"THIS RALLY IS NOT AUTHORIZED"
Preventive Repression and Public Opinion in Electoral Autocracies

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ABSTRACT

Does preventive repression dampen or does it bolster mass support for groups that dissent despite obstruction? Although a large literature recognizes the importance of preventive repression for authoritarian stability, we know very little about its effects on public opinion. To gain traction on this question, this article draws on evidence from unusually detailed data on unauthorized and authorized protests from Russia and an original survey experiment. The author shows that when the authorities engage in preventive repression, such as when they deny protest authorizations, protesters' ability to generate support is compromised. Preventive repression also conditions the effect of nonviolent demonstrator tactics on public opinion. These effects, however, are contingent on citizens' attitudes about the law and the authorities. This article's findings—which provide one of the first causal tests of the mass opinion effects of preventive repression—expand our understanding of the consequences and audiences of repression and have implications for studies of authoritarian resilience.

INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING the effects of protest on public opinion is crucial to establishing the conditions that underpin protest and opposition success as well as electoral and political change.[1] Existing research agrees that in democracies and nondemocracies the tactics adopted by demonstrators and the authorities play a critical role in shaping mass opinion and focuses on how protesters and the authorities interact during street protests.[2] Yet the interaction between the authorities and their challengers typically begins and is publicly observable before protesters take to the streets. Although seldom effective at preventing protests, strategies of preventive protest repression, such as prohibitions of assembly, are used in anticipation of dissent around the world. For example, in 2018, 84 percent of nondemocratic regimes had laws that allowed them, among other things, to preemptively hinder peaceful assembly, up from 62 percent fifteen years prior.[3] Despite the importance of preventive repression and protest for authoritarian stability and democratization, our understanding of the effects of preventive repression on targeted groups' ability to generate support remains limited.[4] By focusing on state-protester interactions during protests, analyses of protest effects on public opinion typically fail to account for processes that occur in the lead-up to protests.

My main argument is that beyond its documented effects on dissent and responsive repression, publicly observable preventive repression has a series of indirect effects on public opinion.[5] Strategies of preventive repression, I propose, may influence demonstrators' ability to generate mass support and could condition the effect of demonstrator and police tactics on public opinion. This argument implies that preventive repression may yield substantially more than simply stifling dissent, or increasing the costs of mobilization, conventionally understood as its primary objectives.[6] Publicly observable strategies of preventive repression are a broader instrument of authoritarian control and may be used to shape the views and subsequent behaviors of citizens. By compromising protesters' ability to generate support, contemporary autocrats may not only undermine participation in unfolding protests but could also prevent mass defections to the opposition.[7] When protests—one of the most consequential actions individuals can undertake to influence democratization—fail to bolster support for the

opposition, the prospects for political change are compromised.

I explore these arguments using evidence from the effect of protest authorizations on support for groups that dissent despite obstruction. Traditionally used to facilitate negotiations between protest organizers and the police and to enable planning, protest authorization requirements are integral to the repression of protests in contemporary nondemocracies.[8] Authorities tasked with authorizing protests use the process to discriminate against groups for the content of their speech.[9] Protest laws subject the organizers and participants of unauthorized protests, those who go ahead without approval, to administrative and criminal sanctions that apply even when protests are peaceful.[10] According to activists in electoral autocracies around the world, authorization requirements are increasingly used to dampen their ability to mobilize and to justify their arrest.[11]

Existing protest and public opinion data are poorly suited to empirically test expectations about the effect of protest authorizations, as a strategy of preventive repression, on public opinion in nondemocracies. The majority of comparative protest-event data sets do not document whether or not protests are authorized. Several public opinion surveys rarely differentiate between attitudes toward authorized and unauthorized events.[12] I therefore collect and analyze unusually detailed protest-event and original survey data from Russia. During the period under investigation, which stretches from 2012 to late 2020, Russia shared many features in common with other electoral autocracies that permit opposition yet use the law and protest authorizations to manage dissent, making it a helpful setting for this research.

I first exploit subnational variation in opposition protests that took place on the same day—June 12, 2017. All protests were organized by the same groups—Navalny supporters—and advanced the same popular and uncontroversial demands—asking for action against government corruption. Combining data on unauthorized and authorized protests with responses to a nationally representative survey fielded weeks after the protests, I show that demonstrator approval is lower in localities with unauthorized, as opposed to authorized, events, and that this effect is robust when we control for police arrests, respondents' political

attitudes, and local-level opposition support. Second, using a factorial experimental design that randomly varies information about protest status (authorized or not), the tactics of demonstrators (engaging in clashes with the police or not), and those of the police (involving arrests or not), I show that preventive repression dampens support for protesters and for the protests they stage. At the same time, the effect of preventive repression is conditional on demonstrators' tactics and varies across the population. Authorizations shape only the views of respondents who think that the law and the authorities are legitimate.

This work joins several studies in revisiting the impact of protest authorizations as a nonviolent strategy of repression and extends that agenda to electoral autocracies.[13] Although existing research agrees that the law is integral to the repression of protests in nondemocracies, claims about the consequences of legal repression often rely on assumptions about public opinion that have not been directly tested at the microlevel. The article's principal contribution is to show how protest authorizations, used as a strategy of preventive repression, influence support for protesters and protests—a central focus of research in contentious politics and conflict. Findings call for greater emphasis on processes that occur in the lead-up to protests. They also draw attention to preventive repression as a strategy that may help to shape individuals' opinions of protests, and in doing so, may influence the prospects for successful collective action in nondemocracies.

This research also expands our understanding of the various consequences of preventive repression. Although scholarship focuses on the direct effect of preventive repression on dissent and responsive repression, this work emphasizes the indirect effects of preventive repression on public opinion.[14] The audience of preventive repression in this context, which includes the general public, is broader than traditionally assumed by studies of preventive repression that view such repression as a strategy intended to achieve direct deterrence.[15] Strategies of preventive repression that use the language of the law, this research implies, may be similar to strategies of propaganda and may influence mass beliefs about the opposition, blurring the boundaries between propaganda as a tool of persuasion and repression as a tool of fear. Findings also join a growing body of research on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance.[16] I contribute to this line of research by showing that strategies of preventive

repression might compromise peaceful protesters' ability to generate support. I also show that in nondemocratic settings, nonviolent tactics significantly improve public perceptions when protesters are faced with the impossibility of obtaining protest authorizations. To the best of my knowledge, this work provides the first experimental test of the direct and conditional effects of preventive repression on public opinion in a nondemocracy, where most protest restrictions take place. Tests using observational data are also among the first to empirically combine information on preventive and responsive repression in a single empirical framework and to study their effect on public opinion.

PREVENTIVE REPRESSION IN ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES

Autocrats use strategies of preventive repression—their first line of defense against threats—in anticipation of dissent; such strategies are distinct from strategies of responsive repression, used after dissent is observed.[17] To date, most of the literature on preventive repression in authoritarian regimes focuses on strategies that rely on coercion and understands preventive repression as an activity that ought to be carried out surreptitiously. Indeed, targeted assassinations, unlawful imprisonments, or torture used to impede opposition are rarely intended to be visible to the public.[18] As Tiberiu Dragu and Adam Przeworski remind us, "repression is most effective when it is invisible."[19] This literature reflects the conventional understanding of preventive repression as a costly strategy whose primary aim is to achieve direct deterrence—the demobilization of the regime's challengers.

