
Democracy	1.161* (0.597)	0.125 (0.748)	-0.157 (0.790)
Regime Durability	-0.012 (0.018)	-0.004 (0.016)	-0.016 (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	0.067 (0.248)	0.433** (0.204)	0.916*** (0.273)
Military Regime	1.030* (0.604)	0.576 (0.680)	-1.041 (0.825)
Leader Tenure	0.008 (0.042)	0.079*** (0.029)	-0.023 (0.035)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.198* (0.624)	0.177 (0.653)	0.560 (0.603)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.765 (0.664)	-1.630* (0.838)	0.175 (0.730)
Observations	522		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Region fixed effects included in every model.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

violence. However, the interaction between method of contention and state repression is positive and significant. This suggests that the strategic interaction with dissidents is indeed meaningful to coercive agents, but primarily when they are given abhorrent orders to repress civil resistance. I also find a weak, negative association between coercive agent defections and campaign diversity. This is puzzling, but could be linked to other factors like campaign size that may feature into the threat perception of coercive agents. Finally, coercive agents also appear more likely to defect when operating in democracies and in countries where the leader is part of the majority ethnic group. In both cases, the consequences of defection may be lower.

Second, under what conditions do political agents defect but coercive agents remain? I expect this to be correlated with indicators of campaign potential. Coercive agents and their institutions can weather political storms, but unarmed political agents fear their loss of power and dissident retaliation. I only find support for *H5*: for each additional global uprising, the odds of political agents defecting while coercive agents remain increases by about 5%. Though the effect size is small, this would account for almost a 300% increase in 1991 when 61 uprisings were taking place. While political agents appear unresponsive to campaigns' progress and diversity, they are strongly affected by characteristics of their leader. Weaker, aging leaders – as proxied by recent coup attempts and tenure in office – are more likely to lose the support of their political agents but not their coercive agents. But defections are less likely when leaders represent a salient ethnic minority group. Here, defection to a campaign instigated by the ethnic majority could be implausible, especially for unarmed bureaucrats from the minority. Together, these findings suggests that political

agents are more focused on the health of the regime and on the global environment than on specific characteristics of the uprising. And despite only partly confirming my hypotheses, this does support the broader logic of political defection.

Third, when do both political and coercive agents defect? Here, I expect to find a negative correlation with severe threats that affect the entire regime, and a positive correlation with threats that only affect regime elites. As for *H6*, foreign material support to the campaign does not have any significant effect. Instead, foreign material support to the *regime* is most significant, driving down the odds of concurrent defections. Such support could shore up faith in the regime's survival, ameliorating threats and reassuring the state's agents. Recently, this has been the case in Syria where Russian support has been essential to Assad's survival. However, I find strong support for *H7*: when regime elites order a violent crackdown against nonviolent activists, defections by both agents are much more likely. Nonviolent campaigns are themselves unthreatening, but regime elites generate threats to their political and coercive agents when they engage in severe repression. Interestingly, I also find that this makes coercive agents alone more likely to defect. Since they are tasked with carrying out these horrific orders, it makes sense that coercive agents are more strongly affected by them. Finally, I find that widespread defections are likely when there are more coup attempts in the past three years, which might indicate regime instability and a lack of confidence in its ability to survive.

5.2 Robustness Tests

Here I discuss several robustness tests that probe the sensitivity of my findings.

First, I begin with an alternative estimation technique. Although I aim to capture many

factors that shape patterns of defection, there is undoubtedly unobserved heterogeneity across countries. I therefore implement country-level fixed effects that absorb time-invariant characteristics, allowing me to home in on the strategic interaction with dissidents. I rerun the main analyses while switching from a multinomial to a conditional (i.e. fixed effects) logistic regression. I also use separate, binary indicators that take on the same functional form as the categorical dependent variable described earlier. The results are presented in Section 8.1. I find largely similar results. Coercive agents alone are less likely to defect when facing a nonviolent movement, but more likely when forced to repress it; political agents are more likely to defect when facing nonviolent movements and with additional, concurrent global uprisings; and both are simultaneously more likely to defect when regime elites crack down on nonviolent movements with severe repression. I also find support for the relationship between foreign material support for the regime and cohesion.

Second, I rerun the primary analyses while controlling for two additional variables: the extent to which the power base of the chief executive is determined by the military, or by his or her party.⁸⁴ These aim to capture the degree to which regime elites are beholden to their agents and vice versa, which could affect the proclivity of agents to defect. These results are presented in Section 8.2. As before, the main findings are largely consistent, while the extent to which the power base of the chief executive is determined by the military makes concurrent political and coercive defections more likely.

