# Unheard Voices: Violent Protests in Democratic Countries and their Successes

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## Abstract

Violent protests are unconventional political processes that are not recognized by the United Nations as legitimately belonging to the right to freedom of expression. Although democracies offer many different opportunities for populations to raise concerns or hold leaders accountable, such as voting rights and plebiscites, sometimes citizens' voices are not heard and the spaces left vacant by democracy's shortcomings are supplanted by violence. It is a researched field with a paradoxical puzzle that deserves more academic attention. This study investigates ten different factors and their correlation with successful violent protests in democratic countries. Success is considered a relevant policy or leadership change. Logistic regression in R was used to analyze a dataset of 84 violent protests held between 2017 and 2024, with 26 successes. Since the amount of data available was limited, the results had low statistical significance, which opens the floor for further research. Out of the variables researched, three of them showed a statistical correlation with success outcomes. They accounted for all but two successes. This research concludes that, in democratic countries, violent protests conducted by historically minority groups, with complex demands, or under a government that is not left leaning, are the most likely to be successful.

## Keywords

*Violent protests, Democratic countries, Successful social movements, Contentious politics*

## Introduction

Despite violent protests being held in a highly negative regard, many protesters continue to turn to violent means to make their voices heard. In France, they are pejoratively called "casseurs", which could roughly translate to hooligans. Violent protests are generally considered to be less common and less effective than nonviolent ones in democracies (Shuman et al, 2024), as the domestic institutions offer opportunities to voters to raise concerns about their government, as a distinction to autocratic regimes. This paper aims to examine the variables associated with the success of violent protests, to uncover the factors linked to both triumph and the effectiveness of violent demonstrations.

The phenomenon of protests has always sparked contentious debates (Borbáth, Gessler, 2020; Frey, et al., 1992), especially regarding the political sphere, which continues to wonder what are the conditions that can determine the success of these forms of mobilization. The research question of this study is: "Under what circumstances are violent protests successful?". This paper intends to fill a gap in the literature that has primarily researched peaceful protests and their capacity to establish substantial changes in the political and social landscape (United Nations, 2022).

Violent protests are controversial as they raise significant moral, political, and social concerns, particularly regarding the methods through which they are carried out. However, they can sometimes achieve their objectives, leading to observable impacts on public policies, social change, and shifts in political power, ultimately securing achievements (Steedly, H. R., & Foley, J. W., 1979). The objective of this study is to establish correlations between contextual factors and success.

This paper first discusses previous literature and theoretical perspectives on protests and their success in general, defining what are the expectations from the research and documenting the various significance of the variables that are taken into consideration (such as the concept of violence and the concept of success). Secondly, it goes on to explain the methods used to gather and analyze data, respecting the quality standards of quantitative research. The results are presented in a third and final section, with a complete and illustrated analysis of the data.

## Theoretical Framework

Protests are carried out in public spaces and express dissent, opposition, denunciation, or demands to influence decision-making (United Nations, 2022). They are part of the democratic political process, as they are a bottom-up method used by a population that does not feel heard to bring an issue onto the political agenda or express their disagreement on a political matter. The issue of social mobilization has been pondered at length by the representatives of the United Nations, thus this research adopts their definition, which is institutionalized and could be seen as an internationally accepted, such as reiterated in the UNDP policy document on “Protests, human rights and conflict prevention” (Sapienza et al, 2024). This paper exclusively analyzes violent demonstrations carried out in democratic countries.

The right to protest and hold demonstrations is seen as upholding the fundamental freedom of expression (Amnesty International, 2022). It is noteworthy, however, that this right only exists as long as the manifestation is peaceful. A physically violent assembly is not considered to uphold human rights by the United Nations (2022). It is also a controversial topic for people as perspectives depend on the perceived threat and the political ideology of the different parties (Turner, 1969; Brown and Harlow, 2019). The United Nations defined violent protests as "involving physical force against others that was likely to result in injury or death or serious property damage" (United Nations, 2022). This paper adheres to the UN’s definition of violent protests for its straightforward perspective that highlights the limit between the freedom of assembly and contentious politics.

One can define a protest success according to different scales. Any impact from whether more people joined the cause or having caught media attention for the first time, to changing a country’s regime could signify change.

Drent and Wouters split internal and external drivers of success, the former included a protest's persistence and the latter its disruptive power (2024). A more psychological perspective to grassroots movements explored the support and the changes in mindset that led to broader social change (Nardini et al, 2020). The authors took the party to focus on ostentatious and quantifiable changes that directly answered to the demands expressed by the protesters: policy and/or leadership change.

Democratic countries are considered in this paper as those having a V-dem score higher than 0,5 in the liberal democracy index, a trustworthy institute that provides a "multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy" (V-dem Project, 2024). Indeed, the top half countries of the index can be considered to provide enough opportunities for their population's opinion to be heard. In countries that have democratic processes, it would seem unlikely that political debates escalate into violence. Then, the circumstances that lead violent protests to successful outcomes will be explored through quantitative analysis. The paper is investigating the different factors related to protests and attempting to find which ones correlate with higher success rates. The literature review will draw upon previous research on which factors are the most relevant to account for.