However, the practice of preventive repression in contemporary electoral autocracies is often at odds with this view. First, several strategies of preventive repression involve limited coercion. Contemporary autocrats increasingly use the law to dampen their rivals' ability and willingness to challenge the state.[20] They do so in many ways that include, among others, imposing restrictions on which groups can lawfully organize and participate in protests.[21] Using the law to label independent media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as foreign agents, contemporary autocrats also try to prevent targeted groups from engaging in activities critical of the government and to discredit them in the eyes of the public.[22] Among

the most common strategies of preventive repression today, affecting as much as two thirds of the world's population, are restrictions on assembly.[23] Responding to the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring, electoral autocracies have adopted restrictive protest requirements and imposed criminal and administrative sanctions on the organizers and participants of unauthorized protests.[24] These and similar strategies can be described as channeling—activities that do not involve the use of coercion, yet are meant to "diminish or affect future activism, limiting the range of spaces, activities, and issues in which activism can safely occur."[25]

Several strategies of preventive repression that do not involve the use of coercion, such as those reviewed in this article, are intended to be observable not only to dissidents but also to the general public. For example, the authorities deliberately publicize their decision to prevent civil rights' groups from registering as organizations with the ability to organize lawful protests, to label individuals and organizations as foreign agents, and to deny protest authorizations.[26] Information that upcoming protests are unauthorized receives widespread coverage.[27] The authorities tasked with authorizing protests communicate their decisions through statements to the press and even through the use of street signs placed in central urban spaces. During Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill protests, for example, the police staged press conferences to inform the public that upcoming protests were unauthorized.[28]

Yet legal strategies of preventive repression, such as protest permit denials, are seldom effective at preventing dissent. As I show in the supplementary material (Figure A.3), approximately one in three protests taking place in Russia in 2017 were unauthorized, yet they went ahead nonetheless. The International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Kazakhstan also estimates that in 2011, approximately 93 percent of all protests in the country were unauthorized.[29] In 2019, several of the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill protests went ahead even after the police denied permits for organizers. [30]

That preventive repression and defiant protests are publicly observable implies that they can influence public perceptions of the authorities and of their challengers.[31] To date, however, our understanding of the effect of preventive repression on evaluations of targeted groups remains limited. Given contemporary autocrats' growing reliance on nonviolent preventive

repression and the importance of protest for authoritarian stability, this gap in our understanding of the mass opinion effects of preventive repression and protest authorizations is problematic.[32] As noted above, a reciprocal relationship among protest, electoral, and political change exists in democracies and nondemocracies alike.[33] Understanding under what conditions protest authorizations influence evaluations of groups that dissent despite obstruction is of paramount importance as we try to better understand how an opposition may gain support and how preventive repression shapes the prospects for successful collective action in electoral autocracies.

PROTEST AUTHORIZATIONS, PROTESTERS, AND PROTESTS

Contentious politics scholarship has created the theoretical space for studying protest authorizations as a strategy of nonviolent repression.[34] As a starting point for theorizing the indirect effects of protest authorizations on public opinion, I review research on the effect of preventive repression and authorizations on protests, responsive repression, and media coverage. Building on this discussion, I formulate expectations about the effect of protest authorizations on public perceptions of targeted groups.

Existing research shows that authorization requirements impose layers of control on protest organizers.[35] To secure permits, protesters may be forced to accept restrictions on the time, manner, and location in which they can demonstrate. Such restrictions, which often involve pushing protests to less-visible public spaces, can undermine protesters' ability to generate awareness of their demands. Protest authorization requirements also serve to criminalize peaceful protests that go ahead without approval.[36]

Second, protest authorizations, similar to other strategies of preventive repression, can influence the types of groups that take to the streets. As research reminds us, groups that dissent despite obstruction have greater resolve and a higher threshold for violence than those deterred by preventive repression.[37] Groups organizing or participating in unauthorized events may be more determined to challenge the status quo than those who, in response to a ban on protest, choose to revise the location or time of a proposed event, continue negotiations with the authorities, or stay home. Indeed, various considerations may shape protest organizers'

decisions to go ahead with unauthorized protests, including the potential to maximize disruption and attract media coverage. According to John McCarthy and Clark McPhail, "when a group refuses to negotiate the details of the time, place, and manner of protest, it engages in disruptive behavior that is more likely to call attention to the protest than if it had quietly abided by institutional rules."[38]

Third, studies show that preventive repression can set in motion violent dynamics.[39] Groups of higher resolve—those that take to the streets without a permit—may be more likely to adopt violent tactics than others. In a similar vein, in contexts in which preventive and responsive repression are used as complements, the probability of arrests may be greater during unauthorized as opposed to authorized protests, independent of whether demonstrators are violent.

Finally, research acknowledges that protest authorization requirements can shape how protests are covered in the media. Permit denials can be used to drive up the perceived costs of protest participation and to stigmatize protest organizers and participants ahead of a protest as well as to call into question the legitimacy of the protest after it has occurred. Authoritarian media commonly describe unauthorized protests as unlawful, in a way that helps to amplify the authorities' narrative and justify their actions.[40]

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

I propose that protest authorizations can influence public opinion toward groups that dissent despite obstruction and that they can do so at two points in time: prior to the occurrence of unauthorized protests and after, that is both before the tactics that the protesters and the police use are observed and after. At both points in time, a key factor influencing the mass opinion effects of preventive repression is the (perceived) legality of unauthorized protests. Unauthorized events, taking place without the authorities' approval, are in several contexts illegal. As research in sociology and political science reminds us, perceptions of protests as legal or right are an important factor that shape identification with protesters and with their claims.[41] When protesters select unlawful tactics, generally viewed as illegitimate and unacceptable, they face greater challenges eliciting mass support.[42] In authoritarian settings,

the coverage of unauthorized protests in state-controlled media outlets further amplifies concerns about the legality of demonstrators' actions, undermining their ability to generate approval.[43] Extending the logic of research that finds that the use of unlawful or violent tactics reduces identification with protesters even among members of the public who align with protesters' profiles and support their claims, we may expect participation in unauthorized protests to dampen public support for protesters and protests, even among groups who share protesters' grievances and support their demands.[44]

The nonviolent character of the repressive act is another factor that could shape the mass opinion effects of protest authorizations. As research shows, strategies of legal repression, considered as more legitimate forms of control than strategies of repression that rely on brutal force or coercion, can damage targeted groups' reputations. Perceived to have the rightful authority to determine acceptable behavior, the law is integral to the stigmatization of protests. During the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, for example, criminal prosecutions and hearings were used to attach negative associations to protesters' reputations and to reduce support for their demands.[45] Denying protest permits may also serve to attach negative connotations to targeted groups, leading people to assume that those targeted are more violent or unreasonable than others. This could contribute to negative evaluations of groups whose protest permits have been denied, even before protests take place.

At the same time, the mass opinion effects of protest authorizations may not be homogeneous across the population, but rather contingent on beliefs about the legitimacy of the law and of the authorities. As existing research indicates, legitimacy beliefs, the "conviction that it is right and proper to accept and obey the authorities and abide by the requirements of the regime," are not uniformly distributed within or across nondemocratic regimes.[46] Within countries, differences in normative support for the law or the authorities may stem from differences in individuals' ideological proximity to the incumbent or personal experiences with the authorities and the law.[47] We might anticipate that individuals who view the law and the authorities as legitimate—that is, as having the authority to determine acceptable protest behavior—will see protest authorizations as rule of law and unauthorized protests as undesirable and unacceptable. Those who question the legitimacy of the authorities and of the

law could see protest permit rejections as rule by law, synonymous with repression.[48] In keeping with the evidence that repression can catalyze dissent through emotional mechanisms, these individuals might experience empathy toward targeted groups and, as a result, report greater support for protesters and protests.[49]

Protest Authorizations, Protesters, and Police Tactics

In this section, I ask whether the mass opinion effects of protest authorizations are conditional on the tactics that demonstrators and the police adopt during street protests. I present two competing sets of hypotheses that link protest authorizations, protester, and police tactics to public perceptions of protests and of groups that dissent despite obstruction.

On one hand, the effect of protest authorizations on evaluations of protesters and protests may not depend on protesters' or police tactics. Labeling a protest as unauthorized could undermine its legitimacy and foster a negative image of protesters and of their aims independent of whether protesters adopt violent or peaceful tactics and of whether they face arrests. On the other, the mass opinion effects of authorizations could depend on the tactics that protesters and the police adopt during protests. Failure to obtain authorization may impact support for protesters who are violent or face arrests much less than it affects support for peaceful demonstrators. As research shows, often groups that are perceived as violent and unreasonable enjoy low levels of support among the public. Additional decreases in public support for these groups are negligible if possible at all.[50] Indeed, demonstrator violence or arrests can trigger concerns about safety among the public, heightening bystanders' anxiety and fostering perceptions of protesters as extremists.[51] This perception may prevent citizens from joining protests and from supporting protesters independent of whether protests are authorized.

