

RESILIENCE OF CONTENTIOUS MOVEMENTS UNDER REPRESSION:
THE ROLE OF BYSTANDER PROTECTION AND DISRUPTION

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RESILIENCE OF CONTENTIOUS MOVEMENTS UNDER REPRESSION: THE
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Burma/Myanmar, a country with a long history of brutal military dictatorships, was for decades a hostile environment for mass contention. Nonetheless, large-scale protests, as part of the Burmese urban pro-democracy movement, still emerged through the years. So what accounts for the perseverance of a non-violent movement in a repressive regime? In this dissertation, I argue for the role of an important yet oft-neglected factor: civilian bystanders and observers of opposition activism. I theorize that *bystander protection and disruption* toward protesters, in particular, significantly impact the durability of a protest movement. To test my theory, I provide an original qualitative dataset with a large number of semi-structured interviews and written testimony of more than 100 ordinary citizens and former pro-democracy activists in Myanmar. The novelty of this dataset is the unprecedented number of voices from the ordinary, non-contentious general public, which are mostly missing in existing research. Hence, the findings from my research would serve to deepen our understanding of movement resilience under repressive authoritarianism.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Van Mai Tran was born and raised in Hanoi, Vietnam. Before coming to Cornell University, Van earned her B.A. degree at Wesleyan College and worked in Washington, D.C. and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Since September 2019, she has been working at Phandeezar, a Myanmar tech hub, to manage research projects on information disorder on social media. She lives in Yangon, Myanmar.

Dedicated to my parents

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

All Burma Federation of Student Unions	ABFSU
All Burma Monks' Alliance	ABMA
Burmese Socialist Programme Party	BSPP
Democratic Association of Youth and Student	DAYS
Democratic Voice of Burma	DVB
Free Funeral Service Society	FFSS
National League for Democracy	NLD
Rangoon General Hospital	RGH
State Law and Order Restoration Council	SLORC
State Peace and Development Council	SPDC
Supervisory Committee for Student Movement	SCS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Authoritarian regimes with zero-tolerance policies toward the opposition are hostile environments for mass contention to emerge or endure. Indeed, in the case of modern Burma/Myanmar, hereafter referred to as Myanmar, the five decades of military dictatorship were a period of brutal repression against pro-democracy activism. Ever since General Ne Win took over the state in 1962 until General Than Shwe ceded power to a quasi-civilian government in 2011, anti-regime urban protests sprang up continuously yet were cracked down upon heavily. In every decade during the 50 years of military strongman rule, in the city of Yangon alone, there are numerous records of strikes and demonstrations by students, workers, monks, and the general public that the sitting junta crushed (Htun Aung Gyaw 1997, Fink 2001, Boudreau 2004, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2009). Student protests at Yangon University in 1962 halted with the Ne Win government's arrests, killings, and bombing of the university's recreation center. The U Thant Affair in 1974, where students in Yangon stole late UN Secretary U Thant's coffin to bury him at Yangon University, also met a similar fate. Worker strikes that broke out several times between 1974 and 1976 were put to a violent end with the same methods. This is not to mention thousands of imprisonments, disappearances, and censorships of leading dissident figures and their supporters. State brutality against contentious mobilization repeated itself into the later decades. Support from foreign governments and international communities also hardly made their way to activists inside the country.

Under such a hostile environment, one mass protest incident rarely induces change. Instead, challengers need to maintain a durable capacity for mobilization that can resurface time and again despite heavy crackdowns, and might eventually engender political change under the right circumstances. That is what happened in Myanmar. In the face of constant suppression, large-scale urban pro-democracy protests still re-emerged with the same spirit and fervor through the years. A variation of mobilization resources lived on, in the form of either key personnel, knowledge, experiences, or revolutionary spirit that rekindled fresh rounds of anti-government demonstrations throughout the decades. Activists who escaped repression worked with new generations of activists, adapted their strategies, and launched further contentious cycles with the hope that their new attempts would be more effective in generating pressure at home and abroad for regime change. The long-term resilience of the Burmese urban pro-democracy movement is one of the most impressive and puzzling among all cases of collective activism under authoritarianism.

So what accounts for the perseverance or demise of a non-violent movement in a hostile environment? While most studies of contentious politics under authoritarian control have highlighted innovations and adaptations in mobilization strategies (Hurst 2004, O'Brien and Stern 2008, Weiss 2006), few have analyzed how these experiences and knowledge might live on, despite state repression, to continue igniting further cycles of mobilization. By studying the case of pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, my research offers insight into the resilience of non-violent mobilization under repressive regimes.

This study presents and incorporates an important yet oft-neglected factor into

the interaction between challenger and the state: civilian bystanders and observers of opposition activism. I argue that only by taking into account the diverse types of bystander reactions toward contentious actors can we construct a full landscape of political opportunity structure (POS) that surrounds social mobilization in a dictatorship. This approach generates a novel perspective to better understand opportunities and constraints around movement entrepreneurs by considering the role of bystanders. Indeed, bystander response moderates the scope and efficiency of repression and violence.

There can be various types of bystander responses toward challengers, ranging from non-action to hostile disruption, sympathetic protection, and protest participation. Many bystanders engage in low levels of support, such as applauding demonstrators, watching activists' public speeches, or following protesters from afar. A smaller number engage in more direct forms of participation after they are inspired or provoked by dissidents. Such acts might include joining demonstrations, launching similar protests in their own neighborhoods, and leading backlash protests against state repression. Beyond these types, I argue that *bystander protection and disruption* toward protesters are important parts of movement dynamics that significantly influence the durability of a protest movement.

I define *disruption* as physical violence or sabotage against protesters, which might take many forms, including blocking protest marches, violently confronting protesters, surveilling and informing the authorities of wanted activists or secretive dissident activities, among others. *Protection* is the opposite of disruption and includes a variety of acts such as forming a protective human chain around protesters, donating

food and medicines to protesters, advising protesters on how to stay safe, taking injured protesters to hospital or giving medical treatments, hiding dissidents from the authorities, among others. My findings will show that the political salience of these two forms of response applies not only to the Burmese case, but also to the majority of cases of popular activism under repressive regimes. Ultimately, as movement organizers have the ability to influence bystander response, these organizers themselves can act in order to diminish counter-movement brutality.

In the following sections, I outline theoretical and empirical gaps in the social movement literature and elaborate on how my research on the Burmese pro-democracy movement, by highlighting the role of bystander response in mediating counter-movement violence, makes important contributions toward filling in these gaps.

The social movement literature

According to Tarrow (2011), social movements are “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with leaders, opponents, and authorities.” A key feature that distinguishes a social movement from an isolated protest or contentious episode is the fact that a movement preserves mobilization resources even in the face of hostile opponents so that new contentious cycles can emerge. As Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find, the components of movement resilience include survival of existing members, participation by new members, and continued activism despite repression. On the other hand, demise occurs when (1) the majority of contentious actors do not survive repression or stay active, (2) the movement fails to recruit new members, or (3)

members are unable to resume protests. The loss of existing dissidents—i.e. the mobilizing network—directly hurts the strength of the activist network, its repository of protest knowledge and experiences, and hence its ability to stage fresh rounds of demonstrations in the future. Thus, the survival of this network is the most essential component of movement resilience.

However, it is a particularly tall order for such core social networks to persist in a dictatorial context. The social movement literature that grows out of Western pluralistic political systems assumes that even when a movement is repressed, its main activist networks are still intact: they are just prevented from mobilizing to engage in collective contention. However, in many dictatorships, once the authorities suppress a movement, they are very likely to harass, detain, or kill protest organizers and their mobilizing networks as well. *So how can mobilizing networks ever survive in a hostile political regime that is determined to crack down on them?*

In terms of the existing social movement literature, it has very little to say about durability of a contentious movement under repressive dictatorships. Besides acknowledging the near implausibility of building or sustaining a movement in the absence of liberal political opportunities, neither Tarrow (2011) nor McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) addresses which factors might still facilitate such movement's survival under harsh repression. Other scholars studying contentious politics under authoritarianism, especially under Asian regimes, have mostly focused on mobilization strategies of isolated strikes and protests, which are admittedly the norm in this part of the world, rather than on the rare cases of sustained movements (Hurst 2004, O'Brien and Stern 2008). Among the few scholars who study resilient

campaigns, they have presented the role of either movement structure (i.e. centralized vs. decentralized) or mode of contention (i.e. violent vs. non-violent) in contributing toward the survival of mobilizing networks (Chenoweth and Stepan 2011, MacLeod 2015). Nonetheless, they acknowledge that collective contention is highly vulnerable no matter its structure or method, if it operates within a hostile dictatorship.

a. Mobilization strategies of contentious actors in dictatorships

According to the literature on mobilization strategies, contentious campaigns under repressive regimes require movements to bypass state surveillance, infiltration, harassment, arrest, and targeted killings. Such strategies involve innovations in mobilizing structures, frames, and networks. For instance, in terms of mobilizing structures, according to O'Brien and Stern (2008), instead of working with independent unions or associations, Chinese activists had to turn to existing non-contentious social networks:

“Mobilizing structures take a distinct shape in illiberal circumstance, as activists adapt to a shifting and often unforgiving environment. Institutions as different as letters and visits bureaus, social networks, and environmental NGOs can serve as proxies for social movement organizations, insofar as they help people attribute blame and suggest solutions.”

Operating under a hostile dictatorship also limits a campaign's mobilizing networks, meaning that campaign organizers have a harder time trusting activists with whom they have few pre-existing connections (Wright 2008). Hence, mobilizing networks are mostly built through familial bonds and long-term friendships.

The process of constructing and disseminating collective action frames is also

very different under a repressive regime where freedom of speech is curtailed. Not only is it difficult to gauge which frames resonate with the wider population, it is also challenging to broadcast these frames on a large scale. Hence, rather than actively shaping up a new frame, labor activists in China frequently make use of existing *mass frames*, which are “coherent worldviews shaped in large part by the structurally rooted collective life experience of social groups” (Hurst 2008). As a result, framing “takes on a more mass-based, spontaneous, and informal character than in many classically conceived social movements” (Hurst 2004). For instance, we see many movements invoke words or actions by historical heroes, founding fathers, and traditional authorities as basis for their collective action frames, instead of convincing the mass of new, liberal concepts.

Research on contentious mobilization in repressive regimes beyond China, including Myanmar, echoes these ideas. In terms of mobilizing frames, images of police brutality against unarmed protesters, such as students, monks, etc. – a “mass frame” that can easily trigger outrage among the population – are usually evoked to launch backlash protests (Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018, MacLeod 2015, Htun Aung Gyaw 1997, Fink 2001, Boudreau 2004, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2009). As for mobilizing networks, in explaining variation in the emergence of human rights organizations under military juntas in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, Loveman (1998) finds that existing social bonds—particularly Catholic church networks—provided a high level of trust and extensive foundation for resilient activism. In the case of Myanmar, for similar reasons, the large networks of students and monks across the country were the breeding grounds for mobilizing and launching nationwide protests.

Nonetheless, as crucial as it is to highlight innovations and adaptations in terms of mobilizing frames, networks, and structures of collective contention under authoritarianism, the studies mentioned above have not addressed how these resources might survive once repressive autocrats crack down on the underground networks of churches, temples, universities, and other forms of social organizations. My next section discusses the scant literature on this critical issue.

b. Movement growth and survival strategies in the face of state repression

Few have studied movement resilience under repressive regimes in-depth, and existing research on this topic is unsatisfactory. This literature offers weak explanations for variation in durability of contemporary urban campaigns since it mostly focuses on challengers' modes of contention and mobilizing structures, which do not significantly vary across most campaigns (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, MacLeod 2015, Beatty 2011, Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018, Finkel 2015, Loveman 1998).