Regular democratic processes allow a population to make their opinion heard and keep policy-makers accountable, such as when one signs a petition or votes in an election. When no peaceful solution is found to a pressing issue, desperate protesters start using violent means (Gustafson, 2019). They hope to raise both the popular awareness and the stakes for the government to comply with their demands. It is important to create studies that focus exclusively on violent protests, as they represent a failure of the democratic processes.

The societal relevance of this paper is that it could reach both activists and policymakers, both sides need to communicate and collaborate better to avoid manifestations escalading into violence. It implies the creation of policies to address grievances before protesters feel compelled to turn to violent means. Indeed, in his book "The Rationality of Political Protests", Karl-Dieter Opp uses theories of political science to argue that the Rational Choice Model explains protesters' behaviors (2019). In the case of violent protests, the benefits of using violent means are considered from a utilitarian perspective by the protesters to counterbalance the costs.

## Literature Review

Firstly, the separation between violent and non-violent protest in study is a recent development. As such, research have been conducted on protests in the United States of America: Steedly and Foley (1979) expanded Finch's (1975) research on social protests, reviewing and presenting the outcomes of social movements. This paper found factors and strategies for success without making a distinction between violent and peaceful protests. They claim the major factor for success is when the protest demands do not depend on the ousting of an established member of the community from office. It can be implied that the "threat to the status quo" reduces drastically the success rate. A reanalysis by Frey et al. (1992) mitigates those findings and shows how an ongoing national "economic crisis or war" is more likely to bring about success. A more recent study on media coverage showed how "media portrayal" defines the mere viability of protests for minorities' rights (Brown and Harlow, 2019). These different

factors will be taken into account and then put into a broader and more recent context to assess their relevance in 21st-century democracies' violent protests, but also indifferently of the topic of the protest.

Secondly, many studies consider what makes protests more likely to happen. Checking whether these triggers are also factors for success can show a trend in people's expectations for success which incentivizes protests. A recent study investigated which political camp is more likely to engage in protests, also considering whether a "left-leaning political environment" triggers higher rates of protests (Borbath and Gessler, 2020; Kostelka and Rovny, 2019). It will be relevant to verify this factor, as it could show whether a specific regime favors the protests' success. Moreover, three papers highlighted the importance of different types of networks for successful outcomes. Kingstone et al. showed "coalitions" increased success rates (2018), and Hussain and Howard showed "social media" functions in allying more people to the cause (2013), which is supported by the 2016 paper of Barberà and Jackson.

Thirdly, the most recent research on protest success studied broad samples and suggested that, on the one hand, "waves" of violent protests increase success likeliness (Onursal et al, 2024). On the other hand, cohesive ideology and "precise demands" improve the odds of success (Mueller, 2022), it is a similar factor to the reanalysis of Finch's research as the concept of unity, and "specific and limited goals", for which single issue or clearly defined demands tend to be better heard (Steedly and Foley, 1979; Frey et al, 1992).

To conclude, the selected factors that will be analyzed in this research are "threat to the status quo", "historically victimized group" and a "negative media portrayal" as factors that would impede success. On the other hand, an "economic crisis or war", a "left-leaning government", "trending on social media", a "strong political network" and "specific and limited goals" are factors expected to drive success. The hypotheses of this paper are the following:

Hypotheses - Negative Impacts

H01: a protest threatening the status quo has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H11: a protest threatening the status quo has a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H02: protesters being former victims of discrimination have no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H12: protesters being former victims of discrimination have a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H03: negative media coverage has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H13: negative media coverage has a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

Hypotheses - Positive Impacts

H04: a protest's peak size has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H14: a protest's peak size has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H05: the protester's network has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H15: the protester's network has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H06: a protest trending in the media has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H16: a protest trending in the media has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H07: a protest happening during a crisis has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H17: a protest happening during a crisis has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H08: a protest with well-defined goals has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H18: a protest with well-defined goals has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H09: a protest happening under a left-wing government has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H19: a protest happening under a left-wing government has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H010: a protest happening repetitively has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H110: a protest happening repetitively has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

Previous research on protests tends to examine the factors contributing to their success without distinguishing between the use of violent and nonviolent means and account for a single factor driving success. Furthermore, they tend to assess samples of manifestations regionally rather than globally, such as Kingstone et al (2013), or Mosely and Moreno (2010) focusing on Latin American countries. The analysis of broader protest samples is a recent trend in academia. The approach of this paper is to narrow down the analysis of protest success to violent ones while, at the same time, expanding the sample to all recent protests from democratic countries to create generalizable results.