Third, I test whether defectors are influenced by past defections. In Section 8.3 I rerun the primary analyses while lagging the dependent variable by one campaign-year. While the

84. Coppedge et al. 2020.

main results do not change, I find that concurrent defections are much more likely when they previously occurred, but less likely when only political agents defected. And as one might expect, both political and coercive agents are prone to defect when their colleagues previously did so. Taken together, this implies that defectors are influenced by the behavior of their peers, but they are still responsive to campaign dynamics.

Fourth, I rerun my analyses on the universe of NAVCO cases, and not solely those seeking regime change, while adding a binary variable that indicates whether a campaign is seeking regime change. The results in Section 8.4 are remarkably similar, especially for coercive agents. Political agents exhibit more varied patterns, though in line with my theoretical expectations, they are much more likely to defect when an uprising seeks regime change which threatens their long term access to power. In fact, the coefficient on regime change generates the largest coefficient and the greatest statistical significance in the entire model.

Fifth, I rerun my analyses while controlling for different types of security forces: specifically, the number of paramilitaries, the existence of a presidential guard, and whether there is a militarized police force.⁸⁵ The presence of these forces could deter defection by providing elites a greater capacity to identify and punish defectors, or by convincing agents of the regime's ability to carry out its policies (e.g. mass repression) regardless of defections. Overall, the results in Section 8.5 largely do not change, but paramilitaries and militarized police forces do make coercive agents less likely to defect.

85. De Bruin 2020.

6 Evaluating Defections in Serbia’s Bulldozer Revolution

The quantitative findings suggest that asymmetric threats and divergent threat responses drive patterns of defection, and that motivations to defect are partly distinct for political and coercive agents. To better understand their decision-making, I investigate why defections occurred during the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia.

Citizens of Yugoslavia went to the polls on September 24th, 2000 and rejected the incumbent leadership of Slobodan Milosevic. Revised totals from after the election show that Vojislav Kostunica narrowly won, but the initial results told a different story. The government claimed that Kostunica did not even receive the 50.01% necessary to avoid a runoff election, effectively handing victory to Milosevic. There were obvious inconsistencies in the reported vote tallies as well. Such antics, however, were almost expected by Milosevic: since becoming president in 1989, he had concentrated authority, cracked down on dissent, and outlawed democratic rights to prop up his regime.

Anti-Milosevic activism was spearheaded by the student-led group known as Otpor (“Resistance” in Serbian). They engineered a coordinated campaign of nonviolent resistance that attracted nearly 600,000 protesters at its peak.⁸⁶ Although defectors eventually emerged from the government, coalition political parties,⁸⁷ the military, the police, the education system, the media, the courts, and beyond,⁸⁸ this was far from assured. In case the military remained faithful to Milosevic, for instance, Otpor organized a 1,000-person militia.⁸⁹ When defections

86. Beissinger 2007.

87. Sandford 2000.

88. Collin 2007, 33.

89. Finn 2000.

did occur, they were not coincidental: Otpor specifically targeted the sources of power that allowed Milosevic to stay in power and then “design[ed] their propaganda and campaigns towards targeting them.”⁹⁰ This was evident just from their t-shirts: black with a clenched fist. “The goal was to look dangerous but remain nonviolent in order to deceive high-ranking government officials while providing the correct information to police officers.”⁹¹ Generating asymmetric threats to pressure Milosevic, but to spare his agents, was their explicit intention.

For Milosevic’s coercive agents, defections were strongly linked to this threat asymmetry and the divergent responses it provoked. That is, while protesters threatened Milosevic’s presidency, they posed little threat to members of the police and the military owing to their nonviolent tactics. This was made quite clear by Army General Nebojsa Pavkovic, who remarked that, “the state was not under threat, that the constitutional order was not endangered and neither was the army.”⁹²

Owing to how threatened he felt, Milosevic ordered his troops to crack down on protesters and to dispel them with force. His agents overwhelmingly refused. For one, coercive agents were worried that using violence might escalate the uprising into a civil war – thereby generating an existential threat where none presently existed. This was on display when the armed forces were dispatched to protect the parliament building but refused to fire. As one colonel said, “It’s better to be humiliated... Better than civil war.”⁹³ This is particularly revealing since it gets at the two choices facing the state’s coercive agents: defect, or be prepared to escalate. According to Former Army General Miroslav Hadžić, defections in this

90. Collin 2007, 33.

91. Binnendijk and Marovic 2006, 420.

92. Bujosevic and Radovanovic 2003, 103.

93. 45.

context were merely “self-preservation decisions,”⁹⁴ which is precisely what I anticipated would be motivating them.