First, most existing studies argue that social movements are more resilient when they are non-violent, since they would attract a larger number of participants and supporters (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018, Chenoweth et al. 2017, Carey 2010). This literature provides quantitative and qualitative evidence that shows non-violent movements with high public participation rates to be less likely to suffer and more durable against brutal state crackdowns than are violent campaigns. However, in most cases of repressive dictatorships, since autocrats have different strategies at their disposal to crush large-scale dissent without eliciting backlash, they are willing to use force against popular non-violent demonstrations (Deng and O'Brien

2013, Chenoweth 2017, Aytac et al. 2018). Under such circumstances, non-violent campaigns do not perform equally well, and not all of them can transform into resilient movements. So what makes some non-violent campaigns more durable than others? The literature is yet to offer explanations for this variation.

In terms of a movement's own mobilizing structure, studies suggest the benefit of having a decentralized structure, i.e. alliances or umbrella organizations, over a hierarchical one in terms of increasing a movement's resilience in the face of state repression (MacLeod 2015). However, examining mobilizing structure under repressive dictatorships does not help us to understand variation in contentious campaigns' survival. This is because having a decentralized alliance is not so much a strategic choice for these activist networks; rather, it is the only option when a well-organized, centralized mobilization structure is not feasible under tight state surveillance and restriction of communication channels. Hence, most campaign structures resemble one another, mainly taking on a decentralized form.

So what might account for variation in the survival or demise of non-violent mobilization in the face of unrelenting state repression? In this dissertation, diverging from existing studies' emphasis on the role of challenger's mobilizing structure or mode of contention, I argue that non-contentious acts from bystanders have an independent effect on movement resilience. Particularly, in this study, by examining the case of the Burmese pro-democracy movement, I present two forms of understudied bystander response that can have significant effects on whether public activism endures or perishes, as these responses moderate the scope and efficiency of counter-movement violence.

The Burmese pro-democracy movement

According to Tarrow's definition of social movements, Myanmar under various military regimes between 1962-2010 witnessed a range of different movements that had distinct demands: the student movement called for students' rights, the worker movement demanded workers' rights, monks staged religious boycotts on behalf of their layman followers' hardships, etc. These activist groups also came together for what they considered the "umbrella movement": the nationwide *pro-democracy movement*, which includes a series of protests between 1988-2010. These protests cohere as a movement not only because they are cycles of collective transgression that share common claims, but also because of the shared mobilizing network that were sustained throughout the decades, despite the junta's constant crackdowns and harassments. This network consists of key players such as: student activists and former-student activists (All Burma Federation of Student Unions, 88 Generation Students, 96 Generation, 98 Generation, etc.), party activists (National League for Democracy, etc.), monk activists (All Burma Monks' Alliance, etc.), among others.

My main case studies, the 1988 Four-eight Uprising and 2007 Saffron Revolution, are examples of this umbrella movement. The 1988 protest, the first protest in the series, started out as part of the student movement and later transformed into the breeding ground for the decades-long pro-democracy movement. Similarly, the 2007 protests turned from a boycott by Buddhist monks into the last major demonstration of the pro-democracy movement.

The "Four-eight" or "8888" Uprising witnessed its first main protest on August

8th, 1988. The Uprising was a culmination of a cycle of student activism in Yangon in the preceding months spawned by the students' grievances at General Ne Win's one-party dictatorship, including its sudden demonetization of the *Myanmar kyat* in 1987 and police brutality against student protesters in March and June 1988. Notable demonstrations were led by students from the Rangoon Institute of Technology, Rangoon University, and Institute of Medicine. Starting in late July, student activist leaders, including the underground All-Burma Students' Union, broadcast a call for a Four-eight nationwide uprising against the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) regime. The main demands were to have the current government step down and to establish a democratic regime in Burma (Myanmar's official English name at the time). With student-led protests continuously emerging in different townships, in late July, General Ne Win resigned from the Party Chairman office and appointed General Sein Lwin as the new head of state. Sein Lwin immediately imposed martial law and a night curfew all over Yangon. Nonetheless, this did not stop the students from taking to the streets on the planned August 8th date and attracting a large following of protesters from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The Sein Lwin government tried to crack down on these protesters at night but new protests still sprang up across the country in subsequent days, and the recently appointed Chairman resigned only after four days into the Uprising on August 12th. This emboldened more bystanders to join the pro-democracy protests. The Rangoon Bar Council and Burma Medical Association also denounced the regime's violence against protesters. However, the true breaking point was the withdrawal of martial law and troops from the streets after a civilian was appointed as a new BSPP Chairman,

Dr. Maung Maung, on August 19th. The Uprising then became like a festival during which the general public, including factory workers, farmers, office staff, artists, homemakers, civil servants, and soldiers, throughout Myanmar turned out in droves to demonstrate under their professional or township banners without fear of repression. The most notable event at the time was a public speech delivered by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma's independence hero General Aung San, to a swelling crowd of activists and spectators at the Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon on August 26th, calling for national unity and a peaceful transition toward democracy. A few days later, on August 28th, the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) was publicly formed in order to coordinate country-wide pro-democracy student activism, with Paw Oo Tun, aka Min Ko Naing, as its chairperson.

As the Four-eight Uprising was at its pinnacle in late August, the government shut down most local administrative offices and left neighborhoods to fend for themselves. Yangon residents then received many rumors of rioters or ex-convicts roaming freely on the streets and destroying traffic lights, cars, shops, offices, and households. For this reason, most people tried to stay indoors except for when they had to go to the market or go to work. During the same time, there were many cases of criminal suspects being killed or beheaded by civilians, with their bodies displayed in public for days. As a result, fear shrouded the city and the Four-eight Uprising gradually became a traumatic experience for many Yangon residents. After almost one month of "anarchy", the military staged a coup and General Saw Maung took over power and set up the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) on September 18th, 1988. Martial law was immediately imposed and almost all protesters

were brutally killed or arrested. This marked the end of Four-eight.

The SLORC subsequently promised to hold multi-party elections and changed the country's English name into Myanmar in 1989. Aung San Suu Kyi then founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, which went on to win a landslide in the elections in 1990. However, the junta rejected the results and continued to rule the country with an iron fist, heavily cracking down on all dissidents. General Saw Maung later resigned in 1992 and General Than Shwe took over, renaming the leading political apparatus as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Throughout the SPDC era of 1990s-2000s, with continuous mass crackdown, surveillance, and arrest, the Burmese junta incarcerated thousands of activists, forcing the rest to turn to dormant party politics or exile/border armed struggles. Nonetheless, the domestic opposition movement did not perish, but was sustained through dozens of large-scale opposition campaigns. This was possible mainly thanks to the survival and commitment of core movement veterans that made up a resilient mobilizing network. These veterans inspired and passed down knowledge on how to plan protests secretly and avoid being discovered by the regime. Different circles of experienced activists also connected with each other and contributed to the emergence and efficient operations of new pro-democracy protests. Last but not least, these activists worked with independent mass media to build a foundation of political knowledge among the public in order to delegitimize the regime and increase public interest in activism.

As a result of such resilient networks, various urban pro-democracy protests sprang up during the 1990s-2000s, including the large-scale Saffron Revolution in 2007 – my second case study. The Saffron Revolution, which occurred during

September 2007, earned its name because it was led by Burmese Buddhist monks, whose robes usually have maroon-saffron colors. The immediate trigger for mobilization was General Than Shwe government's sudden reduction in fuel subsidy in mid-August 2007, which led to a two- to five-fold increase in petrol, diesel, and natural gas prices. This brought hardship on the majority of the population, who lived near or in poverty. As a result, hundreds of civilian activists staged protests throughout Yangon in the latter half of August, most of whom were arrested right after. As civilian protests suffered heavy crackdowns, monks in the towns of Sittwe (Rakhine State) and Pakkoku (Magwe Region) started to take to the streets, since monks' reliance on people's donations led the monks to sympathize with their supporters' economic plight.

The main event that ignited nationwide protests, including in Yangon, was the military's attacks against the protesting monks in Pakkoku that left many of them severely injured. Following this incident, on September 9th, the underground All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA), led by U Gambira, issued an ultimatum to the SPDC government demanding the regime to "issue a public apology for the mistreatment of monks, reduce fuel and commodity prices, release all political prisoners, and begin meaningful dialogue with democratic opposition groups" (Human Rights Documentation Unit 2008) within a week. If the regime failed to comply, ABMA would call for a nationwide religious boycott.

Due to the SPDC's lack of response, starting on September 17th, monks staged protest marches all over the country. Monks in Yangon typically began their marches at Shwedagon Pagoda and calmly walked through different neighborhoods while

peacefully chanting *Metta Sutta* – the Burmese Buddhist script of loving kindness. Since the monks originally did not allow civilians to join their protests, people surrounded the monks and locked arms to form a human shield in order to protect the monks from possible violent crackdown. Then, on September 24th, U Gambira asked the general public to take part in the movement in order to topple the regime. As a result, different activist groups, including members of the NLD as well as the ABFSU, and many civilians started to participate and follow behind the monks in their marches. While the monks only chanted *Metta Sutta*, the activists behind them shouted various political slogans, including “To get democracy,” “To get human rights,” “To revolt against the military dictatorship,” and others.

Subsequently, on the nights of the 24th and 25th, SPDC announced over its mass media and loudspeakers a warning for all protesters, both monks and civilians, to disperse. If they failed to comply, they would face punishment according to the law. Starting on September 26th, the security forces, comprising of soldiers, riot police, and hired thugs, violently cracked down on demonstrators, beating, shooting, and arresting anyone in or near protest sites. The security forces also violently raided multiple monasteries at night, attacking and arresting all resident monks at monasteries of Chauk Htat Gyi, Maggin, Ngwe Kyar Yan, and others. Consequently, all Saffron protests stopped by the end of September.

Despite such a brutal ending, movement resources lived on and inspired further rounds of civil disobedience until General Than Shwe disbanded the military regime and stepped down in 2011. A new civilian government was formed, though under a manipulated general election, in the same year.

What is Myanmar during 1988-2010 a case of?

Due to the high level of brutality of Burmese dictators against the opposition, research on social movements under non-democratic regimes might hesitate to use Myanmar under military rule as a case study. However, I argue that the Myanmar case is far from unique and this divergence between Myanmar and other autocracies is overstated. While many contemporary authoritarian regimes do allow independent press and civil society, many other dictatorships throughout history heavily suppress them. Hence, instead of assuming that Myanmar is an outlier, I start from the assumption that the Burmese military junta is a typical example of those hard-lined regimes. We can also find similar conditions in modern-day dictatorships across Latin America, Africa, Asia, etc., including personalist, one-party, military, monarchical, and theocratic regimes such as: the Communist party-states in China, Vietnam, and Cuba; the Islamic Republic of Iran; Lukashenko's strongman rule in Belarus; monarchies in the Gulf region (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and UAE); and dominant-party regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (Algeria, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Turkey) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Angola, Cameroon, Burundi, etc.).

First, like other civilian dictatorships which are usually considered to be less hard-lined, the Burmese juntas—though not allowing protests—also rarely cracked down on them in the beginning. Instead, the state tried to use non-violent strategies to disperse crowds first. For example, the mass communication system would warn protesters and bystanders to go back to normal business, and announce imminent crackdowns in advance if the masses did not cooperate. Moreover, the riot police themselves would go into neighborhoods and alleys to order groups of five people or

more to disband. Overall, the Burmese junta did not constantly apply violent repression on urban protests under all circumstances. Instead, they preferred to use non-violent strategies when possible.

Secondly, like the Burmese junta, other civilian dictators, in many cases, also resort to brutal repression if non-violent strategies fail to stop protests from growing. Even though certain types of protests are allowed to take place in authoritarian regimes, there are still too many cases of state repression against regime dissidents across the globe to make the Myanmar case unique. According to Chenoweth (2017), state repression against non-violent contentious movements is a more regular occurrence than one might think:

“Security forces used lethal repression against over 80% of nonviolent campaigns occurring during the 1900–2006 period. Since 2007, however, this trend has increased to nearly 92%, indicating that limited applications of brute force remain common tools that authoritarian leaders use to combat challenges from nonviolent campaigns.”