This paper's humble contribution puts a focus on recent violent protests in democratic countries and analyzes the factors that lead them to success or failure. No previous research has explored this narrow topic. Thus, it would allow a better understanding of why recent movements in democratic countries taking up violent approaches succeed, and others do not. Success is defined as the achievement of a desired outcome (Inniss and Crawford, 2024), which is difficult to measure as a dichotomous variable. To serve the purpose of this paper, and in accordance with the codebook from Carnegie Endowment (2024), a successful protest is considered one that drives policy or leadership change relevant to the demands of the protesters. It does not account for symbolic success, as it is an immaterial concept that is hardly measurable.

The present paper adopts an all-encompassing approach to understand and quantify what are the common denominators in violent protests that lead to success in democratic countries. There is no previous research systematically analyzing them. For this reason, aiming for a more comprehensive and global insight that would be generalizable to modern-day protests in democratic countries, this paper uses a quantitative method. The benefits of analyzing violent protests quantitatively are threefold. Firstly, it allows for a greater amount of data to be collected, producing more detailed and generalizable results (Corbetta, 2003: 37). Secondly, the analysis of such an extensive data matrix will be facilitated using quantitative methods, despite lowering the precision of its content (ibid). Thirdly, the results of the research will have higher verifiability and duplicability than a qualitative analysis on the topic (ibid). Thus, by analyzing violent protests based on their quantifiable properties, this paper adopts a neo-positivist perspective (idem: 18).

Findings indicate that the use of violence is more likely to influence policy change than peaceful assemblies (Shuman et al, 2024). Nevertheless, there is also evidence suggesting that nonviolent action seems to consistently have an advantage in driving mobilization. A significant limitation of this paper is its inability to take mobilization as a success factor, given the research time constraint. The data availability is limited since Carnegie's protest tracker started collecting data in 2017, but the authors argue that this issue can be mitigated by their contemporaneous occurrences, which implies up-to-date research that is easily generalizable to the modern era. Furthermore, the paper primarily sources its knowledge from Global North scholars, which decreases its applicability to countries in Asia and Africa notably. However, researching democratic countries reduces drastically the possibility of using sources of countries where political systems tend to not reach an LDI score higher than 0,5. It is a limit that must be considered when reading this paper.

It could be criticized that this paper undermines the efficacy of peaceful protest practices. Nonetheless, violent protests are an extreme practice, in their intensity and impact. They stand within the range of unconventional

political processes, also called contentious politics, which makes their existence in democratic countries a puzzle that deserves to be addressed in exclusivity from nonviolent ones.

This paper does not pretend to establish a causal link between context factors of protests and their success: it is a quantitative analysis intending to reveal the factors correlated with successful violent protests. Finally, interdisciplinary perspectives are scarcely accounted for in this research. The impacts of psychology, social dynamics, and media framing are only touched upon in 3 factors: "historically victimized group", "peak size" and "negative media coverage". Furthermore, reliance on quantitative data can omit individual qualitative characteristics of protests, but it has the advantage of producing results that can be generalized to cases in democratic countries.

This research will have sensitive implications, and the authors must consider ethical components. Namely, this paper does not legitimize, nor encourage, the use of violent means to reach desired outcomes. There is a risk its results could be misused or promote violent strategies. Creating knowledge and filling a gap within the academic discourse is the priority of this paper. Its secondary role is to inform policymakers to use preventive measures. Improving the reactivity to nonviolent political processes could avoid violent escalations in times of discord.

## Design and Method

The research question "Under what circumstances are violent protests successful?" aims to find what societal, economic, and political factors correlate with higher policy changes in protests when protestors are using violent means to reach their desired goal. The database created for this research was built from secondary data. The Protest Tracker dataset made by the Think Tank Carnegie Endowment established the basis of the collection process, gathering most protests since 2017. It was modified in order to fit their research expectations.

Firstly, since the research focused only on democratic countries, to determine what countries are democratic, the LDI (Liberal democratic index) average between 2017 and 2024 from the V-dem scores (V-dem Project 2024) was calculated, as it was considered the most complete measuring scale for democracy. Its complexity was prioritized over the use of the Freedom House scale because it was deemed all-encompassing. If the mean was equal or superior to 0.5, the country was considered democratic and thus stood in the dataset. Countries with a mean lower than 0.5 were thus discarded.

Out of the democratic countries in the dataset, the protests were either seen as violent (1) or nonviolent (0). The nonviolent protests were not considered. By the definition given earlier, violence was registered as such when proof was found of damage to property, injuries, or death in the media. Out of the 715 protests (in democratic or undemocratic countries; violent or nonviolent), only 84 remained (in democratic countries; violent).

While not reaching a sample size of 100 violent protests, this was collectively considered enough data for a representative quantitative analysis for the purposes of our research. As master students, the research focused on resources that were available at the time. Therefore, the sample size was considered meaningful while

acknowledging its limits. Further research can create an all-encompassing violent protest dataset starting in the 21st century to reach more precise and generalizable results.

Secondly, the protests that did not present the variable "significant outcome" were checked individually to consider whether they could be considered successes. This variable was changed to "success" and was coded binarily (0 = unsuccessful, 1 = successful), according to the aforementioned definition of success. The database presented 26 successful protests and 58 unsuccessful.