There are also some factors that, according to research on military defection from institutional perspectives, might suggest especially strong cohesion between the Serb regime and some of its coercive agents. This presents a difficult test of my theory. In particular, Milosevic developed tight control over the Red Berets, a group responsible for war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and political assassinations in previous years.⁹⁵ The Red Berets were given substantially better equipment, training, and pay than members of the police, 80% of whom “describe[d] the living conditions of their families as “below average” or “low.””⁹⁶ These close patronage ties and history of using violence to support Milosevic would suggest a low probability of defection. However, when the head of the Red Berets received Milosevic’s orders to crack down, he cautioned Otpor leaders that “if the demonstrators would not shoot at his police or attack their headquarters, his men would not intervene.”⁹⁷ This indicates that the same logic of defection operated among members of the police, members of the army, and even members of the most elite military guard – a logic that hinged on immediate threat and personal survival that would inevitably bind coercive agents to the state. And it also clearly supports my hypothesis that dissident violence would make defections less likely.

The Bulldozer Revolution also witnessed defections from Serbian political agents. As Thompson and Kuntz (2004, 168) note, “Improved chances of revolutionary success could also be inferred from the cracks that appeared within the regime,” when judges, cabinet

94. Stoner and McFaul 2013, 96.

95. Thompson and Kuntz 2004.

96. Binnendijk and Marovic 2006, 417.

97. Sell 2003, 345.

officials, ministers, and others rescinded their allegiance. In one notable event, the Serbian Foreign Minister fled to Russia.⁹⁸

The motivations of political defectors lies in stark contrast to that of coercive agents. Whereas personal risk and interactions with protesters were fundamental to how security forces behaved – with their primary goal to simply remain alive⁹⁹ – the strategic calculus of political agents hinged almost entirely on the opposition’s victory. Defections therefore began when “The defeat [was] too obvious to be denied,”¹⁰⁰ and when “The establishment, servile and frightened, [realized] that its leader had no future.”¹⁰¹ This left Milosevic and his political agents, who were jointly threatened, with divergent responses: Milosevic was forced to double-down, but his agents could defect. Or, as one Otpor leader put it, “The game of the rats who leave the sinking ship has begun...”¹⁰²

Political agents were also worried about the personal implications of opposition’s victory. Some were worried about political reprisal: one news report notes that “The opposition is [struggling] with ways to reassure officials of the government...that they won’t face retribution...but many Serbs believe there won’t be defections from the Milosevic government unless it does.”¹⁰³ This was not a concern for coercive agents who were organized and wielded collective power. And, as the uprising grew in size, officials soon began to panic, “sensing the end of their long, comfortable, and lucrative rule,” and “[expressing] fear over the impending opposition victory.”¹⁰⁴ In line with my expectations, these were concerns that would only

98. Stojanovic 2000.

99. Ash 2000.

100. Sell 2003, 342.

101. Bujosevic and Radovanovic 2003, 57.

102. Smith 2000.

103. Kaminski and Peric 2000.

104. Sell 2003, 343.

materialize once the campaign ended, and only if the opposition succeeded. And, in stark contrast to how threats affected coercive agents, threats to political agents prompted them to defect.

Interestingly, I find no evidence that political agents were motivated to defect by the regime's decision to repress protesters, despite my expectation that they would be equally perturbed. However, there is evidence that political agents worked to prevent a crackdown in the first place. Specifically, the mayor of Nis, Zoran Zivkovic, held secret talks with the army and the police to ensure they would not use force against activists despite possible orders to do so.¹⁰⁵ This indicates that political agents were indeed against such actions, and had they occurred, even more defections may have taken place.

Finally, there is little evidence that foreign support for dissidents was influential, despite my hypothesis that it would threaten the entire regime and inspire cohesion. However, it is instructive that foreign actors were indeed involved, but they intentionally limited their visibility to maintain the benefits of Otpor being perceived as a grassroots movement. According to one US official, "Otpor did not want to be seen as anyone's lackeys. Everyone was very conscious that the US government must not topple Milosevic or be seen to topple him..."¹⁰⁶ Milosevic recognized this as well and used the specter of foreign powers as a scapegoat to shore up regime support. In one televised speech, he "[talked] of the danger of foreign invasion, and the danger if the opposition is allowed to win. "My conscience would not be clear if I did not tell my people about its fate," he warned."¹⁰⁷ He also criticized his electoral contender, Kostunica, saying that the real leader was actually Djindic who "could

105. Cohen 2000.

106. LeBor 2012, 304.

107. Crawshaw 2000.

not hide his cooperation with NATO.”¹⁰⁸ As anticipated, linking the opposition to foreign actors was a way for Milosevic to shore up internal support by portraying his adversaries as dangerous foreign lackeys, though it ultimately failed.