Mass mobilization in such cases is expected to encounter a variety of repressive methods that aim to silence and decimate the opposition. My case study shares features with many other cases of repressive authoritarianism, which suggests that my findings from Myanmar may have broader relevance as well.

In fact, Myanmar might be peculiar not because of its juntas' willingness and capacity for large-scale violence, but rather because it has witnessed a durable contentious movement that lasted as long as the regime itself. This actually makes Myanmar a useful case to study the different ways that mass protests might survive or suffer under repressive dictatorships. Hence, findings on factors that shape movement

dynamics in dictatorial Myanmar may usefully be applied to other cases of authoritarianism across the globe as well.

Bystander perception and reactions toward contentious movement

So how to explain the durability of the Burmese pro-democracy movement and other contentious movements under repressive dictatorships? Here I would like to extend the analytical focus of social movement research outside of a movement itself toward its operating environment, or so-called political opportunity structure (POS), and problematize one of its main components, the threat of suppression. Specifically, I would like to discuss the role of oft-neglected bystander actions in moderating the scope and efficacy of violence toward contentious actors.

The social movement literature conceptualizes POS as external resources or constraints to contentious actors that are generally shaped by regime structure. According to Tarrow (2011), POS is made up of both opportunities and threats, and while opportunities include “(1) opening of access to participation for new actors, (2) evidence of realignment within the polity, (3) availability of influential allies, and (4) emerging splits within the leaders”; threats refer to “the states’ and other actors’ capacity or will to control dissent.” My research problematizes the top-down, one-dimensional approach of conceptualizing threat of suppression. As interactions between the state and non-violent challengers do not occur in a vacuum, but in populated towns and cities, effective suppression of contentious mobilization does not depend solely on a state’s own capacity, but also on the ability of both the state and challengers to influence and harness a third force: a large population of bystanders, i.e. people who know about or observe popular protests yet do not take part. Since non-

violent mass campaigns are openly contentious acts that aim to catch public attention and induce reactions from the general public, bystander response—in all of its diverse forms—is a relevant variable in all cases. As a result, it is important to unpack and settle general misconceptions about bystander perceptions and reactions toward political protests under authoritarianism.

These misconceptions mainly surround the general public's alleged eagerness to join peaceful protests. Particularly, in my case studies, the 1988 Four-Eight Uprising and 2007 Saffron Revolution, the majority of bystanders who witnessed these events were not motivated to participate in protests when the security forces were still active. Instead, they were more inclined to engage in other non-overt acts that have been neglected in the social movement literature. In particular, the misconceptions are embodied in the popular names of my two main case studies themselves. As reports and personal accounts of the two events have mainly been provided by the network of Burmese activists and dissidents, they are susceptible to one-sided perception of the physical scale, the meaning of the events to society, and the composition of their participants.

As testimony by ordinary Yangon local residents will show, the actual turnout at the beginning of Four-eight and during Saffron was restricted to the leading activists – either students or monks – and their core supporters. The idea that every person from every neighborhood took part was only true in 1988 after the state's security forces withdrew from the streets, which happened in the latter half of Four-eight. Although, most people did not hide their grievances and contempt at the Ne Win or Than Shwe government, they chose not to participate in protests, but rather to stay on the sidelines

instead. Overall, Four-eight was no “uprising” until the state decided to back down, and Saffron never became a “revolution” in the true sense of the word. To impose such names on these events misrepresents the gamut of local residents’ perspectives and responses toward these campaigns, and thereby obscures the independent effect of bystanders’ non-protesting acts on movement resilience.

My dissertation focus on the majority of bystanders who are neutral or apolitical, i.e. not concerned about or adhered to the political agenda of either the state or challengers. Although certain bystanders might change their stance and become movement participants during the course of a contentious cycle, as shown above, a large number chooses to stay put. There might also be non-neutral bystanders, who do not participate in a movement since they are pro-regime or anti-movement. However, I argue that this type of bystanders only makes up a minority since most citizens under a non-democratic, repressive regime regard themselves as outsiders to politics. For instance, most youths under authoritarian regimes like Egypt prior to the Arab Spring were uninterested in political acts: “Participation in changing the outcome of politics is not attractive to young people, especially under authoritarian regimes such as in Egypt, where public space is open for some deliberations but free, fair and periodic elections are few and far between and political action is severely constrained” (Sika 2012). Hence, the majority of the general public remain neutral bystanders.

I further argue that the very actions by these neutral bystanders have significant impact on movement dynamics, particularly bystander *protection* and *disruption*. Scholars of the Burmese pro-democracy movement and other contentious movements tend to neglect the role of bystander protection and take for granted

protesters' ability to escape repression and resurface at a different location or time to continue mobilizing. As for the case of Myanmar's 1988 urban pro-democracy protests, Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), Boudreau (2004), and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2009) gloss over the mechanisms through which protesters survived months of government crackdowns and close surveillance. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) and Hlaing (2009) also fail to problematize the personnel and knowledge linkage between the 1988 protests and other pro-democracy campaigns in early 1990s, not accounting for how activists were able to escape persecution after the military coup in September 1988 in order to flee to border areas or continue planning future demonstrations. Similarly, Fink's (2009) analysis of the 2007 Burmese Saffron Revolution protests offers no explanations for activist survival during the protests and after government crackdowns.

In addition, studies of the Burmese pro-democracy movement and other opposition movements tend to mischaracterize the forms of bystander disruption toward protests. Quoting only two interviews, Vincent Boudreau's (2004) *Resisting Dictatorship* describes communities' hostility against protesters in the latter days of Four-eight as criminal acts, using loaded words to degrade community defense committees as "undisciplined", "working-class slums", and "gangs", insinuating his association of disruption with a morally questionable population. He fails to recognize how these acts are not restricted to "slum" areas but are present across both rich and poor neighborhoods, and many times directed by educated and spiritual leaders like Buddhist monks. Ferrara's (2003) article "Why Regime Creates Disorder" does more justice to this phenomenon by taking into account how aversion toward anarchy

lowered public support for Four-eight. However, both Ferrara and Boudreau fail to capture the whole range of bystanders' negative responses. While Ferrara (2003) only focuses on passive acts, i.e. withdrawal of support, Boudreau only describes “mob-like” violence, i.e. beheading, attacking, and extorting. I would like to complement these studies and the overall literature by proposing an equally important mechanism, whereby states can morally motivate bystander disruption by framing counter-movement violence as community defense against “opportunist criminals.”

My theory

My process of theorizing starts with a loose theory and I use the Myanmar case studies to firm up and, subsequently, test my hypotheses. In order to discipline this theory-generating exercise, I employ the method of inductive iteration presented by Sean Yom (2015):

First, investigators can begin research with something less than a fully theorized hypothesis, such as hunches and conjectures informed by knowledge but open to revision. Second, when analyzing data or cases, investigators may retreat back into theorizing to reformulate their explanation in response to the inherent cacophony of research—for example, contradictory or null results, competing propositions, unexpected inspirations. They return to those data and cases to reassess their fit with the evolving explanation, and so forth. Third, this iterative cycle does not end after a single and terminal hypothesis test. Rather, the researcher must intervene into the process and judge whether a theoretically grounded and internally robust explanation has coalesced for outcomes of interest.”

Accordingly, a significant advantage of this practice is that it requires more frequent theorizing and demands greater transparency in order to guard against data mining,

selective reporting, and ignoring of conflicting results. I will present in detail the application of inductive iteration to my theorizing process in the next chapters. Below is a summary of my theory.

I argue that bystander response is shaped by two distinct processes. First, both the government and opposition, here I call *political leaders*, promote certain types of protester images in order to influence public perception of a contentious campaign. Whether a bystander chooses to protect or disrupt protesters depends on (a) whether she is exposed to protester images that resonate with her victim or criminal frame and (b) whether her moral identity motivates response towards victims/criminals. I expect that this victim frame mostly applies to images of innocent civilians enduring state violence, whereas the most resonant criminal images are of people who might directly harm the lives or properties of bystanders. Secondly, political leaders might also attempt to invoke bystanders' moral identity and provide them with logistical support in order to mobilize collective response. Hence, whether a bystander reacts to protesters by herself or collectively depends on whether she is exposed to neighborhood-level mobilization for collective action.

Consequently, I argue that bystander protection and disruption influence the scope and efficiency of repression, and therefore, determine not only how many protesters survive but also to which extent surviving protesters stay committed to the movement. Specifically, bystander disruption leads grassroots activists to suffer from both state repression and bystander sabotage, further discouraging them from re-engaging in the movement. On the other hand, if bystanders provide protective support to protesters, they might increase not only these activists' survival rate in the face of

government crackdowns, harassment, or surveillance, but also their commitment to carrying on with the movement. Finally, grassroots activists' survival and steadfast commitment contribute to movement resilience, because they either lead or participate in subsequent protests, or pass down their practical knowledge and ideological inspiration to new movement leaders and participants.

Data collection and analysis method

To test my theory, I provide an original qualitative dataset on the Burmese pro-democracy movement during 1988-2010, with an emphasis on the 1988 and 2007 events. I conducted semi-structured interviews and collected written testimony of more than 100 ordinary citizens and former pro-democracy activists in Myanmar during late 2017- early 2018, who witnessed or were involved in protest events in 1988, 2007, and others. The novelty of this dataset is the large number of voices from the ordinary, non-contentious general public from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, which are mostly missing in existing research on social movements in dictatorships.

For the written accounts, I collaborated with the Yangon School for Political Science and other local private libraries and institutions in Yangon to identify and collect published testimonials. As for the interview sample, in order to build trust with interviewees while maximizing the diversity of the sample, I also worked with different connections from the above-mentioned institutions and their affiliates to recruit respondents. With advanced proficiency in Burmese, I managed to recruit the interviewees, conduct in-person interviews with a team of local research assistants, and transcribe and translate the interviews into English together with my team. The

interview process stopped once my sample reached all of the sampling criteria (regarding geographical, demographic, and political representations) and the data reached saturation, i.e. when new interview data was mostly redundant and offered too little new information (Bertaux 1981, Weiss 1994, Creswell 2014). I provide further description of my interview sample in Chapter 3.

By collaborating with local organizations, the research protocol is in keeping with local social standards and expectations. First, Myanmar's political liberalization is conducive to my interviews and archival work. Since 2012, a large number of former politicians and student activists in Myanmar have given interviews to newspapers, magazines, and television shows and authored memoirs that were publicly distributed throughout the country. They openly discuss their historical anti-government activities and state repression under the military regime, without having faced any threats or repercussions.

In order to ensure the reliability of my interview and testimony data and guard against the possibility of incorrect recall, I triangulate the accounts with other sources of published information, including reports from the Burmese military juntas, civil society, and international human rights organizations. In terms of social desirability, since the contentious events occurred more than a decade ago under previous regimes and there is little censorship surrounding the events during my fieldwork period, the probability of interviewees misrepresenting their own experiences is minimized.

As for data analysis, I adopt the process tracing method in my dissertation as it allows me to not only identify a link between variables of interest but also the causal mechanisms that produce such correlation. According to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly

(2001), discovering causal mechanisms is key in social movement research: “To explain contentious politics is to identify its recurrent causal mechanisms, the ways they combine, in what sequences they recur, and why different combinations and sequences, starting from different initial conditions, produce varying effects on the large scale.” The field’s emphasis on studying mechanisms and processes is arguably even more relevant in the context of repressive dictatorships where many more unidentified mechanisms exist, compared to liberal democracies. Hence, in this dissertation, I perform process tracing on the various contentious cycles of the urban pro-democracy movement in Myanmar.

My contributions

While the resilience of the Burmese pro-democracy movement is distinctive, I argue that the findings from my research significantly contribute to our understanding of repressive dictatorships. This section elaborates on my contributions to the bodies of literature on social movement and authoritarian repression.