Then, out of the other factors that were present in the dataset, only the "peak size" and "duration" were considered relevant factors and, as such, kept. The former was considered according to Somma and Medel (2018) who declared that very large demonstrations were those with more than 5001 people present, resulting in the binary codification of: 5000 or less= 0; 5001/+ = 1.

Thirdly, the following factors were added to the dataset to deepen our understanding of the protests: "threat to status quo", "network", "social media", "victim", "crisis", "goals", "negative media coverage", "left-right", "waves". Each variable was assigned a 0 or a 1, readers can refer to the codebook in Annex 1 to have a more precise description of the variable assignment.

The primary aim of this research paper was to determine the societal, economic, and political factors correlated with policy changes following violent protests. Not taking into consideration authoritarian regimes, this study focused only on democratic countries, to see and analyze the democratic system. Indeed, several mechanisms for public expression and governmental accountability allow democracies to be more susceptible to public pressure. Therefore, it was decided that nonviolent protests had to be removed, focusing only on violence's role in achieving success (where, for success, we intended a policy change and/or removal of a political leader). By narrowing our focus to violent protests only, we were able to establish a clear research goal and to find more precise findings. The Protest Tracker, systematically recording protests worldwide, gave us a solid and credible foundation for our methodology, reducing the risk of working on self-collected data biases. Having clearly defined violence as coming only from protesters' intentional actions and their outcomes, we centered the research on the protesters. The addition of other context-sensitive variables (apart from peak size and duration of protests which were common factors in protest literature) enabled us to deepen our understanding of the socio-political contexts and protest dynamics.

The software program used to conduct the quantitative analysis was R. The program was ideal to create clear, informative visualizations and to show effectively the relationships between the variables. Since every step of the analysis was recorded, it was considered the most suitable software for this research in terms of transparency, reproducibility, and reliability. Having chosen the program to work on, the most suitable method to analyze the findings was logistic regression, generally used to estimate the eventual relationships between dependent and independent variables and predict binary outcomes. Providing odds ratios shows how changes in any independent variable can influence the dependent variable. In other words, it serves to identify a binary outcome based on different factors, which was the best fit to this paper. is commonly used in studies analyzing political events

(Moseley, 2010; Zhang et al, 2020). It can account for many variables and provide intuitive results to allow researchers and decision-makers to draw correlations and make informed decisions. Finally, to assess the accuracy of the logistic regression, the Hosmer-Lemeshow test was used.

Having chosen to follow this path, this ensured us to use the best possible practice in the field. Using the logistic regression on the program R further enabled us to have a clear and visual representation of our results, making it more accessible to interpret our findings. The three logistic regression graphs are useful because the curve of the line shows the relationship between the dependent variable and each singular independent variable.

The research was conducted respecting the standards of reliability, validity, replicability, and generalizability. The use of a systemic dataset (Protest Tracker), minimizes the risks of subjective biases in the paper, ensuring, therefore, a consistent data collection process (Corbetta, 2003). Determining democracy (LDI $\geq$ 0.5), violence (injuries, death, damage to properties), and success (policy change or removal of a political leader), clarifying explicitly all the variables used and having coded them in a binary way, enhanced the reproducibility of the analysis. The reproducibility criterion was further optimized by the choice to use R, obtaining precise calculations for our results (Walliman, 2021). The step-by-step process used in the program makes, therefore, the research replicable. Using logistic regression to identify the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent one enabled the results to clearly show and quantify the impact of each factor in determining (or not) eventual success. Since the sample dataset had a small size, we analyzed the findings by looking at every variable and its relationship with every other one, therefore analyzing each in a couple format (for example, “size” and “threat to the status quo”, “size” and “network” etc.) The process was repeated for every other variable. The variables chosen and the inclusion of societal, political, and economic factors aligned with the theoretical literature and provided a comprehensive framework to work on (Corbetta, 2003); as such, the analysis conducted is coherent with the research question, despite the limited sample. To better visualize our findings, a dendrogram was then used to regroup clusters of similar protests together and better analyze the similarities between protests.

## Results

Given the results of each variable, a model overview shows that the significant variables are namely “goals”, “left-right”, and - though marginally significant - “victim”. The remaining values are not statistically significant, most probably due to the limited dataset. The variables can be, therefore, regrouped into two groups: the ones having a positive association and the ones having a negative association regarding the probability of success. The variables “size”, “crisis”, “goals” and “nmc” have a negative association with the likelihood of success, meanwhile the variables “threat”, “network”, “trend” and “waves” have a positive association with the likelihood of success.