We can also ask whether the effects of protester and police tactics on public perceptions vary when protests are authorized and when they are not. Again, the effects of protesters' and police tactics may be independent of protests' legal status. In line with research on the reputational advantages of nonviolent resistance, we may anticipate the public to be more supportive of protests that are nonviolent as opposed to violent, whether or not they are

authorized.[52] In an authoritarian setting in particular, maintaining an image of nonviolence could help protesters to challenge the authorities' narrative that protesters pose a threat to public order. Yet protesters' and police tactics may shape support for protesters and protests when events are authorized but not when they are unauthorized. Perceived as predictable and unsurprising, demonstrator violence or arrests during unauthorized protests could convey no new information about protesters' or protest attributes, preventing individuals from further updating their assessments. Demonstrator violence or arrests may also fail to influence public perceptions of unauthorized protesters and protests when demonstrators who take to the streets without a permit are already perceived as threatening or unreasonable.[53]

THE RUSSIAN CASE

During the period under investigation, which extends from 2012 to late 2020, Russia shared many features in common with other electoral autocracies, which makes it a helpful setting for this research: extensive restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly; general uncertainty about opposition groups; and high levels of normative support for the law.

Similar to Russia, most twenty-first-century electoral autocracies formally permit protest and use the law to manage dissent.[54] According to the Civil Liberties Data set—which considers among others how easily the authorities can deny authorizations and ban protests—freedom of association and assembly in Russia between 2000-2020 was similar to that of electoral autocracies such as Turkey, Egypt, Venezuela, Chad, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and Thailand.[55] Restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Russia also typify those that electoral autocracies abroad impose.[56] Authorities tasked with authorizing protests use the process to discriminate against groups for the content of their speech. Progovernment demonstrations go ahead uninterrupted, while authorities selectively issue permits for protests critical of them and the government.[57] Local authorities enjoy wide discretion for refusing protest permits. Laws envisage penalties that range from fines to imprisonment for merely participating in or organizing a peaceful protest that does not receive authorization.[58] Finally, the Russian authorities, like their counterparts abroad, inform the public that upcoming protests are unauthorized.[59]

In Russia and across electoral autocracies, a range of groups have been denied protest authorizations. Groups that face protest rejections in Russia include members of the nonsystemic opposition—left-wing and liberal groups not represented in the state Duma—civil society groups, and local activists. And although they typically respond to unauthorized protest with arrests, the Russian authorities have also allowed some unauthorized protests to go ahead uninterrupted. What is more, for several years, the Russian authorities pursued a strategy that involved authorizing some protests while denying authorization for other events organized by the same group. For example, during the Moscow election protests of 2019, the mayor's office rejected some protest notifications but approved others submitted by the same protest organizers.[60] Accused of violating the right to freedom of assembly, the authorities emphasized that opportunities to protest lawfully were available to the opposition. Indeed, the decision to authorize some protests while denying authorization for other events organized by the same group—common across electoral autocracies—may help to maintain authorization as a plausible informational signal. That opportunities to protest remain available may also allow the authorities to claim that the opposition elects to stage unauthorized protests to maximize disruption and coverage. This rhetoric could help to portray the opposition as deliberately choosing to violate the law and could shape perceptions of groups that dissent despite obstruction as violent or unreasonable.

In Russia, state control over online and offline media also helps to sustain high uncertainty about the opposition. Even in September 2020, for example, 18 percent of Russians had never heard of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. An additional 12 percent were unable to state whether they approved of his activities.[61] Russia, like other authoritarian regimes, provides scarce information about opponents of the ruling regime and limited opportunities for citizens to observe opposition groups in action and learn about their demands.[62] In contexts in which a large share of the population has weak preferences about protesters, protests and their preventive repression may reveal rare information about the opposition, which can powerfully impact public perceptions. Existing research has demonstrated that Russia provides a fertile case for the study of the public opinion effects of protests in a nondemocracy.[63] I extend that agenda to consider whether preventive repression conditions protests' effects.

Normative support for the law in Russia is similar to normative support for the law in other authoritarian settings. For example, in the 2016 round of the International Social Survey Program, a majority of Russians reported that citizens should obey the law without exception. A majority of citizens in other electoral autocracies covered in the 2016 survey shared this view as well, such as in Venezuela and Thailand.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The empirical analysis proceeds in two steps. I begin by exploiting subnational variation in authorized and unauthorized protests taking place across Russia on June 12, 2017, combining data on local protests and arrests with a nationally representative survey of public opinion fielded weeks after the protests. Next, I draw on an original survey experiment that randomizes exposure to information about protest type (authorized or not), demonstrator tactics (whether involving clashes with the police or not), and police arrests.

The protests that took place on June 12, 2017, were organized by Alexei Navalny's Anticorruption Foundation to condemn government corruption. According to estimates, between fifty and ninety-eight thousand demonstrators took to the streets across 207 localities. Approximately 1,700 to 1,805 of them were arrested. The protests, coordinated in Moscow, were an integral part of Navalny's campaign ahead of the 2018 presidential election.[64] Same-day, nation-wide protests are also typical of protests organized by the Communist Party in Russia. On June 12, 2017, Navalny supporters were determined to have the protests go forward, independent of whether they had secured authorization, even in localities in which support for direct action was low. This tactic increases confidence that places with no protests on that day were indeed localities in which no protest notifications were submitted.

The case selection offers local-level variation in protest authorizations and arrests that allows me to test theoretical expectations. For example, protests in Sakharov Square in Moscow and in St Petersburg were unauthorized and hundreds of demonstrators were arrested. In other places, such as Kolomna in Moscow Oblast and Ishimbay in Bashkortostan, protests were unauthorized yet no demonstrators were arrest. That all protests took place on the same day, were organized by the same group, and raised the same demands helps to alleviate threats

to inference stemming from differences in either the timing, content, or the identity of organizers. The content of the protests was also well-suited for enabling protesters to generate mass support. In opinion polls conducted in early 2017, about 80 percent of Russians stated that corruption had permeated the Russian Government and that corruption was "totally unacceptable."[65] The popularity of protesters' claims makes it more challenging to find that protester approval was either higher or lower in places with authorized versus unauthorized events. Finally, as nationwide protests and protests organized by Navalny supporters commonly face preventive repression, inferences from the 2017 case are of theoretical and practical significance. Exploring whether authorizations dampened Navalny adherents' ability to generate mass support, even when staging protests that advanced popular claims, is an important task in its own right.

However, the observational design of this study is subject to potential endogeneity of permit approval patterns and public opinion. For example, if the authorities were more likely to authorize protests in places in which the opposition enjoyed greater support to begin with, findings could be spurious. What is more, as protest-event data do not capture variation in demonstrators' tactics, I am unable to address whether the effect of preventive repression is conditional on protesters' tactics. Last, how far findings from the effect of authorizations on support for Navalny protests can generalize to protests organized by other groups is unclear.

The experimental design addresses several of these concerns. By randomizing exposure to information about authorized and unauthorized protest, demonstrators' tactics, and police arrests; and comparing the attitudes of those exposed to these different frames, I study the causal effect of preventive repression and address concerns about reverse causation (support for the opposition driving protest authorizations). The experiment—embedded in a nationally representative survey of voting-age respondents fielded in September 2020—also allows me to explore whether the effect of preventive repression is conditional on demonstrators' and police tactics. And the experiment does not name a specific demonstrator group and does not identify its claims, which would have limited my ability to generalize beyond the named group and its demands. Taken together, observational and experimental data provide a rounded test of the effect of protest authorizations on attitudes toward groups that dissent despite

obstruction.