First, this study offers a new framework to comprehend opportunities and constraints around movement entrepreneurs by taking into account the role of bystanders. Particularly, based on my analysis of qualitative interviews and primary written data on urban pro-democracy movement under Myanmar’s military dictatorships, I show that two types of non-protesting actions by bystanders, namely protective support and hostile disruption, affect movement resilience by moderating the scope and efficiency of anti-protester repression and violence.

Another major contribution of this study to the social movement literature is the finding on the ability of movement organizers to modify the physical political

constraints imposed by hostile regimes, which have traditionally been conceptualized in most existing studies as exogenous to challengers. From a similar perspective, a number of studies on the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America have highlighted the ability of contentious movements to win the support by security forces (riot police, military, etc.) as the most crucial factor leading to movement success. My research complements these studies by examining a hard case where, even though the majority of the security forces did not defect, the decision by civilian bystanders alone to collectively protect movement participants and refuse cooperation with the authorities had an independent impact on the movement's survival. In order to encourage bystander noncooperation with the authorities and protection of movement participants, movement organizers framed protesters as innocent victims of state brutality, who deserve public assistance or rescue.

However, dictators are not naïve. The Burmese junta recognized the importance of civilian cooperation to the success of state repression against dissidents, which the current social movement literature has mostly neglected to address. Hence, by studying a contentious movement under this particular regime, I make a third contribution in terms of delineating the types of state propaganda and counter-mobilization strategies that might provoke bystanders' hostile disruption toward movement participants and cooperation with the state's repression campaigns.

Moreover, I also provide a new explanation for variation in observed state repression against social movements within a regime. Based on my research, such strategic variation is not explained by the dilemma of authoritarian control vs. power-sharing (Svolik 2012, Greitens 2016, Policzer 2009, Gandhi 2010) since this factor

varies across regimes instead of within one regime. It is also not due to autocrats' preferred pattern of repression that targets some forms of dissent more than others (Boudreau 2004), since contentious events under study are of the same form: urban, non-violent, anti-regime protests. Variation in the security forces' capacity or will to obey orders to repress (Bellin 2012) cannot account for within-regime variation in repression in the Burmese case either, because the Burmese military regime managed both of these factors quite effectively and kept their repressive apparatus intact. Instead, with this research, I show that an important cause for variation in observed mass repression is the state's own temporal strategy for rolling out violence so as to meet the least public backlash. Specifically, I explain this variation and illustrate this timeline by showing how the Burmese junta mostly tried to hide repression and only visibly cracked down in public after they already promulgated criminal images about protesters, in order to legitimize mass brutality.

I further elaborate on these contributions in the following chapters.

Specifically, in Chapter 2, I present my theory. Then in Chapters 3-6, I test my hypotheses with evidence from the Burmese urban pro-democracy movement. Finally, I conclude in Chapter 7 by demonstrating the potential applicability of my theoretical framework to contentious mobilization under modern-day repressive dictatorships.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I present in this chapter my theory of how bystanders' non-protesting actions can facilitate or undermine movement resilience under repressive regimes. As James Scott points out in his 1985 monograph *Weapons of the Weak*, political science tends to ignore or consider insignificant ordinary people's acts that are not overtly political. Accordingly, the current literature assumes that all non-protesting actions have a similar negative effect on movement resilience. Diverging from existing studies' focus on the role of active public participation in demonstrations or a movement's own resilience strategies, I argue that the general public's non-protesting acts have an independent effect on movement resilience. Numerous works have demonstrated the political salience of average citizens' hidden resistance that is usually not as captive as open rebellion (O'Brien and Li 2006, Fu 2018, Braun 2017). Similarly, in this study, I would like to present and argue for the political significance of two forms of understudied bystander responses that can have distinct effects on whether public activism endures or perishes.

I conceptualize popular movements as a type of public activism whose main repertoire is sustained public protest. Such movements can have different types of causes: from outright calls for regime change to policy-specific demands in terms of labor rights, minorities rights, land rights, environmental protection, etc. Each movement can consist of multiple protest events over time, and I define a popular movement as *resilient* if its demonstrations keep emerging and attracting a large

number of participants. A significant challenge toward movement resilience under dictatorships is government repression, which can take many forms, including constant attacks and arrests of participants during and after protests, continuous surveillance of movement leaders, censorship of pro-movement materials, blackout of independent media, etc. These different manifestations of government repression test movement resilience and give rise to my main research puzzle: Why do some movements maintain their strength while others weaken after targeted repression?

Resilience can vary between popular movements, or within a movement itself. In terms of variation between movements, assuming there are two movements that suffer equal state repression, one movement is more resilient than the other if it has a higher number of mass protests occurring over a longer period of time. In terms of variation within a movement, considering a movement that is constantly suppressed by the state in different locations or over a number of years, there can be variation in resilience across locations or across time if mass protests occur more in some locations or time periods than others.

I explain movement resilience by focusing on actions of neutral bystanders, especially their protection and disruption toward the movement participants. Since protest movements are openly contentious acts that aim to catch public attention and induce reactions from the general public, bystander response, in all of its diverse forms, is a relevant variable in all cases. In general, there can be various types of bystander responses toward popular movements that range from non-action, hostile disruption, sympathetic protection, and protest participation. Many bystanders engage in low levels of support, such as applauding demonstrators, watching movement's

public speeches, or following protesters from afar. A smaller number engage in more direct forms of participation after they are inspired or provoked by the movement. Such acts include joining demonstrations, launching similar protests in their own neighborhoods, leading backlash protests against state repression, and vandalizing government properties.

Among these forms, I argue that bystander protection and disruption are critical to movement resilience under repressive periods and that the political salience of these two forms of response applies to the majority of cases of popular movements under dictatorial regimes. Disruption refers to physical violence against protesters, blocking protests, or reporting of movement activities to the authorities. Protection is the opposite of disruption, and includes a variety of acts such as forming a protective human chain around protesters, donating food and medicines to protesters, advising protesters on how to stay safe, hiding protesters from the authorities, taking protesters to hospital, and giving medical treatments to protesters, among others.

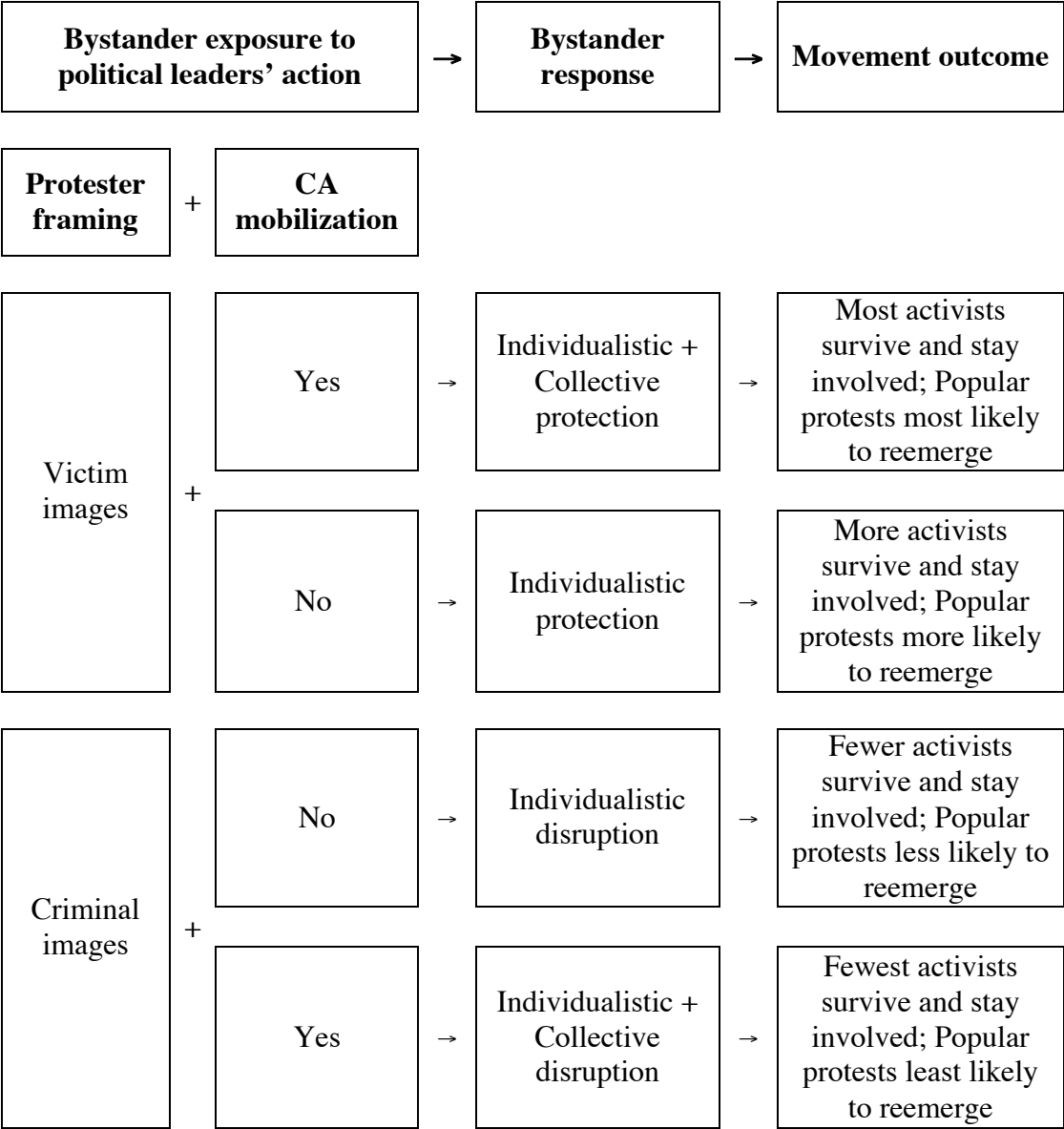
If bystander actions can play an important role in explaining movement resilience, what makes a bystander decide to rescue or confront protesters when they face state repression? I argue that bystander response toward movement participants is shaped by two distinct processes. First, both the government and movement, here I call *political leaders*, promote certain types of protester image in order to influence public perception of the movement, and whether a bystander chooses to protect or disrupt protesters depends on (a) whether she is exposed to protester images that resonate with her victim or criminal frame and (b) whether her moral identity motivates response towards victims/criminals. Secondly, political leaders might also

attempt to invoke bystanders' moral identity and provide logistical support in order to mobilize collective responses, and hence, whether a bystander responds to protesters by herself or collectively depends on whether she is exposed to leaders' mobilization for collective action (CA).

Consequently, I argue that the presence of bystander protection or disruption will determine not only how many protesters survive but also to which extent surviving protesters stay committed to the movement, which in turn shapes movement resilience or ability to keep staging future popular protests. According to my hypotheses, bystander disruption will cause grassroots activists to suffer from both state repression and bystander sabotage, hence further discouraging them from re-engaging in the movement. On the other hand, if bystanders provide protective support to protesters, they can increase not only these activists' survival rate but also their commitment to carry on with the movement. Finally, grassroots activists' survival and steadfast commitment contribute to movement resilience, because they either lead or participate in subsequent protests, or pass down their practical knowledge and ideological inspiration to new movement leaders and participants.