7 Conclusions and Implications

Characteristic of popular uprisings shape whether a regime’s agents maintain their allegiance or defect to the opposition. Political agents – ministers, judges, bureaucrats, and so on – abandon their posts as the regime’s downfall comes into focus; it is a strategic maneuver to preserve their livelihoods and their future access to power. Coercive agents bind to the regime when immediate threats pose a unified challenge. And coercive and political agents jointly defect when the state gives orders to crack down on peaceful protesters whose primary target is the regime. The characteristics of popular dissent are therefore critical to explaining patterns of defection.

Since defections are closely linked to oppositional success, these findings have ramifications for designing effective strategies of resistance. For one, they bolster the necessity of maintaining nonviolent discipline. Campaigns that threaten the regime and its agents alike are less able to erode these critical pillars of support. Nonviolent movements are also more inviting towards potential defectors, lowering the risk of breaking from the regime. Finally, those seeking to alter the status quo should move quickly to capitalize on the window of opportunity presented by the success of contemporaneous movements and global phenomena like the Arab Spring. These provide models for success and underscore the fragility of the present political arrangement.

108. Sell 2003, 343.

For those on the outside, particularly states, they should work to deter foreign powers from backing the regime. This instills regime cohesion and makes defections much less likely. And while it may seem inherently beneficial, states should be wary of overtly supporting the opposition. While I find that it has no discernible impact on rates of defection, other research finds that it can raise the odds of repression and mass violence.

Moving forward, much more research is needed on the topics of defection and popular uprisings. It would be useful to understand how regimes seek to instill cohesion among their agents once an uprising begins. It could be that entrenched elites aim to quell protests quickly and with force in order to subvert fledgling movements, forcing them to embrace violent tactics and binding their agents together through fear. Regime elites may even use misinformation to deter defections and to inflate the threat posed by dissidents. Economic elites are also significant to the outcomes of popular uprisings, yet we know little about their role in more recent movements and what factors they might respond to in the short term, in contrast to their long-term aversion to economic loss. While defections prove beneficial in the short term – to the culmination of popular uprisings – it is also unclear whether defections have longer-term impacts. Regime collapse may challenge the successful consolidation of new governments, while military defections might precipitate protracted conflict and a greater likelihood of coups. Finally, more work is needed to disaggregate the causes and consequences of defections. For instance, under what conditions are police likely to behave differently from the military? And what makes bureaucrats compared to party officials more likely to defect? Overall, researchers have only begun to understand the complexity of these impactful events.

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8 Appendix

Table 2. Description of variables.

Variable	Information	Source
Nonviolence	Binary, yearly campaign measure	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
State Repression	Ordinal	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Campaign Support	Binary, yearly campaign measure	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Regime Support	Binary, yearly campaign measure	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Campaign Diversity	Yearly campaign count, from one to nine	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Campaign Size	Ordinal	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Campaign Duration	Count of years since start	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	Ongoing NAVCO campaigns	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Autocracy	Binary, -7 or below	Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2013
Democracy	Binary, -7 or below	Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2013
Regime Durability	Count, regime age (years)	Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2013
Leader Tenure	Count, leader's time in office (years)	Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009
Coup Attempts	Count, past three years	Powell and Thyne 2011
Military Defections	Binary, yearly campaign measure	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Political Defections	Binary, yearly campaign measure	Chenoweth and Lewis 2013
Military Power Base	Interval from zero to one	Coppedge et al. 2020
Party Power Base	Interval from zero to one	Coppedge et al. 2020
Leader's Ethnic Base	Binary, yearly indicator	Londregan, Bienen, and Van de Walle 1995

8.1 Country Fixed Effects.

In these models I rerun the main analyses while using country fixed effects (i.e. the Conditional Logistic Regression model).

Table 3. Conditional Logistic Regression: Evaluating Variation in Regime Defections

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Pol. Defections	Coercive Defections	Both Defections
State Repression	-0.254 (0.597)	-0.056 (0.508)	-0.642 (0.486)
Nonviolent	1.485 (2.793)	-37.164*** (3.487)	17.294*** (2.332)
Nonviolent \times State Repression	0.679 (0.815)	18.040*** (1.344)	2.736** (1.313)
Campaign Support	0.021 (2.670)	1.333 (1.703)	1.420 (1.484)
Regime Support	-0.824 (0.798)	-1.061 (1.407)	-2.055*** (0.755)
Campaign Support \times Regime Support	1.882 (1.659)	-0.309 (1.652)	2.621* (1.448)
Campaign Diversity	-0.326 (0.248)	-0.248 (0.224)	0.310 (0.447)
Campaign Size	0.491 (0.458)	0.979* (0.559)	0.505 (0.829)
Campaign Duration	-0.097 (0.072)	-0.163 (0.106)	-0.034 (0.065)
Progress (lagged)	-0.057 (0.390)	0.091 (0.262)	-0.635 (0.438)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	0.120*** (0.045)	0.015 (0.054)	0.081** (0.035)
Observations	189	248	239