Before I present the results, I address whether respondents to either the 2017 or the 2020 surveys felt free to answer questions honestly. Although conclusively addressing questions about desirability bias is not possible with the available data, existing studies suggest that survey respondents in Russia answer survey questions openly, even sensitive questions.[66] Reassuringly, in the 2017 and the 2020 surveys, the nonresponse rate was not greater among wealthier, better educated, or urbanite respondents—groups known to self-censor.[67] In the 2017 survey, nonresponse was not higher in localities with unauthorized protest and in 2020, nonresponse did not vary as a function of treatment assignment (see supplementary material A.1.2).

Local Protests and Public Opinion: Observational Evidence

Data on the June 12, 2017, protests come from a collaboration between Meduza, an online news aggregator, and OVD-Info, an advocacy group and independent media project launched in 2011 as a means of monitoring arrests during mass protests in Russia. Protest event data, described in Appendix A.2 in the supplementary material, was collected by a team of activists, regional correspondents, and citizens supplying reports on protests and arrests. The OVD-Info and Meduza protest-event catalogue is detailed and includes a greater number of entries than other similar data sets. Each protest entry is accompanied by information about the locality and region of a protest, its type, whether it is authorized, protest turnout, and arrests.

For the empirical analysis, I combine data on local protests with information about public opinion. The survey data that I analyze come from a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of Russian voting-age respondents fielded by the Levada Centre, Russia's most reputable public opinion firm, between June 23 and 27, 2017. The Levada survey includes several questions on the June protests. I focus on an item that asks whether respondents they "approve the participants of the mass protests of June 12." Because this question asks about evaluations of protest participants in general, it does not allow us to disentangle differences in attitudes toward various groups—protest organizers, activists, and attendees. We can therefore think of responses as capturing an average evaluation of these groups. We can also reasonably

expect that assessments of protest participants are affected by their decision to participate in unauthorized protest and the way that protests unfold.

The dependent variable, approval of protest participants, ranges on a four-point scale with higher values denoting more favorable evaluations of demonstrators. Although I omit "don't know/refuse to answer" responses to this question from the analysis, results are unchanged if I include these responses and when I recode responses into a dummy variable that takes the value of one if respondents "definitely or rather/somewhat" approve of protesters (40 percent of respondents) and zero otherwise (Figure B.1 in supplementary material).

The first of the two main independent variables used in the analysis provides information on the occurrence and type of protests in respondents' locality. This three-point item allows us to compare demonstrator approval in places with no protests (48 percent of the sample), authorized protests taking place in the locations and times indicated by organizers (approximately 9 percent of respondents), and localities with unauthorized events (43 percent of respondents). The second of the two main independent variables combines information about protest status (authorized or not) and police arrests. This five-point item takes the value of one if a respondent lives in areas with authorized protest without arrests, places such as Pskov or Ekaterinburg (7 percent of respondents); two if respondents live in areas with authorized protest with arrests, places such as Perm and Stavropol (2 percent of respondents); three and four when respondents are in places with unauthorized protest without and with arrests, respectively (approximately 21 percent of respondents live in each of these localities); and five if a respondent lives in places without any protests.

The June 2017 survey also contains a number of items that serve as helpful proxies of respondents' political views. I focus on two: 1) "Which party did you vote for in the 2016 Duma election?" and 2) "In your view, in whose interests is Aleksei Navalny acting?" The past vote item takes a value of zero if in the 2016 parliamentary election a respondent voted for an opposition party, one if they voted for the ruling regime party, United Russia, and two if they abstained. Regime voters could be less likely than others to approve of antiregime demonstrators, independent of their claims or tactics. In response to the Navalny question, respondents could indicate that Navalny is acting in the interests of a group in the country's

leadership, of the West, of Russia, or of his own presidential campaign. Respondents could also state that they were unable to assess in whose interests Navalny was acting. For the analysis, I group the first two responses, expressing more hostile views of Navalny, together and compare them to all other categories. The inclusion of the past vote and Navalny support items allows us to account for the fact that attitudes toward protest organizers, or the opposition more broadly, could influence the extent to which individuals update their evaluations of protesters in response to preventive repression and arrests.[68] Using data from Russia's Central Election Commission, I also control for the local vote share of opposition parties in the 2016 Duma election. This item further helps to account for differences in local contexts, yet results are unchanged if I omit it from the analysis (Figure B.1 in supplementary material). Last, region fixed effects reduce the threat of omitted variable bias stemming from unobserved regional characteristics and help to account for the fact that several localities are within the same federal region.[69]

Table 1 reports the results. Model 1 suggests that protester approval is about 2.7 (95 percent confidence interval [CI]: 2.4, 2.99) in places with authorized protest and about 2.3 (95 percent CI: 2.21, 2.4), by approximately .4 lower, in places with unauthorized protests. Negative views of unauthorized protests, perceptions of groups participating in them as threatening or unreasonable, and these events' hostile coverage in the local press may account for these differences. What is more, several of the protests that had not secured approval to go ahead in the locations or times indicated by organizers were pushed to the outskirts of cities or had to take place in the early hours of the day. For example, in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, the June 12 protest took place at seven in the morning. Such obstacles to assembly may have dampened protesters' ability to generate support. In localities without protests, protester approval is about 2.5 and statistically indistinguishable from approval in places with authorized events.

Model 2, Table 1 suggests that protester approval was the highest, approximately 2.8, in places with authorized protests without arrests. In places in which authorized protests faced arrests, protester approval was considerably lower, by approximately one point. Approval in places with authorized protests without arrests was approximately half a point greater than protester approval in places with unauthorized protests without arrests. In contrast to places with authorized protests, protester approval did not shift as a function of arrests in places in

which protests were unauthorized. Approval of protesters was similar and statistically indistinguishable in places in which unauthorized protests faced arrests and places that did not. The public may have already viewed those participating in unauthorized events as unreasonable or threatening, such that arrests conveyed no new information about their attributes. The hostile coverage of unauthorized protests in the local press may have also compromised demonstrators' ability to gain approval, independent of arrests. Last, in places with no protests, protester approval was lower than it was in places with authorized peaceful events.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Turning to the controls, only a handful of significant variables emerge. Evidence that approval is lower among more educated respondents echoes research that shows that better educated respondents are less likely to abandon the ruling regime and side with the opposition during periods of defection cascades or protests.[70] As anticipated, United Russia voters and respondents who abstained in the most recent parliamentary election report lower approval of protest participants than opposition voters. Respondents who feel that Navalny is acting in the interests of the West or those of the Russian Government, set as the baseline category, also report lower levels of approval than other respondents.

Finally, to address the possibility that support for Navalny or for the opposition predicts protest authorizations with the available data, I run additional analysis presented in Table B.1 in the supplementary material. In the absence of nationwide, direct measures of Navalny support, I use the presence of an office for Navalny's 2018 campaign in a locality as a proxy.[71] As the campaign relied extensively on local volunteers, the location of offices was nonrandom. Campaign offices were located in cities that could coordinate Navalny's actions, places with "a lot of activist potential and local experience to draw on."[72] I examine whether local offices predict protest status or arrests in the June 12 protests, and I find that they do not. Opposition parties' combined vote share in the 2016 election does not predict permit authorizations or arrests either. Nevertheless, future work should further explore subnational variation in the use of protest authorizations in Russia.

SURVEY EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

In the experimental part of the study, which involves a 2 × 2 × 2 factorial design, respondents that I randomly assigned to eight experimental groups were presented with information about the status of protests (authorized or not), opposition tactics (respondents were told that protesters engaged in clashes with the police or that they were peaceful), and police responses to protests (with or without arrests).[73] The experiment was embedded in a nationally representative survey of public opinion conducted face-to-face in respondents' homes between September 25 and September 30, 2020.[74] The sample comprised 1,605 voting-age respondents. The survey, described in detail in A.l in the supplementary material, was implemented by Levada Market Research.

The experimental prompts read as follows: "Imagine the following scenario: Somewhere, in one of the local settlements (areas) of our region, the organizers of a protest submitted a notification about the protest to the city authorities.