My unit of analysis is the individual bystander, i.e. her exposure and response to movement participants. Hence, I do not separate protest events but put them all in the same pool and compare how individual bystanders come to respond differently toward protesters and how different bystander reactions lead to different likelihoods of protester survival. The exception is when I theorize about the effect of surviving protesters' continued participation on movement resilience, i.e. the emergence and scale of future protests. For this mechanism, the unit of analysis is the individual

activist. I summarize the hypotheses regarding political leaders' actions, bystander responses, and movement outcomes that I introduce above in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Theory on bystander protection and disruption toward protesters under repressive dictatorships

1. The impact of government and activists' framing and mobilization on bystander responses

Why do bystanders engage in protection or disruption, and why does this vary across bystanders? In order to provide an explanation to this puzzle, I develop new hypotheses by integrating the current literature on (a) frame resonance (Kaplan 2008, Masullo 2020); (b) public's trust vs. fear regarding protesters (Chenoweth 2017, Aytac et al. 2018, Turner 1969); (c) emotional motivations and moral identity (Pearlman 2018, Wood 2003, Thomas et al. 2009, Pagano and Huo 2007); and (d) leader mobilization for collective action (Robinson 1995, Ward 2016, Loveman 1998). The result is a fresh perspective that complements existing approaches while offering additional, novel insights.

a. Effect of protester images on bystanders' sympathy vs. hostility

The literature tends to assume that participants of movements that are popular are more likely to be faced with sympathetic, supportive bystanders during repressive periods and, conversely, that participants in less legitimate movements are more likely to experience disruptive hostility (Aytac et al. 2018, Ward 2016, Loveman 1998). Movement legitimacy can come from several different sources: popular demands, popular leaders, or non-violent methods. According to Loveman (1998): "When early risers are able to create or expand openings, whether they will be filled by new actors depends in part on the ability to frame the struggle in terms that resonate in the wider society." Similarly, Aytac et al. (2018) contend that whether a bystander "sees fellow government opponents being teargassed and infers that an injustice is being done" or "sees lawless hooligans who are receiving the treatment they deserve" depends on

whether such bystander believes the cause of protesters.

However, I argue that we cannot equate public approval of a movement with sympathetic support toward its individual protesters, since these are two distinct phenomena. Granted that bystanders are not likely to sympathize with protesters if they perceive movement demands as illegitimate or unacceptable, movement legitimacy is not enough to trigger sympathy: individual participants themselves need to appear as “deserving” of help. Despite having popular demands and employing a non-violent method, a movement might still be vulnerable to the regime’s allegations of harboring rioters as well as state agents’ infiltration and violent incitement. Hence, the general public might still become aggressive toward protesters within a popular movement. Therefore, while movement legitimacy plays a role, it does not automatically produce bystanders’ sympathy or preclude their hostility toward individual protesters. Instead, in order to invoke sympathy toward protesters, a movement needs to employ various strategies to undermine the state’s criminal allegations to convince the public of the protesters’ innocence.

Political leaders are aware of this and are actively involved in manufacturing and reshaping protesters’ public images in addition to framing the legitimacy of the protests themselves. For example, Aytac et al. (2018) acknowledge that the Turkish government manipulated narratives about protesters not so much in order to discourage protest participation but mainly to diminish public sympathy and support toward protesters:

“For their part, ruling authorities who find themselves facing a backlash movement understand implicitly the importance of a counternarrative that justified their acts. In a

polarized setting like Turkey, the government constructed this narrative not so much to keep protesters off the streets as to take advantage of the situation to rile their own supporters.”

Hence, we cannot take for granted that the popularity of a protest guarantees that the public is supportive of protesters.

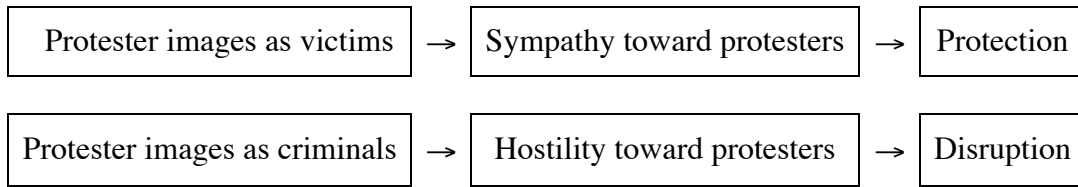
Indeed, according to the literature on frame contestation and resonance, in order to encourage bystanders or community members to take a desired action, political entrepreneurs need to frame such action in a way that resonate with others’ beliefs, values, ideologies, etc (Kaplan 2008, Masullo 2020). In the case of popular protests, since protester images are products of political leaders’ strategies, I contend that frame resonance can vary, and hence, that bystanders’ perceptions of and reactions toward the same protesters can also vary. I hypothesize that bystanders are likely to sympathize with protesters if protester images resonate with individual bystanders’ visions of victims, and more likely to distrust protesters if protester images match individual bystanders’ visions of criminals.

I further argue that once bystanders sympathize with protesters’ suffering, they are motivated to offer protective support. As the literature on rescue of victims of mass killing or genocide corroborates, victim images might lead to different emotions, including guilt, sympathy, and outrage, that motivate different types of actions (Pagano and Huo 2007, Thomas et al. 2009, Saab et al. 2015, Blum 1992). Pagano and Huo (2007) study how moral emotions motivate responses among U.S. citizens towards Iraqi citizens – “victims” of the 2003 War. They find that while guilt predicts support for reparation of damage created by the U.S., outrage toward the Saddam

Hussein regime is likely to facilitate political actions that punish perpetrators. More importantly, they also show that sympathy correlates with support for humanitarian action to improve the welfare of people in Iraq. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2009) find that “[sympathy]’s key motivating action tendency is to attempt to help the disadvantaged and mitigate their suffering.” Hence, sympathetic emotion for “victimized” protesters is the intermediate step that bridges frame resonance and the action of protective support toward protesters.

On the other hand, when protester images resonate with the criminal frame, bystanders are more likely to regard protesters as threats (Turner 1969) who can potentially wreak havoc with their communities. I argue that such distrust and threat perception channels another important emotion – *hostility* – which motivates disruptive actions against the protesters. Similar phenomena have occurred in cases of massacre or ethnic cleansing where ordinary citizens turned against their neighbors due to state propaganda that framed the targeted population as criminals. Examples include state-manufactured accusations that inflamed the Yugoslav wars in the early 1990s as well as Milosevic’s propaganda of Muslim men abusing Serb women that motivated Serbian support for ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims (Maass 1996, Gagnon 2006).

I summarize the mechanism from frame resonance to bystander response in Graph 2.



Graph 2. Effects of protester images on bystanders' emotional and behavioral responses

Accordingly, a government's goal is to diminish resonance with bystanders' victim frame and heighten resonance with the criminal frame. On the other hand, a movement's goal is to increase resonance with the victim frame and minimize resonance with the criminal frame. Since both the state and activists are well-versed in framing tactics and constantly update their strategies to compete for public support, this competition leads to different types of protester images that reach the general public.

So which protester images tend to resonate with which frames? In this section, I theorize on the types of images are likely to resonate with bystanders' victim or criminal frame and, hence leading to sympathy or hostility.

Governments have numerous strategies to frame protesters as criminals. However, I argue that they are not equally effective. According to Chenoweth (2017), the different tactics that states have employed include calling protesters agents of foreign interests or national traitors, planting agents provocateurs within protests in order to frame protesters as thugs, and censoring and defaming protests. In the case of protests in Turkey, in order to invoke aversion among bystanders toward protesters, then-Prime Minister Erdogan even labeled the protesters as "looters" (Aytac et al. 2018).

Nonetheless, I argue that only certain types of criminal images can invoke hostility among bystanders. Specifically, I expect that “anti-government rebels” or “coup plotters” who only pose merely indirect threat toward people’s wellbeing will not be considered as much of an urgent danger as will gang members, robbers, or thugs who might directly harm the lives or properties of bystanders. Thus, protester images that frame protesters as direct threats such as these are more likely to invoke bystander hostility and motivate disruption. In order to manufacture these images, as stated above, governments can broadcast the criminal labels of protesters and infiltrate protests with government agents who will act as such criminals in public, hence distorting bystanders’ perception of movement participants. This forms the first part of my first set of hypotheses:

H1a: Protester images as gang members, robbers, thugs, and murderers are more likely to make bystanders consider protesters to be criminals, and hence to become hostile toward protesters.

On the other hand, in terms of victim images, movement leaders in many cases are well versed in manufacturing different types of such images. For example, many movements broadcast and focus media attention on images of protesters suffering brutal police attacks and shootings:

“In the days before the Tahrir Square protests of January 25, 2011, [organizers of the Egyptian Arab Spring protests] spliced together video images of past police attacks and posted “get-out-the-protest clips on YouTube,” stringing together “notorious scenes of police brutality captured by cell phone video cameras” (El-Ghobashy 2011, 266). [...] According to Tatiana Chernovol, a protest leader [of the EuroMaidan

protests in Ukraine] and harsh critic of the government, the opposition at this point “exaggerated ... they said people were being killed. No one was killed, some people were beaten, but [in general] the police acted very peacefully at that moment” (Aytac et al. 2018).

Another type of image – a “martyr’s” funeral held in public – has also been used in similar contexts to mobilize bystander sympathy. For instance, according to stories from the Syrian civil war in Wendy Pearlman’s 2017 book *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, peaceful funerals of protesters killed by the Syrian government forces tended to attract large public attendance and moral support.

However, I argue that the literature’s characterization of bystander sympathy lacks nuance and that not all targets of state repression are equally likely to be considered as victims. Specifically, I expect that movement participants are more likely to gain public trust and sympathy when they can distance themselves from the state propaganda that demonize them. As stated above, governments have different tactics at hand to accuse protesters as frauds and criminals. Dictators can also incite conflicts between ethnic or religious groups in order to diminish inter-group trust (Robinson 1995, Maass 1996, Gagnon 2006). Thus, in order to gain tolerance from bystanders, a movement needs to actively contest the government propaganda, i.e. discrediting the criminal allegations, exposing the state’s ulterior motives, and maintaining control over protesters. I argue that this will increase protesters’ chance of receiving bystander sympathy and protection during government crackdowns. This leads me to the second part of my first set of hypotheses.

H1b: Protesters images as innocent members of the public yet still enduring

excessive state violence are more likely make bystanders consider protesters to be victims, and hence will become sympathetic toward protesters.

b. Beyond emotions: The role of moral identity in motivating high-risk bystander protection and disruption

Although my preceding discussion emphasizes the emotional foundations of bystander actions, sympathy or hostility alone are not enough to motivate bystander protection or disruption toward protesters, since both of these responses are high-risk acts. If protesters are at risk of state repression, then supporting or protecting them is risky as well. Supporters can be arrested, and places of refuge (such as mosques, monasteries, and churches) can be targeted if they are found to have supported protesters, even by just giving food to protesters during marches. Similarly, hostile disruption is also a high-risk act since bystanders might have to engage in violent confrontations against protesters that can result in casualties – the kind of altercations that people normally try to avoid. For these reasons, when bystanders see or hear about a protest, their instinct is usually to stay away from the event in order to avoid risks.

So why would bystanders ever engage in protection or disruption? I argue that bystanders' moral identity plays a crucial role in turning sympathetic/hostile emotion toward protesters into actions. Specifically, when acting is crucial to maintaining their moral identity, bystanders' risk perception matters less in their decision to act. For instance, the existing literature has identified the significance of moral motives for high-risk activism. Pearlman (2018) traces how bystanders' moral identity triggers risk acceptance when they witness protests and such moral obligation motivates them to

take part. According to her model:

“Witnessing early risers display esteemed values such as courage can activate bystanders’ urge to act in order to earn their own self-respect. [...] Subsequent movers are hence re-evaluating not the instrumental benefit of protest for achieving political objectives, but its inherent reward as a form of self-actualization. Finally, in absorbing punishments, early risers can trigger others’ feelings of obligation to stand up for a moral principle, and thereby their willingness to make sacrifices that they previously had not.”

Similarly, in Elisabeth Wood’s account on how ordinary peasants came to participate actively in the insurgent movement in El Salvador in the 1980s, it was the heightened moral motivations from liberation theology that enabled their tolerance toward risks. Furthermore, “they took pride, indeed pleasure, in the successful assertion of their interests and identity” (Wood 2003).

Based on this literature, I hypothesize that bystanders engage in high-risk protection or disruption toward protesters when two distinct causal factors are present: (1) resonance with victim/criminal frames creates sympathy/hostility, and (2) bystanders’ existing moral identity turns sympathy/hostility into actions: either rescuing suffering victims or confronting criminals. When either of these identities exists, people will be less likely to avoid protests and protesters, more likely to be risk-acceptant, and more likely to rescue or disrupt protesters in order to safeguard their identity.