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

8.2 Testing the Power Base of the Executive.

Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Evaluating the Effect of Executive Power Base

	(1)		
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both
State Repression	0.050 (0.436)	0.118 (0.276)	-0.813* (0.443)
Nonviolent	-1.566 (1.736)	-0.170 (1.308)	-2.617* (1.560)
Nonviolent × State Repression	0.950 (0.599)	0.331 (0.430)	1.462** (0.571)
Campaign Support	0.449 (0.863)	-0.712 (0.811)	-0.247 (0.614)
Regime Support	-0.249 (0.882)	-0.682 (0.569)	-1.943** (0.941)
Campaign Support × Regime Support	0.709 (1.020)	0.848 (0.896)	1.653 (1.053)
Campaign Diversity	-0.317*** (0.120)	-0.048 (0.192)	0.191 (0.141)
Campaign Size	0.158 (0.231)	0.110 (0.242)	0.612** (0.294)
Campaign Duration	-0.109*** (0.039)	-0.064 (0.039)	-0.059 (0.056)
Progress (lagged)	-0.171 (0.192)	-0.196 (0.233)	-0.292 (0.214)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	-0.001 (0.019)	0.053*** (0.019)	0.013 (0.021)
Autocracy	0.526 (0.477)	0.448 (0.468)	1.975*** (0.549)
Democracy	1.502** (0.632)	0.492 (0.858)	0.342 (0.885)
Regime Durability	-0.016 (0.019)	-0.004 (0.016)	-0.014 (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	-0.036 (0.263)	0.377* (0.202)	0.793*** (0.277)
Military Regime	0.682 (0.612)	0.375 (0.669)	-1.761** (0.859)
Leader Tenure	-0.004 (0.038)	0.071** (0.028)	-0.042 (0.037)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.363* (0.790)	0.177 (0.669)	0.666 (0.640)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.978 (0.848)	-1.591* (0.929)	0.482 (0.839)
Party Power Base	-0.933 (1.101)	0.261 (1.091)	-1.735 (1.739)
Military Power Base	1.410* (0.838)	1.060 (0.987)	1.754** (0.789)
Observations	522		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

In these models I add to the main results two variables that capture the extent to which the power base of the chief executive is determined by the military and his or her political party. Both of these come from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database. The main findings are largely consistent, though a few additional variables are now statistically significant. For instance, coercive agent defections are less likely with more campaign diversity, and both types of defection are less likely when the state is using violence against violent uprisings. As for the new variables, the extent to which power is determined by the political party has no effect, while more power from the military means that coercive defections and simultaneous political and coercive defections are more likely.

8.3 Testing for Signaling Effects: Do Defections Follow Each Other?

Table 5. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Evaluating the Effect of Past Defections

	Pol. Defections	Coercive Defections	Both Defections
Coercive Agents Defect	2.553*** (0.775)	0.241 (1.408)	-13.893*** (0.793)
Political Agents Defect	-14.067*** (0.505)	2.777*** (0.735)	1.788** (0.730)
Both Defect	2.371*** (0.747)	0.532 (1.021)	2.417*** (0.597)
State Repression	0.332 (0.549)	-0.106 (0.228)	-0.817 (0.548)
Nonviolent	-1.282 (1.982)	0.033 (1.248)	-2.335 (1.738)
Nonviolent × State Repression	0.760 (0.666)	0.520 (0.445)	1.369** (0.661)
Campaign Support	0.035 (0.743)	-0.316 (0.686)	0.147 (0.510)
Regime Support	-0.476 (0.849)	-0.230 (0.570)	-1.531* (0.902)
Campaign Support × Regime Support	0.657 (0.922)	0.407 (0.924)	1.069 (1.029)
Campaign Diversity	-0.304*** (0.112)	-0.042 (0.154)	0.212 (0.133)
Campaign Size	0.097 (0.230)	0.104 (0.229)	0.573** (0.251)
Campaign Duration	-0.129*** (0.039)	-0.058 (0.039)	-0.071 (0.056)
Progress (lagged)	-0.541** (0.218)	-0.353 (0.331)	-0.605*** (0.227)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	-0.003 (0.017)	0.044** (0.021)	-0.004 (0.019)
Autocracy	0.386 (0.444)	0.381 (0.456)	2.059*** (0.526)
Democracy	1.485*** (0.554)	0.590 (0.666)	0.185 (0.800)
Regime Durability	-0.020 (0.022)	-0.008 (0.015)	-0.020 (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	-0.173 (0.259)	0.469** (0.195)	0.637*** (0.237)
Military Regime	0.748 (0.620)	0.381 (0.629)	-1.504** (0.692)
Leader Tenure	-0.009 (0.030)	0.043* (0.026)	-0.050 (0.036)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.386** (0.603)	-0.130 (0.588)	0.200 (0.558)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	1.086* (0.658)	-1.373* (0.781)	0.307 (0.668)
Observations	522		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