• *Preventive Repression:* The local administration authorized/did not authorize the meeting. Participation in authorized/unauthorized protest is allowed by the law/is against the law.

- *Protester Tactics:* The participants of this meeting were peaceful/some of the participants of the meeting engaged in clashes with the police.
- *Police Tactics:* The police did not make arrests/arrested several demonstrators."

Subsequently, the survey asked respondents to evaluate each party discussed in the scenario. The language was: "To what extent do you personally approve or do not approve of the activities of: (i) members of the local administration who authorized/did not authorize the protest; (ii) the protest participants; (iii) the police." The protest participant approval item represents the main outcome of interest. As in the 2017 survey, we can think of this item as providing an average evaluation of all groups participating in the protest—protest organizers, activists, and attendees. Evaluations of protesters may be affected by their decision to participate in (un)authorized protests and the tactics they adopt.[75] For all questions, response

categories range on a four-point scale, from definitely approve to definitely disapprove. I recode responses so that higher values denote greater approval and omit don't know or refuse to answer responses. Results are unchanged if we code these latter responses in the middle of the approval scale, or recode the approval item into a dummy that takes a value of one if respondents support protesters and zero otherwise (Figure C.1 in the supplementary material).

The survey also asked respondents if, "on the whole, they support similar protests and would be willing to participate in them." Respondents could report that they: (1) support similar protests and would be willing to take part; (2) support similar protests yet are unwilling to take part; or (3) that they do not support similar protests and are unwilling to participate in them. Respondents could also report that they do not have a view about the protests—that is, are indifferent—or refuse to answer. I recode responses into a dummy that takes a value of one if respondents support the protests independent of whether they are willing to participate in them (43 percent of respondents) and zero otherwise, omitting don't know/refuse to answer responses. Again, I assume that support for protest is influenced by protests' legal status and the way that events unfold. Although I treat evaluations of protesters and protests as distinct outcomes that provide complementary evidence regarding the effect of preventive repression on public opinion, assessments of protesters and protests are linked. Controlling for protester approval in models that explore the effect of the *unauthorized protest* treatment on support for protests, the size of the unauthorized protest coefficient is reduced, yet remains significant (Figure C.1 in the supplementary material). This finding underscores the importance of evaluations of protesters in explaining support for protests and dissent decisions more broadly.

To capture normative support for the law, I use a question that asks whether respondents believe that "protest organizers and participants must obey the law in all circumstances, even when they disagree with the authorities' decisions." Merging normative assessments of the law and of the authorities is generally unproblematic in contexts in which the authorities powerfully represent the law and in which the obligation to obey the authorities and the law are intertwined.[76] Responses to this question range on a five-point scale, with higher values denoting greater support for the statement provided. Of note, in the Russian context, support for the law is not only a proxy for prior vote or partisanship. In the 2020 survey, a majority of respondents across voter groups agreed that protesters should obey the law unconditionally (70

percent of Putin voters and approximately 60 percent and 56 percent of respondents who abstained or voted for an opposition candidate in 2018, respectively). This finding implies that, at the time of the survey, the law enjoyed support across the electorate.

Another item that asks whether respondents think that unauthorized protests are an acceptable way for citizens to express grievances helps to capture beliefs about acceptable protest tactics.[77] I report results that interact the different treatments with the first moderator—beliefs about the law—in the article and present interactions with the second moderator—beliefs about unauthorized protests—in Appendix Table C.2 in the supplementary material. Results are consistent. However, conceptually, we may anticipate normative support for the law to dictate which protest tactics citizens see as acceptable. Normative support for the law and unauthorized protests was assessed in several questions after the experiment.[78] Respondents were also asked how they voted in the most recent presidential election and whether they approve the activities of prominent politicians.

Several features of the experimental design are worth noting. First, I told all groups that protest organizers submitted a notification. Had respondents simply heard that the protest was unauthorized, they would have been unclear about whether authorities did not issue authorization or protesters did not try to secure authorization. Second, the statement that authorized/unauthorized protests are in line with/against the law was meant to clarify and intensify the treatments and reflects information that citizens typically receive about unauthorized protest through the media. Third, the experiment considers only a narrow set of demonstrator and police tactics, focusing on the tactics most commonly used during street protests in Russia. A wider range of protester and police responses are possible. For example, the police could use violent tactics, firing teargas or beating protesters. Naming demonstrator and police tactics was important for isolating the effect of preventive repression. Absent such information, respondents could report different evaluations of protesters primarily because they thought that the participants of unauthorized protests were violent or that the protests resulted in arrests. Yet the design limits our ability to generalize to other tactics.

Last, to balance rich vignettes that provide detailed information on specific protest characteristics with the need to isolate attitudes toward different treatments, I did not name a

demonstrator group or its claims.[79] Naming a specific group or set of claims would have also affected our ability to generalize beyond the named group and its demands, which is a concern with an observational study. Respondents, however, could infer that groups whose protest permits were denied were expressing political or antigovernment views. Assuming that the inferred content of protests is the primary driver of the outcomes that we observe is not consistent with several patterns in the data. First, the unauthorized protest treatment shapes evaluations of protest participants and protests across groups that differ in their support for the claims and organizers of political protests. As Appendix Table C.3 in the supplementary material depicts, the effect of the preventive repression treatment is not conditional on respondents' partisanship, proxied with the past vote item, or on their evaluations of opposition leaders. Although regime supporters may report negative assessments of unauthorized protests and protesters because they think that the protests advance antiregime claims, this response is less likely to explain shifts in opinion among opposition supporters. Opposition voters, who are more supportive of political protests than others, are unlikely to report more negative evaluations of the participants of unauthorized versus authorized events because they infer that unauthorized protests advance political and, therefore, undesirable claims.[80] Second, if the inferred content of protests were the key driver of opinion change, it would reduce our ability to detect any differences between experimental conditions. For example, regime supporters who think that unauthorized protests advance antiregime claims could report negative evaluations of protesters independent of whether they are peaceful or violent. Yet across voter groups, evaluations of protesters participating in unauthorized protests change as a function of the tactics that protesters adopt during the protest (see Table C.4 in supplementary material). Last, in an earlier round of this study, presented in Appendix D, respondents received the additional cue that both authorized and unauthorized protests were political, and results were unchanged.[81]

UNAUTHORIZED PROTESTS AND PUBLIC OPINION

I first examine the effect of the unauthorized protest treatment on public opinion. I also consider how this compares to the other two treatments that provide information about demonstrators' and police tactics. Values reported in the left and right panels of Figure 1 rely on two sets of three ordinary least squares (OLS) models that assess the effect of each treatment on approval of protesters (left plot) and support for protests (right plot).[82] Each plot shows the conditional marginal effect of each treatment—that is, the difference between the treatment versus control groups, while keeping other covariates—age, gender, and education—at their means.[83]

Across both panels, the unauthorized protest treatment suggests that protester approval and support for protests are lower when protests are unauthorized than when they are authorized. When protests are unauthorized, compared to when they are authorized, protester approval, measured on a four-point scale, is lower by approximately –.22 (95 percent CI: –.33, –.12, predicted approval: 2.46 versus 2.68). Support for protests, measured on a binary scale, is lower by approximately –.09 (95 percent CI: –.14, –.04). Predicted support for protests is about .47 when protests are authorized and .38 when they are not. The size of the unauthorized protest treatment is comparable in magnitude to that of the violent demonstrators treatment. Approval of protesters when protest participants clash with the police is lower than approval of peaceful demonstrators, by approximately –.39 (95 percent CI: –.49, –.28). Support for protests drops from about .46 when protesters are peaceful to just .40 when they are violent. Altogether, the evidence suggests that protest permit denials can negatively impact evaluations of protesters and protests. Findings also imply that individuals disapprove of participation in unauthorized events as much as they disapprove of demonstrators' clashes with the police. Information about police arrests does not influence evaluations of protesters. Although the arrests coefficient is negative, it does not reach conventional levels of significance. Differences in support for protests in which demonstrators face arrests and do not, about –.04 (95 percent CI: –.09, .00), are only significant at the 90 percent level.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

PREVENTIVE REPRESSION AND NORMATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE LAW

Figure 1 suggests that protester approval and support for protests are lower when protests are unauthorized than when they are authorized. However, these findings might mask heterogeneity in treatment effects. According to my argument, the effect of protest authorizations might be contingent on individuals' beliefs about the legitimacy of the law.