How do people develop action-oriented moral identities in general? According to Thomas et al. (2009), such identities are socialized through group norms. Using the

example of individual moral motivations in helping the disadvantaged, they argue that people tend to act along group norms either in order to preserve their own identity or to sustain the group's reputed stereotype.

So which social groups would have a moral identity to rescue victims and which groups would feel morally obliged to confront criminals? In terms of the obligation to protect suffering victims, I expect no differentiation among members of the general public since caring for the unfortunate is a widely and frequently promoted value in most societies. Even though repressive dictators might perpetuate animosity among different social groups so that people will not sympathize with a demonized group, governments usually do not suppress community support for "innocent victims" (e.g. the poor, victims of natural disasters, victims of crimes, etc.). States even tend to promote altruism and encourage citizens to provide charity or social services toward the "deserving" sufferers in order to alleviate the state's burden in delivering public goods. Thus, in terms of achieving widespread protective support toward protesters during state repression, the main hurdle is not the general public's lack of moral obligation to rescue victims, but whether the public perceives the repressed protesters as victims or not.

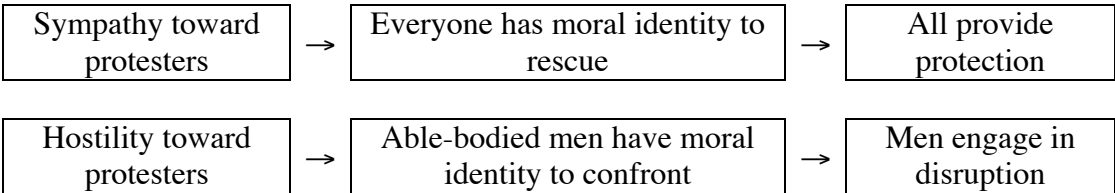
On the other hand, in terms of hostile disruption, I expect the moral identity to confront criminals to be associated with young and middle-age adult men, i.e. able-bodied men, who are regarded by patriarchal societies – including the majority of Burmese and many other societies – as the guardians of their own families and immediate communities. Thus, they are expected to provide and maintain safety for people under their care, which means they have a responsibility to confront and fight

against the sources of threat or disorder that might damage their households. By doing so, they safeguard their paternalistic identity. Therefore, in order for these male bystanders to disrupt protesters, they have to perceive protesters as posing direct danger toward their communities.

This leads me to my second set of hypotheses:

H2a: Once sympathizing with protesters, due to their moral identities to rescue victims, people of all demographic groups are equally likely to provide protective support.

H2b: Once becoming hostile toward protesters, due to their moral identities to confront criminals, able-bodied men are more likely than others to engage in disruption.



Graph 3. Moral identity mediating the relationship between bystanders’ emotions and responses toward protesters

c. Effect of political leaders’ mobilization on collective responses

Even when bystanders are motivated to protect or disrupt protesters, they might still hesitate to perform certain types of activities that are unfamiliar to them – which mostly include collective responses, such as joining a security line around a protest, contributing to group donation, or participating in a mob attack. In order to increase the likelihood that people will participate in these activities, political leaders

can also directly invoke moral identities among bystanders and direct them toward collective responses as an appropriate way to act in “emergency” situations. They can also physically and materially aid them in these endeavors.

In terms of government’s mobilization for collective violence, a textbook case comes from Geoffrey Robinson’s 1995 monograph *The Dark Side of Paradise*. Here he presents an account in which, in order to destroy the Communist force in Bali, Indonesia, the Suharto regime in 1965 not only supplied extensive logistics but also aroused moral obligations among civilians and vigilante groups at the grassroots level to eliminate the “enemies”.

“Providing logistical support to local vigilante groups and mass organizations, the military ensured that the task of destroying the PKI [Communist Party of Indonesia], begun in Java in October, would be carried to a successful conclusion. [...] The rhetoric articulated nationally and locally helped to create an atmosphere in which the killing of one’s enemy appeared not only morally justifiable but a patriotic and religious obligation” (Robinson 1995).

Social movements, by contrast, can make bystanders’ collective protection more likely by broadcasting a call to action or directly arranging collective actions. I argue that such mobilization is more effective when it is done by grassroots activists who are embedded in different neighborhoods and, hence, are considered to be *trustworthy* by the bystanders in their midst. According to Loveman’s (1998) discussion on protest mobilization, “the diversity and density of networks within which the personal networks of [activists] are embedded influences whether, or to what extent, the efforts of the first core group of actors will develop into sustained and effective collective

resistance and opposition.” Similarly, as for mobilization of collective protection, the more widespread a movement’s network, the more likely it is for this type of bystander response to emerge.

This leads me to my third hypothesis:

H3: Bystanders are more likely to participate in collective protection or disruption if they are exposed to political leaders’ neighborhood mobilization.

2. Impact of bystander response on activist survival and movement resilience

a. Effect of bystander response on activist survival

Both activists’ physical survival and continued commitment toward protests determine whether a movement persists or fragments in the face of state repression. In terms of movement fragmentation, experienced activists might choose to “retire”; turn to conventional politics, i.e. forming and running an opposition party; or solely engage in underground activities, such as spreading political pamphlets or participating in armed training. Activists attribute such movement fragmentation to the risk of always being under surveillance, their loss of confidence in protests’ efficiency, their desire to avoid arrest, or their cooptation by the government. Thus, fragmentation is, in an important way, a result of state repression and intolerance toward popular movements.

According to Boudreau (2004), “legacies [of state repression] helped activists determine what forms of resistance the state would tolerate, and how far activists would risk offending state tolerance under given conditions.” For example, in the case of the U.S. women’s movement in the 1980s which operated in a harsh political climate, Sawyers and Meyer (1999) documented how movement members modified

their goals and tactics away from popular protests and became marginalized, depoliticized, and co-opted.

“Both moderate and radical wings modify goals and tactics. Moderates emphasize institutional participation in pursuit of narrower goals, while the more radical wing effectively retreats from the political process – even though its rhetoric or goals may become more radical. Absent a visible link between margins and mainstream, the movement sacrifices legitimacy or visibility, and is less likely to reach a broader audience effectively” (Sawyers and Meyer 1999).

In such cases, state repression can “work” in confronting protest movements, heightening activists’ risk perception and lowering their political efficacy, and hence diminishing activists’ survival as well as continued involvement in mass protests.

How, then, might activists survive and persist after government crackdowns?

In the social movement literature, existing research on this topic is unsatisfactory because scholars either put their emphasis completely on activists’ own defensive strategies (MacLeod 2015, Beatty 2011, Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018, Finkel 2015, Loveman 1998) or simply assume that a high level of public participation facilitates higher survival rate (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) argue that protests are more likely to avoid state repression when they can grow the number of participants or motivate backlash protests. They provide quantitative and qualitative evidence that shows non-violent movements to be less likely to suffer and more durable against brutal state crackdowns than violent campaigns. This is because of the ability of peaceful protests to attract higher participation from public bystanders.

However, I argue that high public participation may not make the regime less willing to repress. Even though the government might be reluctant to crack down on activists in front of a crowd, they can arrest individual protesters after curfew. Furthermore, some authoritarian regimes *are* willing to use force against non-violent demonstrations because dictators have different strategies at their disposal to crush large-scale dissent without eliciting backlash (Deng and O'Brien 2013, Chenoweth et al. 2017, Aytac et al. 2018). As James Scott (1985) argues in *Weapons of the Weak*, most forms of rebellions or revolutions under repressive systems “are nearly always crushed unceremoniously.”

In terms of activists' own defensive strategies, according to Chenoweth (2017), demonstrations are much more likely to survive and succeed despite state repression if they are “linked to a larger campaign infrastructure.” However, when a movement operates in the face of state brutality under a repressive and capable dictatorship, such campaign infrastructure is highly restricted, and public activism never survives by relying on movement resources alone (MacLeod 2015). Myanmar between 1962-2010, for example, is a hard case for opposition organizational capacity because movement resources are highly restricted. More importantly, I argue that even if organizational capacity helps protesters survive repression, it does not necessarily motivate them to continue participation in the movement in the same way that bystander protection does.

Instead, I propose that bystander protection or disruption during protests plays a significant role in shaping the eventual survival and continued activism of dissidents. Even though these bystander responses might not affect the fates of movement leaders

who are already targets of constant government surveillance, I expect bystander support or disruption to play an important role in determining whether lesser-known, grassroots activists can escape government arrest and murder during protests. The survival rate of these grassroots members eventually shapes movement outcomes. Specifically, I expect that the heaviest blow to any movement is when bystanders disrupt or sabotage demonstrators, since not only do protesters have to suffer government crackdown but they also endure added damage by local residents. On the other hand, the most positive scenario for popular movements under brutal dictatorships is when bystanders provide protection toward grassroots protesters, helping them escape government crackdowns and keeping them alive.

Furthermore, in terms of activists' continued commitment despite repressive political environments, by complementing findings from the literature on high-risk activism (Pearlman 2018, Wood 2003) with general observations of Burmese activists, I argue that this commitment depends on three factors: (1) activists' sense of validation for their work; (2) their perception of risk in continued activism; and (3) their burden of guilt in quitting activism. I further argue that bystander protection or disruption during protests affects all three of these factors, and hence, determining the likelihood of activists' continued involvement in popular movements.

In particular, popular movements are less likely to fragment – and activists are more likely to stay committed – if they receive bystander protection during government crackdowns of protests. Being rescued by the public invokes a certain sense of validation for activists' work and reinforces their moral obligation in working for public interests; lessens their risk perception; and activates a sense of guilt in

“betraying” public support if they quit activism. First, bystander protective support is an important stamp of validation that fosters activists’ attachment to their work, not out of the protest’ political efficacy but out of its meaning toward the public. Activists tend to consider bystander protection as not only a manifestation of the public’s pure sympathy toward individual protesters but also approval of the movement as well as desire for the movement to continue. I expect this to provide an additional sense of purpose and moral obligation that inspires activists to remain committed to their popular movement, despite its difficulties. Secondly, I argue that bystander protection lowers activists’ risk perception while they engage in protests, since they can rely on an extra source of support during state repression. Finally, since bystanders have to take noticeable risks to rescue activists, this places extra burden on the activists who survive repression to continue with the movement. This is because their “retirement” would mean all of the public’s effort in helping them is squandered. Thus, I expect that bystander protection makes activists perceive a certain level of guilt in quitting.

If activists survive repression by their own resources instead of relying on bystander support, they are not as motivated to carry on with activism. This is because they do not experience two important commitment devices that would tie them to the movement: public validation for their work or burden of guilt in quitting activism.

Finally, I expect bystander disruption to have the opposite effect of protection on activists’ level of commitment toward their mass protests. Specifically, hostile disruption might increase activists’ perceptions of risk, diminish their sense of public validation, and obviate any sense of public guilt in retiring from activism. Hence, this type of bystander response deters activists’ future involvement with their movement.

Thus, I argue that, under a repressive regime that constantly cracks down on popular protests, protection by the general public provides significant strengths to maintaining movement resilience, while disruption has the opposite effect.

This leads me to my fourth set of hypotheses:

H4a: If bystanders provide protection, activists are more likely to survive state repression of protests and stay committed with the movement.

H4b: If bystanders engage in disruption, activists are less likely to survive repression or stay committed with the movement.

b. Impact of activist survival and commitment on movement resilience

As argued above, the survival and continued involvement by grassroots members are crucial to movement resilience – they are the main resource that keeps the movement alive. According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) in their comparison of resilience between armed and non-armed movements, “regime crackdowns arguably debilitate armed campaigns more than similar crackdowns against unarmed campaigns, because of the greater number of potential assets and “weapons” available to nonviolent resistance campaigns.” Specifically, activists’ continued involvement is invaluable to movement survival since they contribute significantly toward the emergence of future popular protests.