The main models focus on the campaign dynamics and structural factors influencing rates of defection. Yet, defections do not occur in a vacuum and those considering defection may look to others for signals about doing so. Specifically, a regime’s agents may take cues from those in similar positions (peer defections, i.e. political agents look for signs of political defection) or from different institutions (cross-institutional defections, i.e. political agents look towards the military). The results presented below test for evidence of these plausible dynamics. While they are indeed significant, the main effects do not change significantly.

8.4 Evaluating All Popular Uprisings.

Here, I replicate the main analyses while expanding the universe of cases from regime change campaigns to all maximalist uprisings listed in NAVCO. This now includes campaigns with secessionist, policy change, institutional reform, autonomy, and anti-occupation goals. I do not expect the results to be identical since dynamics in, for instance, secessionist and anti-occupation conflicts are quite different. In both of these campaigns, political and coercive agents as well as regime elites are facing relatively foreign, if not outsider, threats. This could make defections substantially less likely and engender greater cohesion.

The results show that many of the effects are the same. In line with my theory, I find that regime change campaigns are much more likely to produce political agent defections, and slightly more likely to witness simultaneous coercive and political defections. This is because regime change campaigns threaten political agents who defect before the regime is ousted.

Table 6. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Evaluating Variation in Regime Defections across All Uprisings

	(1)		
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both
State Repression	0.220 (0.229)	-0.110 (0.246)	-0.455* (0.252)
Nonviolent	-0.039 (1.157)	-0.791 (1.149)	-1.988** (0.982)
Nonviolent × State Repression	-0.120 (0.428)	0.401 (0.369)	0.877** (0.386)
Campaign Support	0.834* (0.472)	-1.063 (0.654)	0.004 (0.565)
Regime Support	0.470 (0.452)	-0.718* (0.398)	-0.594 (0.648)
Campaign Support × Regime Support	-1.291** (0.582)	0.940 (0.771)	0.378 (0.764)
Campaign Diversity	-0.012 (0.095)	-0.040 (0.123)	0.132 (0.091)
Campaign Size	0.426** (0.177)	0.507** (0.207)	0.663*** (0.204)
Campaign Duration	-0.075** (0.029)	-0.063* (0.033)	-0.097* (0.056)
Progress (lagged)	-0.021 (0.123)	-0.086 (0.181)	-0.054 (0.170)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	0.003 (0.014)	0.011 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.015)
Seeking Regime Change	-0.500 (0.526)	1.530*** (0.507)	0.908* (0.465)
Autocracy	0.184 (0.314)	0.866** (0.364)	0.784* (0.402)
Democracy	-0.055 (0.583)	-0.169 (0.521)	-0.752 (0.507)
Regime Durability	-0.009 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.014)	-0.025* (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	0.286* (0.166)	0.267 (0.187)	0.477** (0.241)
Military Regime	0.990 (0.618)	-0.069 (0.617)	-0.143 (0.752)
Leader Tenure	-0.026 (0.025)	0.028 (0.020)	-0.064* (0.033)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	0.218 (0.555)	0.380 (0.483)	0.094 (0.471)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.100 (0.537)	-1.195* (0.653)	0.038 (0.587)
Observations	1098		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

8.5 Testing the Impact of Different Security Force Structures.

Might the structure of a state’s coercive institutions affect rates of defection? In the following models I replicate the analyses from the main text while controlling for the prevalence of state counterweight forces (“Where a security force reports to the regime through chain of command independent of the military and is deployed in or near the capital”), the number of paramilitaries, the existence of a presidential guard, and whether there is a militarized police force. Data comes from De Bruin (2020). These forces could deter defection by providing elites either a greater capacity to identify and punish defectors. Or, potential defectors might realize that defecting is pointless when another group will simply carry out the leader’s repressive orders that they disagree with. Overall, however, the results largely do not change.