I test this expectation by interacting the unauthorized protest treatment with an item that captures support for the statement that protesters should obey the law unconditionally. Responses to this question range on a five-point scale, with higher values denoting greater support.[84] For comparison, I also report results that interact the mediator with the other two treatments providing information about demonstrators' violence and police arrests. Table 2 shows OLS models, while Figure 2 presents the marginal effect of each treatment across the different values of the moderator.[85]

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The top panel of Figure 2 plots the interaction effects shown in models 1 and 4 of Table 2. The figure shows the conditional marginal effect of the unauthorized protest treatment across the different values of the moderator on approval of protesters (square) and support for protests (diamond). In line with expectations, findings suggest that normative support for the law conditions the effect of preventive repression. Respondents who disagree with the statement that protesters should obey the law unconditionally report similar evaluations of protesters and protests when presented with information about unauthorized and authorized events. The unauthorized protest treatment influences only the views of respondents who neither agree nor disagree with the statement that protesters should obey the law unconditionally, and those who share this view.

The middle plot of Figure 2 shows the conditional marginal effect of the violent demonstrators treatment on approval of protesters and support for protests. Information about

demonstrators clashing with the police dampens approval of protesters across respondents, with the exception of those who strongly disagree with the statement that protesters should obey the law unconditionally. Notably, the majority of respondents report less support for protesters when protesters are violent. Following other research on the undesirability of violent tactics for groups that wish to persuade the mass public, this finding suggests that violence fails even among citizens who support disobedience toward the authorities.[86] When the outcome is support for protest, the interaction between the protester tactics treatment and the moderator, shown in model 5, Table 2, fails to reach conventional levels of significance.[87] The interactions between the arrests treatment and the moderator, shown in models 3 and 6, Table 2, also fail to reach conventional levels of significance. The bottom plot of Figure 2 suggests that arrests dampen support for protests only among respondents who somewhat or strongly agree that protesters should obey the law unconditionally, yet these comparisons are marginally significant at the 90-percent level.[88]

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

PREVENTIVE REPRESSION, AND DEMONSTRATORS' AND POLICE TACTICS

I conclude the analysis by examining whether the effect of protest authorizations is conditional on the tactics that demonstrators and the police adopt during protests. I also consider whether the public opinion effects of protesters' and police tactics depend on protest authorizations. Models 1 and 3 in Table 3 interact the unauthorized protest with the violent demonstrators treatment. Models 2 and 4 interact the unauthorized protest with the arrests treatment instead. Figure 3 presents conditional effects from regression estimates. Predicted probabilities and marginal effects from the OLS models shown in Table 3 are in Table C.5 in the supplementary material.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The interaction between the unauthorized protest and violent protesters' tactics treatments suggests that protest authorizations dampen protester approval when protesters are peaceful but not when they clash with the police. Findings reported in the top left plot of Figure 3 (square) suggest that preventive repression undermines approval of peaceful demonstrators by approximately –.36 (95 percent CI: –.50, –.22), yet does not shift assessments of violent protesters. The top right plot of Figure 3 further suggests that while violent tactics dampen protester approval when protests are authorized and when they are not, their effect is greater when protests are authorized.

The interaction between the unauthorized protest and violent demonstrators treatments, shown in model 3, Table 3, fails to reach conventional levels of significance. As the top left plot of Figure 3 shows, preventive repression dampens support for protests both when protesters are peaceful and when they are not. The top right plot of Figure 3 further suggests that violent tactics dampen support for protests when events are authorized (–.07, 95 percent CI: –.13. –.00) but have no effect when they are unauthorized.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Taken together, these findings imply that preventive repression may compromise peaceful demonstrators' ability to gain the support of the public. Participation in unauthorized protests, like the use of violent tactics, may shape perceptions of protesters as unreasonable, or as more threatening than other groups. As existing research shows, when the public perceives groups of protesters as unreasonable and identifies with them only at low levels, support for the protesters is unlikely to change as a function of the tactics that they adopt.[89] This previous finding could explain why preventive repression does not influence approval of violent protesters, who are already perceived as more threatening than peaceful groups. Perceptions of groups participating in unauthorized protests as unreasonable or threatening could also explain why protester approval is higher when protests are authorized compared to when they are unauthorized. Being told that the participants of unauthorized protests engaged in violence is

perhaps less surprising and informative for respondents than being told that participants in authorized protests engaged in violence.

Indeed, given the evidence, we may ask whether the unauthorized protest and violent demonstrators treatments convey the same type of information. If this were the case, we would expect differences in evaluations of groups participating in authorized and violent versus unauthorized and peaceful protests to be statistically indistinguishable. Yet as I show in Appendix Figure C.3, approval of peaceful protesters participating in unauthorized protest is greater than approval of violent demonstrators in authorized or unauthorized protests. This finding suggests that the unauthorized protest and violent demonstrators treatments do not necessarily convey the same information about protesters' attributes. The evidence also suggests that the choice to employ nonviolent tactics significantly improves the public's perceptions of protesters when protest organizers are faced with the impossibility of obtaining authorizations.[90]

The interaction between the unauthorized protest and arrests treatments—shown in models 2 and 4 of Table 3 and plotted in the bottom two panels of Figure 3—fails to reach conventional levels of significance. Protester approval and support for protests are lower when protests are unauthorized than when they are authorized, both when protesters face arrests and when they do not. When protests are unauthorized and when they are not, arrests do not shape public opinion.

DISCUSSION

Why have protest authorizations been effective at dampening support for protesters and protest in Russia, and how far is the argument likely to travel? First, and as already discussed, the Russian authorities' strategy to authorize some protests while denying authorization for other events organized by the same groups could have helped to maintain authorization as a plausible informational signal. In more restrictive electoral autocracies, in which the authorities simply decline all authorizations for protests, authorization carries no informational signal about the attributes of targeted groups. Electoral autocracies, such Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Belarus, China, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia, for example, permit only progovernment demonstrations and routinely arrest activists to prevent them from attending protests.[91] Faced with the impossibility

of obtaining permits, protest organizers in these regimes bypass the authorization process altogether. The public may view unauthorized protests in these settings not as a strategy that protesters use to maximize disruption, but rather as the only avenue available for groups to express grievances. These regimes are beyond the scope of my theory.

Second, the type of attitudinal updating that underpins my argument may be applicable to a range of cases that feature high uncertainty about the opposition and weak preferences for or against groups targeted by preventive repression. Such uncertainty may reflect that the targeted groups are relatively new, or could stem from extensive state control over online and offline media that prevents protesters from generating awareness and support for their claims. Protests and their preventive repression could have a weaker effect on public opinion in settings in which most citizens have a strong preference for or against targeted groups. In short, when groups participating in unauthorized protests are already supported at extremely low or high levels, protests and their preventive repression may be less likely to influence the levels of support they enjoy. Finally, as findings suggest, beliefs about the obligation to obey the law and the authorities, as well as related support for unauthorized protest tactics, condition the extent to which unauthorized protests shape opinions. Variation in these beliefs may meaningfully predict responses to unauthorized protests and legal repression beyond Russia. The greater the share of citizens who view the law as legitimate, the greater the negative effect of permit denials on perceptions of groups that dissent despite obstruction.[92]

At the same time, beliefs about the legitimacy of the law and of the authorities are endogenous to government action.[93] That opportunities to organize lawful protests remain available in electoral autocracies may help to sustain beliefs about the legitimacy of the law. Although normative support for the law is often slow to change, it is not immutable.[94] Blatant violations of the law in electoral autocracies such as Russia may encourage individuals to view the law as an instrument of repression. In Russia and beyond, the long-term legacy of legal repression strategies may well be to undermine the legitimacy of the law.