Mass protests usually emerge in two ways: directly led by experienced activists who survived crackdowns, or led by new activists with consultation by experienced activists. Protests rarely emerge from new activists in isolation; rather, there is usually a lot of coordination behind the scenes between experienced and new leaders, even if this is not known publicly. Experienced activists not only provide organizational

guidance but also actively inspire and train new generations of activists.

The literature on movement resilience emphasizes this role of “senior” activists during the period of secret planning for new protests (Taylor 1989, Sawyers and Meyer 1999). Taylor (1989) calls the movement survival mechanism in this period an *abeyance structure*, which indicates “a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another.” Studying the role of existing activists in keeping alive the U.S. militant feminist movement during the hostile years of 1950s-60s, Taylor (1989) concludes that the retention of activists is crucial in maintaining the movement’s abeyance structure since such activists “promote the survival of activist networks, sustain a repertoire of goals and tactics, and promote a collective identity that offers participants a sense of mission and moral purpose.”

I argue that activists who are committed to mass protests are likely to complete such tasks. First, committed activists play a significant role in inspiring new dissident generations. As stated by Taylor (1989), “in order to make participation [in social movement] more attractive, organizations must elaborate alternative cultural frameworks to provide security and meaning for those who reject the established order and remain in the group.” This is because the majority of general public, which is the pool from which movements recruit new activists, is disengaged from contentious politics under repressive regimes due to the perception of risk and their lack of political efficacy. Thus, I argue that without the work of existing activists to disseminate protest tactics or ideological inspiration to young people, most would not be inspired or motivated to get involved.

Furthermore, experienced activists also have practical knowledge to stage and mobilize public demonstrations themselves as well as can advise and train new activists on how to do so. According to Nancy Whittier's studies on generational spillover of social movements, "ideas, frames, tactics, organizational structure, and so forth" can be transmitted between older and newer generations of activists, through both informal interactions and deliberate training (Whittier 2018). For example, according to El Chazli's (2018) account of the Egyptian Arab Spring, existing activists were aware of the mobilizing power of police brutality images and they broadcast images of police abuse and torture of Khaled Said in order gain public attention, support, as well as outrage toward the authorities, in order to launch the "We Are All Khaled Said" movement. In addition, activists who have experienced multiple forms of state repression also know how to evade surveillance while secretly planning protests. According to Chenoweth et al. (2017):

"Exposure to selective repression (such as surveillance, beatings, arrests, and torture) helps dissidents to develop a robust skillset (the "resister's tool kit") that helps to maintain resistance later on [...]: 'establishing secure communications channels; procuring weapons without being detected by government agents; maintaining well-hidden meeting places and munitions caches; producing high-quality forged identification documents; and being able to identify and neutralize informers and government agents trying to infiltrate the organization'."

Senior activists are also crucial in crafting or helping new activists to craft popular demands and slogans for protests since they are able to learn from previous experiences and failures. For instance, in the case of authoritarian Egypt, protest

movements became more successful when they took lessons from their previous protests and modified their demands to have a more specific and less political objective. Specifically, “they called for certain socioeconomic rights, did not challenge the existing authoritarian structure of the regime, and thus were able to negotiate and obtain their requests” (Sika 2013).

This leads me to my fifth, and last, hypothesis:

H5: If experienced activists continue to be committed to their popular movement, the movement is more likely to launch new mass protests, and hence, to be more resilient.

Conclusion

This theory of bystander responses and movement resilience makes three main contributions. First, it problematizes the “black box” of activism under repressive regimes and rebalances the narratives away from a heavily biased focus on state and opposition. Second, it reveals the significance of seemingly non-political acts by oft-neglected “supporting actors” – ordinary bystanders – in determining the dynamics and outcomes of the main political struggle between the regime and social movements. Third, it sheds light on the very malleability of public perception regarding protesters and contentious politics. Since both the state and opposition are capable of shaping and reshaping such perception with different tactics, there is no certainty as to how it will turn out. This study examines and tests which types of protester images work to activate victim and criminal frames; the different ways governments and movements compete to create and control such images; and the ability of political leaders to directly intervene and mobilize bystander collective protection as well as disruption

toward protesters.

The following chapters provide empirical evidence for each link of the causal mechanism, with my Myanmar case studies of the 1988 and 2007 protest series as part of the urban pro-democracy movement. Specifically, chapter 3 discusses the correlation between political leaders' promotion of protester images and their resonance with bystanders' frames and moral identity. Chapter 4 describes bystanders' exposure to political leaders' CA mobilization and its effect on bystander participation in collective support or disruption. Chapter 5, then, dissects the distinct effects that these bystander actions have on activists' physical and political survival. Chapter 6 details activist survival's effect on movement resilience. Chapter 7 concludes.

CHAPTER 3

LEADER FRAMING AND BYSTANDER RESPONSE TOWARD PROTESTERS DURING THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN MYANMAR

Why does the general public respond differently toward political protests under repressive authoritarianism? In this chapter, I study the effect of state's and opposition movement's framing strategies on bystander responses toward movement participants, with case studies from Myanmar. During the 1988 and 2007 protests, the Burmese political leaders worked actively to label protesters as criminals and conceal victim images. On the other hand, protest leaders and followers employed various tactics to contest the "criminal" charges as well as frame the protesters as "victims" of state repression. By analyzing original interview data and written testimonials by Yangon residents who witnessed the 1988 or 2007 protest events, I find that the state's framing was likely to make bystanders become hostile toward the alleged "criminals" and make able-bodied men morally motivated to confront these protesters. In contrast, the movement's framing not only built public tolerance of protesters but also sympathy and moral obligation to provide protection.

As both protection and disruption were high-risk acts, this chapter highlights the significant role of criminal and victim framing in not only shaping bystanders' emotional reactions but also activating their moral identities to turn such emotions into protective or disruptive acts toward protesters, suppressing their perception of risk. In particular, since protesters were at risk of state repression, supporting or protecting them was risky as well. Many supporters were arrested when they were seen giving

water to protesters during marches, and places of refuge (such as mosques, monasteries, and churches) were targeted when they were found to have hid protesters during crackdowns. However, I find that the public's moral identity to rescue victims of unjust suffering encouraged the majority of Yangon residents to extend their generosity despite such risks. Similarly, direct confrontation with "criminalized" protesters was also a high-risk act where potential violence might result in casualties. Hence, many residents tended to stay away from crowds that were alleged to harbor thugs. Nonetheless, I find that, due to their paternalistic moral identity, able-bodied men were more likely to confront protesters, in order to divert imminent danger away from their communities.

I present below the main hypotheses that I examine in this chapter.

Effect of protester images on bystanders' emotional responses

H1a: Images of protesters as gang members, robbers, thugs, and murderers are more likely to make bystanders consider protesters to be criminals, and hence to become hostile toward protesters.

H1b: Images of protesters as innocent members of the public yet still enduring excessive state violence are more likely to make bystanders consider protesters to be victims, and hence will become sympathetic toward protesters.

Effect of moral identities in turning bystanders' emotions into actions

H2a: Once sympathizing with protesters, due to their moral imperative to rescue victims, people of all demographic groups are equally likely to provide protective support.

H2b: Once becoming hostile toward protesters, due to their moral imperative

to confront criminals, able-bodied men are more likely than others to engage in disruption.

Another distinct feature of my argument is that it highlights a novel perspective that political leaders from both the state and opposition movement compete to win the hearts and minds of the general public. They strive to convince the public to endorse their actions and denounce the other side's. This competitive nature raises the bar for both sides to carry out more advanced strategies in order to gain advantage against each other and, ultimately, be able to sway public opinion. In the cases from Myanmar, movement organizers had to rally widespread support for their activism in a context where the state leaders frequently sought to demobilize public involvement in the pro-democracy protests and legitimize state repression against protesters. For example, championing a popular demand and non-violent method would have been enough for the Burmese opposition movement to gain public support, had the authorities not alleged protesters to be criminals, instigated violence between protesters and bystanders, or hidden mass repression. However, since the junta simultaneously carried out counter-framing strategies, it took the movement a lot more effort, than had there been no competitor, to build and disseminate a persuasive frame to the public. Hence, in order to obtain extensive bystander support, the movement organizers and participants also had to actively contradict the state's criminal charges and widely publicize instances of protesters suffering unjust state brutality. It is crucial here that I present how the general public developed their perception and emotions under dual influences by both the state and movement throughout the protest period. As a result, this chapter juxtaposes bystander exposure

to consecutive state's and movement's strategies in order to effectively convey this dynamic.

Furthermore, in order to reaffirm the advantages that my theory holds over other frameworks in explaining the emergence of bystander protection and disruption, I show how other competing causal factors had little effect on bystander actions in my case studies. I evaluate protest motivation, state reward and threat, ethnic difference, as well as the impact of other types of protester images (anarchic rebels, agents of foreign powers, and non-violent protesters with a popular claim) on public responses. Finally, I elaborate on my contributions toward the existing literature on the 1988 and 2007 events. Overall, the existing literature on the 1988 and 2007 events contains evidence that corroborate my theory. However, since their focus was solely on protest participation as the main form of bystander response toward the movement, their accounts omit a large number of instances of bystander protection and disruption, which are the equally valuable and arguably even more prevalent forms of public reactions. Thus, my research complements this literature by presenting a more comprehensive picture of the emergence of and variation in such bystander responses.

1. Existing explanations

Many forms of bystander protection and disruption emerged and turned into collective action during the 1988 and 2007 events. They also varied across groups, neighborhoods, and time periods, which I will describe in detail in later sections. First, I would like to discuss the existing explanations in the literature for these types of bystander reactions and show how evidence from my case studies of the Burmese urban pro-democracy movement do not support such explanations.

a. Bystander protection as a form of protest participation

Do motivations that lead one to participate in protests also encourage one to protect fellow protesters? Certain acts of bystander protection might have appeared as protest participation (e.g. forming human chains around protesters; and giving water, food, medicine to protesters), however my data show that these are two distinct phenomena. During the 1988 and 2007 events, even though a large part of the general public chose to provide protective support toward protesters, they had very little desire for protesting. My data shows that the majority of bystanders were reluctant to face the risks in opposing the regime and the moral identity to motivate political activism was not widespread among the public.

One interviewee shares his thought process in 1988: "I was interested in participating but I was a government staff at the time. So I just guarded my ward but I didn't go to any strikes" (Interview 101). Another former student activist in 2007 concurs: "I was so excited before to join [the protesting monks], and then there were some students who were afraid. So it was not good to be involved because we were students. [...] The government had intelligence personnel with local wear, not uniform. They were everywhere at that time. If they saw us, it would not be good for our education. So we decided not to be involved" (Interview 100). Thus, the perceived risks in joining political protests, such as getting arrested, getting fired (from government jobs), or getting expelled from school prevented most bystanders from demonstrating.

b. Government threat and reward as motivations for bystander disruption

Were disruptive bystanders mostly citizens who received sizable,

individualized material rewards from the regime (e.g. jobs, business opportunities, social services, etc.)? According to the theory that Lisa Blaydes (2018) presents in her monograph *State of Repression* on the mechanism of how state actions shape citizens' political behavior, the part of the population that is most likely to defend the survival of an autocratic regime includes those that enjoy high-intensity, individualized rewards. Other studies that address bystander violence mostly come from the contemporary Chinese context, where such civilian disruption against protesters have exclusively been depicted as “thugs-for-hire,” suggesting a transaction-based principal-agent relationship between the state and the disruptive civilians (Hurst et al. 2014, Ong 2018).

These cases existed in Myanmar as well. For example, a student activist in 1988 remembers how the government-appointed administrators in his ward, who clearly were regime supporters, requested informers to come watch and arrest activists in his area: “Some heads of the quarter brought up some informers and told them to keep eyes on every action we took” (Interview 3). In 2007, a witness who lived near the protest site in 2007 also recalls how thugs that the government hired came to crush protesters: “There were also some civilian-clothed hired thugs. At first, the crackdown was led by the police, but later on it was mainly led by soldiers and thugs” (Interview 92).