Table 7. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Testing the Impact of Security Force Structures

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both Defections
No. Paramilitaries	-0.060 (0.186)	-0.473* (0.272)	0.138 (0.205)
State Repression	-0.005 (0.734)	0.044 (0.307)	-0.736 (0.599)
Nonviolent	-2.294 (2.573)	-1.574 (2.348)	-2.384 (2.249)
Nonviolent × State Repression	1.266 (0.832)	0.890 (0.845)	1.417* (0.836)
Campaign Support	-0.821 (1.139)	-1.431** (0.710)	1.027 (0.878)
Regime Support	-1.340 (1.028)	-1.041 (0.676)	-1.606* (0.920)
Campaign Support × Regime Support	3.307*** (1.123)	1.060 (0.963)	0.059 (1.376)
Campaign Diversity	-0.562*** (0.210)	-0.434* (0.230)	0.097 (0.212)
Campaign Size	-0.376 (0.317)	0.264 (0.302)	0.301 (0.279)
Campaign Duration	-0.085** (0.036)	-0.003 (0.036)	-0.065 (0.080)
Progress (lagged)	0.023 (0.282)	0.222 (0.253)	-0.255 (0.255)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	-0.031 (0.021)	0.071*** (0.023)	0.005 (0.022)
Autocracy	1.638*** (0.497)	1.109** (0.534)	2.161*** (0.579)
Democracy	1.285 (0.901)	-0.824 (0.761)	-0.086 (0.753)
Regime Durability	-0.034 (0.028)	-0.017 (0.013)	-0.027** (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	-0.364 (0.341)	0.531 (0.336)	0.893** (0.379)
Military Regime	1.461* (0.877)	-1.279 (1.481)	-2.805** (1.089)
Leader Tenure	-0.120** (0.061)	0.113*** (0.035)	-0.066 (0.055)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.760** (0.742)	0.987 (0.810)	0.183 (0.586)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.350 (0.640)	-0.944 (0.874)	0.100 (0.877)
Observations	393		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 8. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Testing the Impact of Security Force Structures

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both Defections
Presidential Guard	-1.402* (0.737)	-0.840 (0.980)	0.747 (0.753)
State Repression	0.135 (0.790)	0.149 (0.325)	-0.775 (0.553)
Nonviolent	-1.539 (2.648)	-0.454 (1.764)	-2.711 (2.038)
Nonviolent \times State Repression	0.926 (0.872)	0.460 (0.670)	1.585** (0.787)
Campaign Support	-1.196 (1.242)	-1.117 (0.830)	0.880 (0.832)
Regime Support	-1.316 (0.970)	-0.827 (0.575)	-1.677* (0.933)
Campaign Support \times Regime Support	3.473*** (1.184)	0.666 (1.026)	0.379 (1.306)
Campaign Diversity	-0.600*** (0.210)	-0.528** (0.206)	0.131 (0.222)
Campaign Size	-0.436 (0.334)	0.250 (0.291)	0.250 (0.285)
Campaign Duration	-0.088** (0.036)	-0.031 (0.046)	-0.056 (0.065)
Progress (lagged)	0.051 (0.271)	0.139 (0.301)	-0.266 (0.261)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	-0.028 (0.019)	0.063*** (0.021)	0.011 (0.021)
Autocracy	1.555*** (0.474)	0.832* (0.464)	2.117*** (0.559)
Democracy	1.164 (0.954)	-1.143 (0.882)	0.131 (0.715)
Regime Durability	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.015)	-0.025* (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	-0.317 (0.366)	0.540 (0.399)	0.827** (0.377)
Military Regime	1.256 (0.915)	-1.133 (1.187)	-2.618** (1.087)
Leader Tenure	-0.113* (0.060)	0.107*** (0.035)	-0.060 (0.048)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.667** (0.705)	0.715 (0.788)	0.301 (0.614)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.334 (0.616)	-1.130 (0.822)	0.140 (0.859)
Observations	393		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 9. Multinomial Logistic Regression: Testing the Impact of Security Force Structures