This study focuses on evaluations of protesters, but additional analysis that Appendix Figure C.4 shows suggests that permit denials can have adverse consequences for the authorities as well. Preventive repression does not undermine the negative effect of arrests on

evaluations of the police. Permit denials also dampen evaluations of the authorities who fail to authorize protests. The decline in support for the authorities is indeed greater in magnitude than the decline in support for the protesters. This finding implies that although denying authorizations could be an effective strategy for undermining the legitimacy of protest in the eyes of the public, it is also short-sighted. Authorities may deny permits without full knowledge of how doing so hurts their reputation. Or perhaps they care little about damaging their reputation among those constituencies who are affected by this information. Further research should engage with this important trade-off, exploring why and when local authorities are more likely to deny authorizations.

CONCLUSION

The significance of preventive repression and protest for authoritarian stability is an important subject of debate among scholars of comparative politics and conflict studies. An influential scholarship agrees that protest success in electoral autocracies often depends on protesters' ability to gain the support of the public, appealing to constituencies beyond their core supporters.[95] Protesters' ability to generate support for the groups they represent, the protests they stage, and the grievances they advance enhances the prospects for successful collective action and strengthens the opposition's electoral performance.[96] The central argument of this work is that processes that occur in the lead-up to protest, such as strategies of preventive repression observable to the general public, may meaningfully impact the effects of protests on public opinion.

With the benefit of unusually detailed protest-event data and of an original survey experiment, this article explores the effect of protest authorizations as a strategy of preventive repression on public perceptions of protesters and protests. Using evidence from the effect of nationwide anticorruption protests, I show that preventive repression can compromise demonstrators' ability to generate approval, even when protests advance popular and uncontroversial demands. Using a factorial design that manipulates information about the status of protests, and demonstrators' and police tactics, I also show that preventive repression influences evaluations of demonstrators and dampens support for protests. Last, results suggest

that the effect of unauthorized protests is contingent on individuals' beliefs about the need to obey the law and the tactics that protesters use.

Findings on protest authorizations' effects on mass opinion imply that the audience of preventive repression in nondemocracies may be broader than conventionally assumed by studies of preventive repression that view such repression as a strategy that allows dictators to deter opposition and keep repression clandestine. By using the law to deny protesters the opportunity to stage legally sanctioned protests, nondemocratic governments can undermine targeted groups' ability to generate support, dampening the prospects for successful collective action. Other strategies of preventive repression that rely on the law can have similar consequences. For example, legislation targeting independent media and civil society groups as foreign agents may serve to discredit these groups in the eyes of the public, compromising their ability to credibly challenge the authorities. By denying civil society groups the opportunity to register as organizations, authorities can also criminalize these groups' political participation and compromise their ability to generate mass support either through protests or other activities.

Findings from this study also have implications for research on what motivates autocrats to engage in preventive repression. The observation that preventive repression may allow autocrats to undermine support for the opposition helps to explain why regimes with the capacity to stifle dissent sometimes adopt preventive repression strategies that create weak deterrence incentives and are deliberately observable to the general public. However, more theoretical work needs to establish the conditions under which visible manifestations of opposition do not represent failures of repressive regimes, but rather reflect a deliberate strategy that incumbents use to manipulate the public's beliefs about their opponents.

Implications also follow for the scholarship on protest management in authoritarian states. Although existing research focuses on autocrats' decision about whether to allow protest and studies how autocrats manage other sources of contention such as elections, we know relatively less about the various legal strategies that autocrats who allow protest may use to manage these protests.[97] Evidence suggests that contemporary autocrats' reliance on nonviolent repression has increased. Thus, continuing to investigate the consequences of protest authorizations on

dissent, responsive repression, and public opinion represents a fruitful avenue for future research.[98] What is more, given the diverse consequences of protest authorizations, comparative protest-event catalogues appear useful to record whether protests are authorized. Comparative data will allow additional insights into the conditions under which regimes use preventive and responsive repression as complements rather than substitutes.

At the same time that this work provides empirical evidence relevant to ongoing debates in authoritarian politics, it also raises questions that it cannot answer. For example, future research should investigate nuances in assessments of protest leaders, committed activists, and protest attendees, as well as further explore the effect of preventive repression on evaluations of local national authorities, and of the police. Research could also assess whether and how characteristics of responsive repression, such as the extent to which it is targeted, condition the effects of preventive repression on public opinion. Additional evidence should seek to identify how preventive repression shapes attitudes toward groups that, faced with permit rejections, elect not to go forward with plans to protest. Scholarship would similarly benefit from considering in greater detail the mechanisms that drive responses to preventive repression, such as emotions, and the extent to which ideological proximity to protesters' claims influences the mass opinion effects of preventive repression.

Despite its limitations, this article's findings show that by using protest authorizations as a strategy of preventive repression, nondemocratic governments may undermine their rivals' ability to generate mass support. This work constitutes one of the first attempts to causally study the effect of preventive repression on public opinion of targeted groups in nondemocracies, with implications for research on protest management and studies of how authoritarianism is contested in the streets.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article can be found at https://TKTKTKTKTK

Data

Replication files for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/CP6OZY

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KEY WORDS

preventive repression, authoritarian politics, public opinion, protests, Russia

[1] E.g., Wasow 2020; Lohmann 1994; Smyth 2020.
[2] E.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Wasow 2020.
[3] Skaaning 2019.
[4] E.g., Robertson 2011.
[5] E.g. Ritter and Conrad 2016; Truex 2019.

[6] E.g. Dragu and Przeworski 2017.
[7] Smyth and Soboleva 2016; Tertytchnaya 2020.
[8] Protest authorization processes encompass procedures that involve issuing protest permits and reviewing protest notifications. Across contexts, protest authorization or permit and notification requirements apply for different types of protests. In the United States, for example, permits are required for large marches or events that could disrupt traffic. For other types of protests, notifying the authorities of a planned protest action is enough and protesters do not need to obtain authorization (see, for example: ACLU, 2023. Know Your Rights: Protesters' Rights. At: https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights). In places such as Azerbaijan and Tajikistan organizers need authorization for most types of protests. In electoral autocracies such as Russia or Kazakhstan, the authorities use the protest notification process as a de facto authorization procedure. Notifying the authorities of a planned protest action, as formally required by law, is not enough. Organizers need to secure the authorities' approval. The authorities can deny authorization of the organizers' preferred time or location of protest and can ban protests deemed to be in violation of the constitution (See, for example: "Project of OVD-Info about how legislation regulates freedom of assembly in the countries of the former USSR". At: https://postsoviet.ovdinfo.org/en).

Under escalated force policing, prevalent in democracies such as the United States until the 1970s, permits were also issued selectively; see, e.g., McCarthy and McPhail 1998. Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, were often arrested for demonstrating without a permit. On Martin Luther King's 1961 arrest in Albany, Georgia and 1963 arrest in Birmingham, Alabama, see: Fairclough, A. 1995. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* University of Georgia Press.
[9] Freedom House 2015.
[10] Trascasas and Casey-Maslen 2014; Freedom House 2015; Rajah 2012, 9.
[11] Deshman et al. 2013; Freedom House 2015, 9, 39.
[12] However, see the 2003, 2005 and 2015 Latinobarometer surveys, which ask about participation in authorized and unauthorized protests. Available at: https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp.
[13] E.g., Earl 2011. For electoral autocracies, see e.g. Moustafa 2014; Jones 2020.
[14] E.g., Ritter and Conrad 2016; Sullivan 2016.
[15] E.g., Dragu and Przeworski 2017; Truex 2019.
[16] E.g., Manekin and Mitts 2022; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Wasow 2020.
[17] E.g., Ritter and Conrad 2016; Dragu and Przeworski 2017.
[18] E.g., Sullivan 2016; Truex 2019.
[19] Dragu and Przeworski 2017, 85.
[20] The law is used to stifle opposition beyond the streets. For example, autocrats use courts to silence elite rivals; Shen-Bayh 2018.
[21] Bakke, Mitchell, and Smidt 2020.
[22] E.g., Bakke, Mitchell, and Smidt 2020; Buyse 2018.
[23] Civicus 2020.
[24] E.g., Lemon and Antonov 2020.
[25] Earl 2003, 51.
[26] E.g., Buyse 2018
[27] E.g., OVD Info 2019.
[28] *News.gov.hk*. 2019. 'Police object to Yuen Long protest'. July 25. At https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/07/20190725/20190725_191321_164.html?type=category&name=law_order&tl=t, accessed August 20, 2022.