| Coefficients: | Estimate | Standard Error | z value | Pr (>\|z\|) | Coefficient |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.8561 | 0.9041 | 0.947 | 0.3437 | |
| size | -0.3955 | 0.5958 | -0.664 | 0.5068 | -32.66% |
| threat | 0.7604 | 0.6029 | 1.261 | 0.2072 | 113.91% |
| network | 0.4809 | 0.6400 | 0.751 | 0.4524 | 61.75% |
| trend | -0.1015 | 0.6057 | -0.168 | 0.8669 | -9.65% |
| victim | 1.7671 | 1.0136 | 1.743 | 0.0813 . | 485.39% |
| crisis | -0.9634 | 0.5938 | -1.622 | 0.1047 | -61.84% |
| goals | -1.2825 | 0.6458 | -1.986 | 0.0471 * | -72.26% |
| nmc | -0.7452 | 0.6748 | -1.104 | 0.2695 | -52.53% |
| left-right | -1.4421 | 0.5962 | -2.419 | 0.0156 * | -76.36% |
| waves | 0.1012 | 0.6137 | 0.165 | 0.8690 | 10.65% |
| | | | | | |
| Significant codes | 0 '***' | 0.001 '**' | 0.01 '*' | 0.05 '.' | 0.01 ' ' |
| (Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1)<br><br>Null deviance: 103.199 on 82 degrees of freedom<br>Residual deviance: 84.713 on 72 degrees of freedom<br>AIC: 106.71<br><br>Number of Fisher Scoring iterations: 4 | | | | | |

In the next paragraph, each variable will be analyzed individually to show the impact on the probability of success. However, it must be noted that the values are obtained from the logistic (family=binomial in R) general linear model (GLM in R). Therefore, the values come from a logistic function and not a linear one. To discuss the estimates of the coefficients, the original value must be retrieved, raising the result of the logarithm to the exponential.

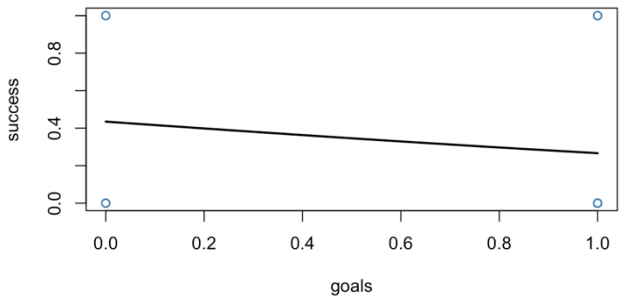



Figure 1 – This logistic regression plot compares the variable goals with the dependent variable success. It can be seen that the more a protest is based on a narrow, single issue the less likely the chances of success of that protest are.

The results for the "goal" variable, hypothesis 8, which has a p-value of 0.0471 and a coefficient of -72.27%, indicate that protests with complex and multifaceted demands are more likely to succeed compared to those who have a single-issue goal. This finding invalidates our initial hypothesis about the variable: namely that single-issue and straightforward demands are more likely to bring about success. Instead, the data supports an alternative hypothesis(H28): protests with multifaceted demands are more likely to succeed. This could be because addressing systemic issues can mobilize broader support, as more complex demands tend to attract coalition and a stronger

network, a factor confirmed by the variable "network" that has a positive coefficient in the analysis, and therefore, making it more likely for a protest to succeed. Additionally, the findings suggest that simpler demands may be more easily dismissed or overlooked by decision-makers, further reducing their probability of success.

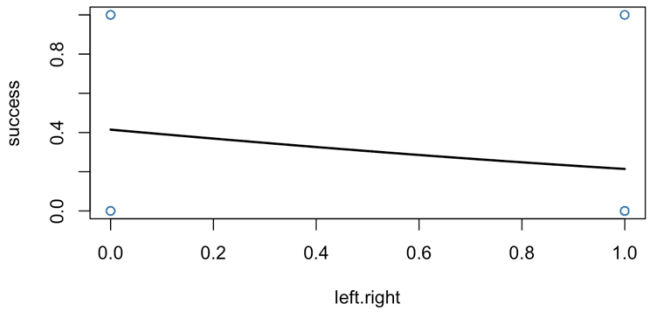



Figure 2 – This logistic regression plot compares the variable left.right with the dependent variable success. With this graph, it can be noted that a protest has a lower probability of success as the government in power during the time of the protest is more left leaning.

The "left-right" government variable, hypothesis 9, with a p-value of 0.0156 and a percentual coefficient of -76.36%, suggests, because of the negative coefficient, that protests are more likely to succeed under right-wing, centrist or independent governments. A possible explanation could be that under a right-wing government, often perceived as more rigid, higher levels of public dissent could emerge, increasing the intensity or persistence of protests. Therefore, the original hypothesis (H19) was dismissed. The new hypothesis (H29): violent protests are more likely to succeed under a right-wing government.

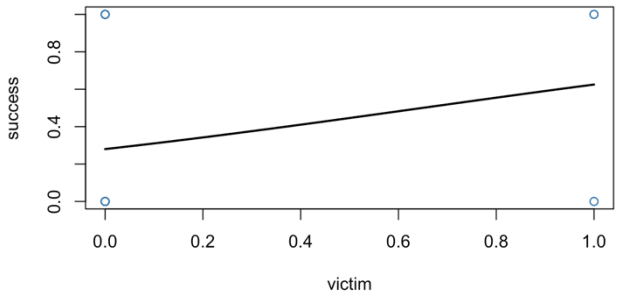



Figure 3 – This logistic regression plot compares the variable victim with the dependent variable success. This graph suggests that there is a direct proportionality between the two variables, because a protest is more likely to succeed if marginalized or victimized groups take part in that protest.