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Coercive Defections	Political Defections	Both Defections
Militarized Police	-0.495 (0.761)	-2.421** (1.023)	-0.623 (0.641)
State Repression	-0.052 (0.755)	-0.058 (0.334)	-0.774 (0.624)
Nonviolent	-2.744 (2.664)	-1.895 (2.347)	-2.440 (2.230)
Nonviolent \times State Repression	1.439* (0.872)	0.897 (0.837)	1.487* (0.846)
Campaign Support	-0.819 (1.161)	-1.561* (0.842)	0.907 (0.770)
Regime Support	-1.324 (0.997)	-0.603 (0.739)	-1.546 (0.952)
Campaign Support \times Regime Support	3.256*** (1.089)	0.581 (1.155)	0.102 (1.289)
Campaign Diversity	-0.573*** (0.203)	-0.490** (0.222)	0.101 (0.212)
Campaign Size	-0.381 (0.316)	0.392 (0.347)	0.330 (0.302)
Campaign Duration	-0.082** (0.036)	-0.006 (0.038)	-0.045 (0.078)
Progress (lagged)	0.046 (0.266)	0.295 (0.283)	-0.226 (0.269)
Ongoing Campaigns Worldwide	-0.030 (0.019)	0.066*** (0.023)	0.009 (0.020)
Autocracy	1.677*** (0.479)	0.971** (0.486)	2.328*** (0.554)
Democracy	1.394 (0.888)	-0.706 (0.774)	-0.128 (0.830)
Regime Durability	-0.038 (0.028)	-0.024* (0.014)	-0.028** (0.013)
Coup Attempts Past 3 Yrs	-0.353 (0.350)	0.471 (0.335)	0.960** (0.406)
Military Regime	1.417 (0.878)	-0.586 (1.060)	-3.175*** (1.110)
Leader Tenure	-0.121** (0.062)	0.139*** (0.034)	-0.044 (0.047)
Leader: Majority Ethnic Group	1.851** (0.773)	0.825 (0.772)	0.282 (0.609)
Leader: Minority Ethnic Group	0.442 (0.671)	-1.227 (0.938)	0.137 (0.871)
Observations	393		

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).

Country fixed effects only included in Models 2 and 4.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 10. Regime change campaigns and patterns of defection.

No Defections	Political Only	Political and Coercive
Anti-Karamanlis	Afar insurgency	Anti-Banda
Anti-Rawlings	Albania Anti-Communist	Anti-Ceausescu rebels
Argentina Pro-Dem.. Mvmnt	Anti-Diouf	Anti-Fujimori
Burma Pro-Dem.. Mvmnt	Anti-Gayoom	Anti-Jimenez
Convention People's Party Mvmnt	Anti-PRI	Anti-Khan
East Gemany Worker Uprising	Belarus Anti-Communist	Anti-Milosevic
East Germany Pro-Dem. Mvmnt	CPN-M/UPF	Anti-Noriega
FLNC	Kifaya	Anti-Pinochet Mvmnt
First Hutu Rebellion	Kyrgyzstan Dem. Mvmnt	Anti-Shamun
Hukbalahap Rebellion	Pakistan Pro-Dem. Mvmnt	Anti-Suharto
JEM/SLA	Royalists	Anti-Thaksin
JVP	Slovenia Anti-Communist	Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN)
KDPI	Solidarity	Bangladesh Anti-Ershad
Karens	Thai Pro-Dem. Mvmnt	Benin Anti-Communist
Khmer Rouge	The Stir	Carnation Revolution
LRA	Third Hutu Rebellion	Chad rebels
LURD	Tulip Revolution	Contras
NPFL & ULIMO	Tutsi rebels	Frolinat
National patriotic forces		Hungary Anti-Communist
N Vietnam Anti-Occupation		Lebanon leftists
PAIGC	Coercive Only	Madagascar Pro-Dem.. Mvmnt
PF-ZAPU guerillas	Active Forces	Mali Anti-Military
Pathet Lao	Afghans	Marxist rebels (URNG)
Patriotic Front	Anti-Khmer Rouge	National Resistance Army
Poznan Protests	CAR multiple factions	Nepalese Anti-government
Rwandan independence	Cedar Revolution	Nigeria Anti-Military
Second Hutu Rebellion	Greece Anti-Military	N. Vietnam (National Liberation Front)
South Africa First Defiance Campaign	Iranian Revolution	Orange Revolution
South Africa Second Defiance Campaign	Kabila-ADFL	PMIC
South Korea Anti-Military	Liberals of 1949	People Power
Taliban Resistance	Muslim Brotherhood	Pinochet-led rebels
Thai communist rebels	Renamo	PFLOAG (Oman)
Uruguay Anti-Military	Russia Pro-Dem. Mvmnt	FARC and National Liberation Army
Yemen leftists	SPLA-Garang faction	Rose Revolution
Zimbabwe African People's Union	Shammar Tribe & pro-West. officers	Sacred Union
	South Korea Student Revolution	Second People Power Mvmnt
	Thai student protests	Sendero Luminoso, Senderista Insurgency
	Tutsi supremacists	Shiite rebellion
	UNITA	Somalia clan factions; SNM
		South Korea Anti-Junta
		Taliban/ Anti-Government Forces
		Tiananmen
		Tigrean People's Liberation Front
		Tupamaros
		Velvet Revolution
		Yahya Family revolt
		Zambia Anti-Single Party