[29] *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*. 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kazakhstan. At: https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2011/sca/186466.htm, Accessed August 20, 2022.
[30] See for example *BBC News*. 2019. Hong Kong: Timeline of extradition protests. September 4. At https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49340717, accessed August 20, 2022.
[31] E.g., Frye and Borisova 2019.
[32] On nonviolent repression, see e.g. Dragu and Lupu 2021. For the importance of protest for authoritarian stability, see Lohmann 1994; Kuran 1997.
[33] McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Smyth and Soboleva 2016.
[34] E.g., Earl 2003; Bablus 1973; Boykoff 2007.
[35] E.g,. McCarthy and McPhail 1998.
[36] Freedom House 2015.
[37] Ritter and Conrad 2016.
[38] McCarthy and McPhail 1998, 119.
[39] Waddington 1992.
[40] OVD Info 2019.
[41] Lupu and Wallace 2019; Bablus 1973.
[42] Exploring the origins of protest repertoires falls beyond the scope of this work, yet constitutes a fruitful avenue for future research. In democracies and nondemocracies, legislation and protest restrictions powerfully influence which tactics are seen as acceptable; Tilly 1978; on mass support see also Crozat 1998.
[43] Pop-Eleches and Way 2022.
[44] See for example Muñoz and Anduiza 2019; Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018.
[45] Barkan 2006; Shriver, Bray, and Adams 2018.
[46] Easton 1975, 451.
[47] On ideological proximity to an incumbent, see Barwick and Dawkins 2020. For personal experience with authorities or the law, see Levi 1997.
[48] Nonet and Selznick 1978, 18.
[49] E.g., Pearlman 2013.
[50] E.g., Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018.
[51] On bystanders' anxiety, see Branton et al. 2015. For perceptions of protesters as extremists, see Lohmann 1994, 53.
[52] E.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Muñoz and Anduiza 2019.
[53] E.g., Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018.
[54] E.g., Scheppele 2018; Moustafa 2014.
[55] Skaaning 2019.
[56] Appendix A.3 describes the process for obtaining protest authorization in Russia. Authorizations were a tool of political control during the last years of the USSR as well. To justify a ban on protest, the authorities in the USSR also referred to "threats to public order and to the safety of citizens"; Beissinger 2002, 337–38.
[57] Freedom House 2015.
[58] Trascasas and Casey-Maslen 2014.
[59] Appendix A.4 describes how the Russian authorities inform the public about unauthorized events.
[60] Tkachenko, Konstantin and Kuznetsova Evgeniya. 2019. "Vlasti Moskvi zayavili o soglasovanii mitinga 10 avgusta" ["Moscow's authorities announced the authorization of the rally on August 10". *RBC*. August 1. At https://www.rbc.ru/society/01/08/2019/5d432de69a7947abb427cae8, accessed August 20, 2022.

[61] https://www.levada.ru/en/2020/11/02/alexey-navalny/
[62] E.g., Magaloni 2006.
[63] E.g., Frye and Borisova 2019; Tertytchnaya 2020.
[64] Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 80-6.
[65] See: https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/04/21/corruption/
[66] E.g. Frye and Borisova 2019.
[67] Robinson and Tannenberg 2019.
[68] Local protests do not predict responses to either of these two questions and results are consistent if we omit them or introduce them in separate models.
[69] In Appendix Figure B.1, I report analysis that controls for a proxy of regional democracy from the Petrov-Titkov index. Controlling for regional democracy helps to account for the fact that less democratic regions could be less likely to grant permits and to allow protesters and civil society to build support, but results in the loss of all Crimean respondents as the democracy indicators were published prior to Crimea's annexation.
[70] E.g., Hale and Colton 2017; Tertytchnaya 2020.
[71] I only consider offices active by June 2017. Results are unchanged when I omit offices that opened in June.
[72] Dollbaum, Lallouet, and Noble 2021, 84-6.
[73] For randomization, Levada Market Research used a random number generator that relies on the number of vignettes and the target experimental sample size.
[74] In Russia, the lockdown imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had eased in May 2020. In August 2020, Levada Market Research was among a handful of public opinion firms that resumed face-to-face surveys. In Appendix A.1.1, I discuss how the pandemic may have impacted findings. In Appendix D, I compare this study's findings to research conducted in March 2020, before restrictions were imposed, and show that results are unchanged.
[75] Although the subject of the sentence—"Some of the participants of the meeting engaged in clashes with the police"—emphasizes the agency of demonstrators, an alternative wording, for example "protesters attacked police officers", would make the treatment even clearer.
[76] Jackson et al. 2012, 4.
https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30157/1/Jackson_etal_Compliance_with_the_law_and_policing_by_consent_2012.pdf here is it page 4. I have amended the entry in the bibliography to cite this version, I hope this is acceptable.
[77] Response categories were: "I find unauthorized protests acceptable and have participated in them"; "I find these protests acceptable but have not participated in them"; and "I find these protests unacceptable and have not participated in them."
[78] Assignment to the authorized versus unauthorized experimental groups does not predict responses to these questions. The correlation between the unauthorized protest indicator and the two items that capture support for the law and unauthorized protests is weak, at –.035 (p = .16) and .027 (p = .27), respectively.
[79] See also Lupu and Wallace 2019, 417.
[80] E.g., Levada Centre Protest Potential Indicators, https://www.levada.ru/2021/09/06/protestnye-nastoeniya/
[81] A conjoint experiment was not possible as participants completed some of the questionnaires on paper.
[82] Balance tests are reported in Appendix Table C.6. To improve efficiency, the analysis includes standard demographic controls: age, gender, and education. Results are unchanged if controls are omitted. As Figure C.2 in the supplementary material also shows, results are unchanged if we treat the *protest support* outcome as consisting of several unordered alternatives in the choice set and replicate the analysis using multinomial probit models.

[83] Full results are in Appendix Table C.1. Robustness checks are in Appendix Figures C.1 and C.2.
[84] I have coded all eighty-one "Don't Know/Refuse to Answer" responses given in response to this question in the middle of the response scale as "Neither agree nor disagree." Results are unchanged if I drop them from the analysis.
[85] Fully saturated models that dummy out the treatment and moderator and include all interaction terms between them yield consistent results.
[86] E.g., Pop-Eleches, Robertson, and Rosenfeld 2022.
[87] Comparisons between the treatment and control groups are significant at the 90 percent level for all respondents, with the exception of those who "Strongly disagree" that protesters should obey the law.
[88] In Appendix Table C.7, I probe the robustness of the single-interaction models shown in Table 2, using fully moderated models and post–double selection models.
[89] E.g., Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018.
[90] When protesters are violent, respondents also report lower support for unauthorized, as opposed to authorized, protests. This finding again implies that the two treatments do not convey the exact same information.
[91] Skaaning 2019.
[92] Across settings, the overall opinion effects of protest authorizations depend on the distribution of beliefs about the legitimacy of the law in the population. In polarized contexts, in which beliefs about the law are divided across pro- and antiregime lines, the average effect of protest authorizations depends on the size of these groups.
[93] Tyler 2013.
[94] Easton 1975; Tilly 1978.
[95] Lohmann 1994.
[96] Smyth 2020.
[97] For autocrats' decisions to allow protests, see Lorentzen 2013. For how autocrats manage other sources of contention, see for example Simpser 2013.
[98] For evidence on autocrats' reliance on nonviolent repression, see for example Guriev and Treisman 2019.