The variable "victim", hypothesis 2, with a marginally significant p-value of 0,0813 and a positive coefficient of 485.387%, suggests that protests led by minority or victimized groups are more likely to succeed. This result could reflect the higher common sentiment of public sympathy or moral urgency, both locally and globally, that protests featuring a minority group could create; An alternative explanation for this unexpected result, could be the recent rise of public awareness about minorities and indigenous groups, such as systemic discrimination and accessibility. None of the original hypotheses were therefore accepted and led to a second alternative hypothesis (H22): when minority groups lead a protest, they are more likely to succeed.

Although the following variables did not result in being statistically significant (p-value > 0.05), as stated above, the said results do contribute to the prediction of a protest success and could represent a starting point for new research that could further enhance our findings.

The variable “size”, hypothesis 4, with a percentual coefficient of -32.67%, indicates that smaller protests in size are slightly more likely to succeed. However, its effect is not statistically significant and goes against the original hypothesis. This finding suggests that factors such as context, goals, and organization of the protests may have a greater influence on their success than the size of the protest itself. Therefore, the outcomes led to accepting the null hypothesis.

The variable “threat to status quo”, hypothesis 1, with a percentual coefficient of 113.91%, does not support the original hypothesis but rather indicates that protests threatening the status quo have a slight positive association with success. Since the effect is not statistically significant, the null hypothesis must be accepted. Although, this result could indicate that protests with the intent of threatening the status quo tend to rally broad popular support among frustrated protesters and influential lobby groups wishing for fundamental change in leadership.

The variable “network”, hypothesis 5, with a percentual coefficient of 61.75%, indicates that protests are more likely to succeed when they have network support. Despite not being statistically significant, this result supports the alternative hypothesis: protests that received support made the demands more likely to be heard. The lack of significance may suggest that network support is not decisive, unless combined with other factors.

The variable “trend”, hypothesis 6, having a percentual coefficient of -9.65%, suggests that protests trending on social media do not have a significant relationship with success. This finding contradicts the original hypothesis that trending online is a factor of success, but it is not significant enough to disprove the null hypothesis. This variable might indicate that online visibility is not correlated with concrete popular action.

The variable “crisis”, hypothesis 7, with a percentual coefficient of -61.84%, depicts that protests that occur during crises are slightly less likely to succeed. The effect is not statistically significant but disproves the null hypothesis of crises being a factor for success. Living in a context of crisis might overshadow protest demands with other social concerns, or a government may already strain its resources and responsiveness, limiting its capacity of actions.

The variable “negative media coverage” (nmc), hypothesis 3, with a percentual coefficient of -52.53%, shows that a negative portrayal of the protests can decrease the likelihood of success. This supports the alternative hypothesis that negative media coverage negatively impacts outcomes. Being an insignificant statistical result, it cannot bring about the rejection of the null hypothesis. The lack of significance might indicate a trend of the media in democratic countries for neutrality, avoiding biased coverage even when reporting on violent protests.

The variable “waves”, hypothesis 10, presents a percentual coefficient of 10.65%, suggesting that repeated protest waves have a slight positive association with success. This result supports the original hypothesis of repetition and persistence helping the likelihood of success, despite the effect not being statistically significant. The lack of significance of this result means the null hypothesis must be conserved. While repetition helps, its limited impact

could suggest that successful protests rely more heavily on strategic factors and/or network support rather than persistence alone.

Because of the reduction in deviance (18.486), the model provides a good set for the data, compared to a model with no predictors. However, since the AIC is relatively high (106.71), having a more comprehensive dataset would offer a more precise overview of the issue. The null and alternative hypotheses that were developed for each independent variable are the following:

H01: a protest threatening the status quo has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H11: a protest threatening the status quo has a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

~~H02: protesters being former victims of discrimination have no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

~~H12: protesters being former victims of discrimination have a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H22: protesters being former victims of discrimination have a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H03: negative media coverage has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H13: negative media coverage has a negative impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H04: a protest's peak size has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H14: a protest's peak size has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H05: the protester's network has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H15: the protester's network has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H06: a protest trending in the media has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H16: a protest trending in the media has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H07: a protest happening during a crisis has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H17: a protest happening during a crisis has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

~~H08: a protest with well-defined goals has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

~~H18: a protest with well-defined goals has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H28: a protest with complex goals has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H09: a protest happening under a left-wing government has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

~~H19: a protest happening under a left-wing government has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

H29: a protest happening under a non-left government (right, center or non-affiliated) has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

H010: a protest happening repetitively has no impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.

~~H110: a protest happening repetitively has a positive impact on the success of violent protests in democratic countries.~~

To conclude the discussion on the results, it is relevant to illustrate that non-left governments correlate with 69% of successes: hypothesis 9, complex goals correlate with 38.5% of them: hypothesis 8 and formerly victimized groups have a 19% correlation: hypothesis 2. Together, these three variables account for 92.5% of all successful

violent protests in the dataset, meaning only two successes fall outside their correlation. The accuracy of the overall model is 77.1%, and it shrinks to 73.5% when only accounting for the three most significant variables. Nevertheless, such a high accuracy of 73.5% remains a strong and meaningful result.

In addition to the logistic regression analysis, which constituted the main result approach for this research, this paper also includes a cluster analysis to explain the dataset. The analysis followed a hierarchical, agglomerative method. In other words, the number of clusters used for this result section were not defined a priori (hierarchical), and the all units started as single observations while combining into larger clusters of similarity (agglomerative, or bottom-up) as long as the height level increases. The identification of four clusters can be considered a good number of clusters. This section will proceed discussing the characteristics of these four clusters.

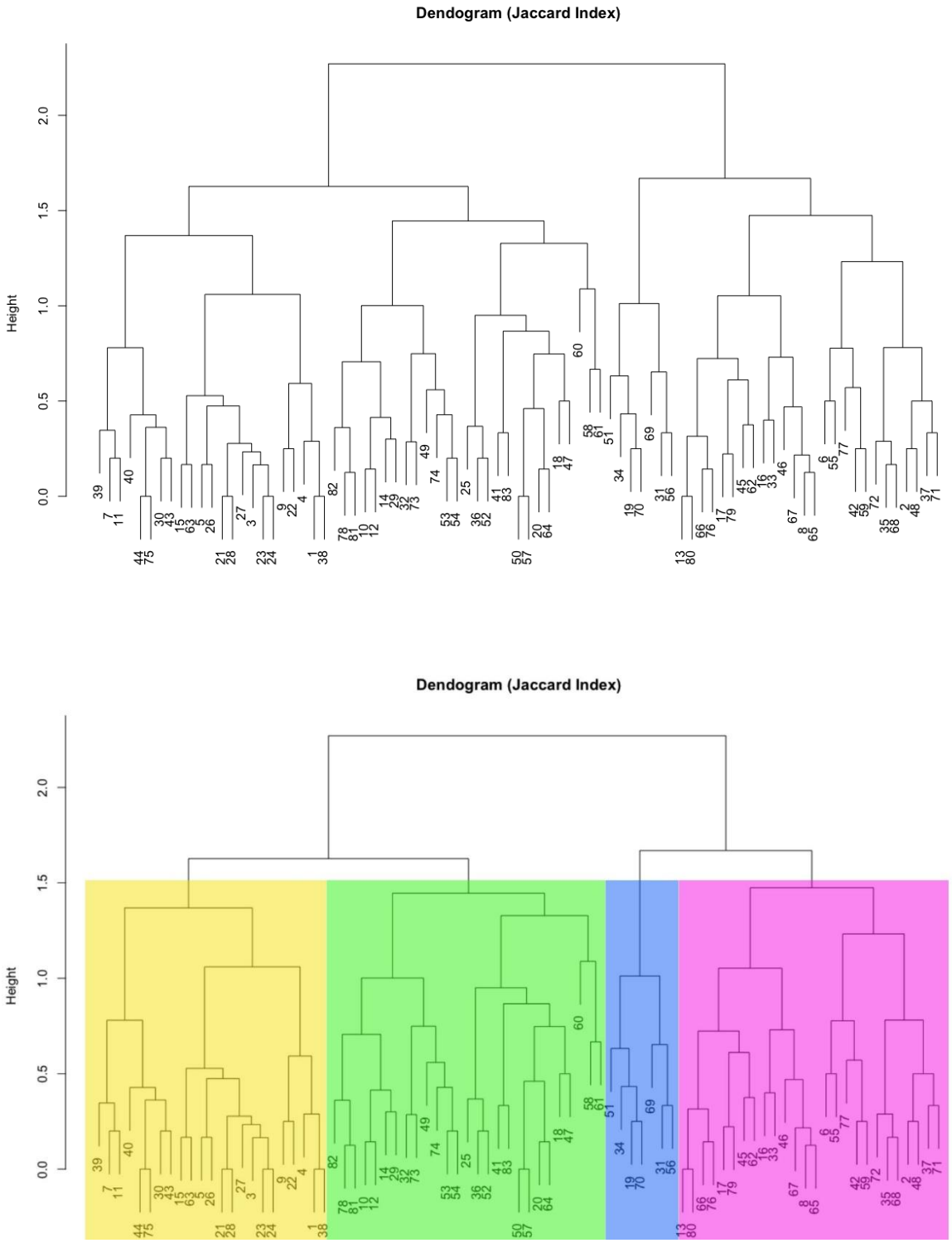



Figure 4 – The dendrogram graph illustrates all the 83 protests of this paper's dataset and agglomerates them in different clusters of similarity. A good quantity of clusters can be found at height 1.5, where four main clusters can be identified.

Cluster 1 (protests 39-38) includes 23 protests that presents the following distinguishing figures:

- All the protests did not have the protesters as part of a victimized group or minority (victim=0).
- All the protests presented a single, defined goal (goals=1).
- All the protests were not portrayed in a negative way in the media (nmc=0).
- With the only exception of protest #63, all the protests happened in a time of crisis (crisis=1).

The second cluster (protests 82-61) contains the highest number of protests (27). It is also the most heterogeneous group as there is no variable equal for all these units. This peculiarity can be also noted in the high distance of protest #60, whose unique characteristic is presenting zero in all the variables in the dataset. Besides the absence of a univocal value for a specific variable in all the protests, the protests of this cluster:

- did not have the protesters as part of a victimized group or minority (victim=0), although it is not true for protest #14, #29, #78, #81.
- were replicated at least once (waves=1), although this cannot be said for protest #25, #49, #60, #73, #82.

By contrast to the previous group, the third cluster (protest 51-56) presents the least number of protests (7) and the highest number of variables with the same value for all the protests. Indeed, all protests:

- failed (success=0).
- did not present at least one attempt to repeat the protest for the same issue elsewhere (waves=0).
- did not represent a threat to the status quo (threat=0)
- did not receive any financial, political or economic support from influential people, lobbies, or organizations (network=0).
- did not go viral on the Internet (trend=0).
- did not have the protesters as part of a victimized group or minority (victim=0).

In addition, two other variables present a univocal pattern even if an exception applies:

- All the protests did not happen in a time of crisis (crisis=0), with the exception of protest #56.
- All the protests presented a single, defined goal (goals=1), with the sole exception of protest #51.

Finally, the fourth cluster (protests 13-71) contains 26 protests, which all had the common characteristic that all were trending on social media at the time of the protest breakout (trend=1).

## Conclusion

Violent protests in democracies are a puzzle to scholars. Studying them independently of non-violent protests or authoritarian regime protests is a challenge that has not often been undertaken in academic research. This paper attempted to fill that gap by doing a logistic regression in R to analyze how ten different factors could influence policy or leadership change during violent protests.

The findings of this research disproved most of its original hypotheses. The only variables that were found to be statistically significant are “goals”, “left-right”, and “victim”. Firstly, governments that are not left-leaning lead to the most violent protest successes, they are either right-wing, centrist, or non-affiliated. Secondly, intricate goals have proven to be the second most impactful success-driving factor. Thirdly and lastly, with less significance given their low recurrence, when the participants of the violent protests are part of a marginalized or victimized group, the demands they had raised in their protests have been overwhelmingly met. The other variables studied, although not statistically significant due to the limited dataset, could still be noteworthy and relevant, as they could reflect

a shift in modern-day protesting. Additionally, further research supported by more comprehensive data could lead to more precise findings.

It is important to reiterate that this paper does not promote or encourage the use of political violence. In fact, within democratic countries, neither the protesters nor the government should face destruction of property or physical injuries during periods of tension. This paper focuses on the investigation of the factors that made violent protester's demands successfully met. Thus, this research must be seen as an opportunity to better decipher the phenomenon of violent protests and promote the use of preventive measures to avoid violent escalations.

This paper extends policy recommendations to both actors in leadership roles and activists organizing protests and leading demonstrations. On the one hand, there is a need to increase reactivity to protesters' demands by considering that aligning the protesters demands to the goals of the policy-making agenda, will decrease the risk of frustration-generated violence by protesters, but also offering new and accessible ways to raise demands, as an alternative political process. They can be achieved by implementing two different tools to modernize democratic representation. Namely using referenda more frequently, following a Swiss model that could mitigate popular frustrations on feeling disconnected from decision-making, and introducing a "Wiki Government" (also called e-democracy) method for organizing the decision-making agenda. This model refers to the collaborative self-improving online encyclopaedia, creating a platform in which interest groups can submit legislation proposals de-intermediate and facilitate communication between the population and its leaders. On the other hand, activists must establish and agree on a coherent in-group scale about the urgency and gravity of the issues they raise, along with adequate methods to do so. The former can take the form of a utilitarian "cost versus benefit" approach to assess whether resorting to violent means is worth the demand. The latter concerns the use of alternative processes, such as waiting until the next elections if an issue is not urgent, signing petitions if the issue has many sympathizers, and organizing roundtable discussions with politicians if the issue needs complex compromises and deep understanding. The authors of this paper argue that one death is too many, and no one should ever die as a consequence of a political demonstration in a country that is recognized to have functioning democratic processes, which should mean its leaders are accountable to the population and it offers the people opportunities to raise concerns about policymaking.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests, and equal participation to this paper.

## Disclosure Statement

The analysis of the results in this paper was designed with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. In particular, OpenAI's ChatGPT, to review and verify the R code. All code and outputs were independently created, reviewed, and validated by the authors to maintain the integrity and reliability of the results. The tool was exclusively used to perform checks on the validity of the code.

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