However, since the Burmese dictatorship kept the number of reward recipients and hired thugs very small, even though these people were involved in hostile disruption, they did not make up the majority of bystanders. Indeed, most of the bystanders who disrupted protesters, as I find from my interview data, did not receive

rewards or suffered punishment prior to their actions. In fact, most of the urban Burmese population, in Blaydes' term, were burdened by "negative goods" such as poor public services and lack of social security, which made them become dissatisfied with the regime. Therefore, bystander disruption in my case studies was mostly not motivated by the regime's reward.

How about government threats? Were bystanders threatened to co-operate with government crackdown, leading to disruption toward protesters? Even though the security forces did threaten civilians, I find that this did not have any significant effect on bystander disruption in the cases of 1988 and 2007 events. First, people might have been threatened to stay away from protest sites or not to support the protests, but there was no evidence that they were forced to actively confront or disrupt the protesters. Second, many interviewees detail how their neighbors, mosques, pagodas, and churches even refused to comply with the government's order against sheltering the wanted movement participants: "The mosques and houses downtown also opened their doors for monks and supporters to come hide. Most houses in downtown are owned by Muslims but they opened their doors to strangers, even though plain-clothed intelligence came to investigate every house at night" (Interview 17). Hence, government threats were mostly irrelevant in these case studies in terms of shaping bystander disruption.

c. Ethnic difference

As various studies on ethnic politics have shown, people tend to trust co-ethnics more than non co-ethnics (Habyarimana et al. 2009). In this case, as Bamar Buddhists were thought to make up the vast majority of urban pro-democracy

protesters, were Bamar bystanders more likely to sympathize and offer protection?
Were non-Bamar more likely to engage in bystander disruption?

There are cases where existing ethnic tension hindered non-Bamar bystanders from engaging in protective support. For instance, a Karen man, who is an ethnic minority living in Yangon in 2007, recalls how his Karen neighborhood was not bothered much by state repression of ethnic Bamar monks and protesters. This is because many minority ethnic populations regarded all Bamar people, the majority ethnic group that also controlled the military and government, as their oppressors for decades. Hence, the protesters' ethnicity background made them appear as "villains" to these minority neighborhoods and deterred sympathetic support: "Most people in our community are Karen people, they didn't really care. Most of the people who were suffering were Bamar people so it had nothing to do with us" (Interview 15).

However, there are also cases where exposure to innocent images of Bamar protesters motivated non-Bamar bystanders to extend protection. One example comes from a politically knowledgeable Muslim priest in Yangon. Even though he saw the non-violent march by the monks in 2007, he did not support them at first because a previous state-sponsored sectarian unrest between Muslim and Buddhist communities made him suspect that monks had malicious intentions. Nonetheless, after witnessing the monks' selfless acts, especially their orderly marches under heavy rain while chanting well-wishes for everyone, he was convinced that they were harmless. This made him sympathize with them when he was later exposed to their suffering of state brutality.

Thus, even though ethnic difference might have played a role in deterring

bystander protection in some instances, the evidence from my case studies does not show a strong correlation between ethnic background and support/disruption to protesters. Indeed, Muslim communities, which disproportionately lived near market places and downtown areas where the protests frequently passed, were among the most active rescuers of protest participants during crackdowns. Moreover, I do not find non-Bamar to be more likely to engage in cases of bystander disruption either.

d. Other criminal images: anarchic rebels or agents of foreign powers

Were other types of criminal images effective in facilitating hostile disruption toward protestors? Not in this case. Enemies of the regime, who did not pose direct risks toward individual citizens, were not regarded as a threat to ordinary bystanders. Most of my interviewees knew of the government's accusations of protesters as rebels, but no one expressed any reactions toward such accusations. They said such framing only had effects on the soldiers who were tasked with countering anti-state dissidents: "The soldiers who cracked down were not Bamar but other ethnic groups with Christian religion. Some soldiers came into my house to use the bathrooms. I talked with them. [...] The soldiers were told that: People you saw on the streets were not good people, they are rebels against the state, so it is your responsibility to defend the state" (Interview 92).

At the height of the Four-eight Uprising, a lot of residents also witnessed the government unlock state-owned warehouses and enabled looting. Later, the government alleged that these looters were thugs who took advantage of the protest period to rob government factories. But most people were not even concerned about the looters of state-owned shops and storages since they did not inflict personal harm

to members of the public. Many even sympathized with them since they shared common hardships or grievances: “The military took the food and the things they want from the storages but they left the storages unlocked. So the people at the time were very starving so they came and took the left-over food” (Interview 101). Among my interviewees, these images did not provoke hostility.

e. Other positive images: Popular movement with a non-violent method

Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find that non-violent movements with resonant grievances tend to attract a high rate of public participation. So, might such popular non-violent images also be effective in facilitating their sympathy and protection during government crackdown? I argue that these images alone cannot motivate sympathetic protection. Even though these images were present during the 1988 and 2007 events, they did not preclude bystander apathy or even hostility toward protesters.

In both 1988 and 2007, the movement organizers presented popular demands and adopted a non-violent method. They “advertised” that there would be a large movement over the whole country to show the public that this demonstration genuinely represented public interest. This increased public acknowledgement of the movement as well as motivated public participation. In 1988, many interviewees also supported the demands of movement participants who asked for the release of arrested activists as well as the removal of the one-party dictatorship that had been suppressing the population politically and economically. Similarly, local Yangon residents expressed their approval of the monks’ demands during the 2007 demonstration, as they monks requested the government to alleviate people’s suffering by: decreasing

commodity prices, releasing political prisoners, and engaging in national reconciliation. In order to justify public protests, the monks even announced an ultimatum: that they would give the government some time to address these problems before they staged a religious boycott.

However, despite having popular demands and employing a non-violent method, the 1988 and 2007 protests were still vulnerable to the regime's allegations that the movements harbored disruptive criminals. They were also vulnerable to state agents' infiltration and violent incitement. One testimonial comes from a shopkeeper near downtown Yangon in 2007 who heard rumors about robbers mixing among the non-violent monks: "Because we were afraid of shooting and smuggling, I closed my shop for three days. The monks usually came back around 2pm, before 2pm we already closed the market" (Interview 91). Hence, without actively contradicting the government's criminal framing or neutralizing agents provocateurs, these protests were unlikely to elicit sympathy from bystanders.

In the next sections, I will detail how only certain types of victim and criminal frames played the main role in motivating the majority of bystander protection and disruption, respectively.

2. Qualitative sampling and causal identification

My main independent variable are types of protester images that the state and/or movement promoted. I argue that, from the beginning to end of the 1988 and 2007 events, Yangon residents' exposure to these images was, on average, independent of their other characteristics that might explain their responses toward protesters. Moreover, this pattern of exposure is also applicable to my interview

sample and enables my qualitative identification of the images' causal effects.

Specifically, due to the movement's diversification of marching routes across different townships in Yangon, many Yangon residents just happened to witness the 1988 or 2007 events since they lived, worked, or passed by the major roads and were curious about the marches' spectacles. In addition, due to the state's and movement's wide broadcast of their framing in order to shape public perception, a large part of the population also heard about or saw photos/recordings of the protests from both the state and movement, without having particular interests in activism.

First, in terms of the protest marches spreading throughout Yangon, one protest follower recounts the movement's strategy to widely advertise its cause during public speeches across crowded neighborhoods in 1988: "The march leaders carried a stool with them, after walking for a while, they got on to the stool and stood up, and gave a speech or sang the national anthem or shouted the demands. So they changed the leaders and carried the march along the way" (Interview 94). Another resident who lived near downtown in 2007 also remembers the easy access to the actual demonstrations and public speeches from the monks: "It was in front of the City Hall. The demonstration leaders clarified the purposes of the demonstration, how the monks started marching and chanting *Metta Sutta* [the Buddhist script of loving kindness] because of the rising commodity prices across the country. So they asked people to join in the speech event in order to persuade people" (Interview 92). Thus, while a lot of anti-government dissidents came to observe the protests, many others were merely ordinary citizens or even pro-government supporters who got to watch these events due to physical proximity to large assembly points. As a result, dissidents did not form

the majority of protest witnesses.

Secondly, another key factor that boosted public exposure to the state's as well as opposition's discourses during the protest events was mass media. In order to shape public perception and emotions toward protesters, both the regime and movement widely promulgated their messages and images in 1988 and 2007. For example, on the government's side, using state media, the BSPP denied mass repression against student demonstrators in the months leading up to the Four-eight Uprising and blamed most of the casualties on altercations among the students themselves. In order to disperse anti-regime protesters and their supporters, Ne Win, before August 1988, also notoriously declared that: "when the army shoots, it shoots to hit." This statement reached the majority of the population through state media, as many of my interviewees corroborate. Even anti-government dissidents were frequently exposed to state media since these announcements penetrated every neighborhood through the public announcement system. Hence, Yangon residents, with different political leanings, were more or less equally exposed to state media on a regular basis.

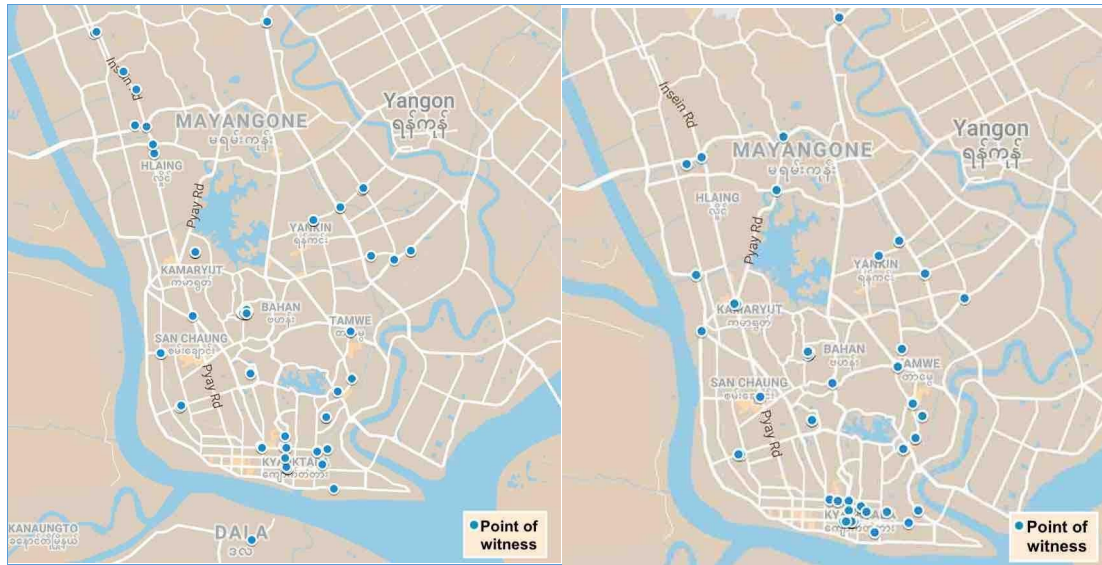
On the movement's side, even though people were not allowed to watch or listen to non-state media, but many people were still able to frequently access them through different means that the state could not regulate. For example, pamphlets and posters were usually distributed at crowded places, such as markets and public parks, and caught the attention of people nearby. Adults also usually had hand-held stereos to listen to BBC or VOA, rich families had access to foreign TV channels like CNN or Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), poor people watched those channels at teashops or their rich neighbors' houses, etc. Many ordinary residents with little interest in

activism had been observing these news sources since they had become skeptical of the veracity of government news and had found independent channels to be reliable. Their precarious lives depended on government policies or actions that the state did not always transparently announced or explained. Hence, the habit of normal citizens to listen to foreign radios preceded the 1988 and 2007 events, and ordinary people were just as likely as dissidents to be exposed to these sources. Thus, it was normal for a large, apolitical population in urban areas to have access to both government and non-state media.

Capitalizing on such opportunities, since the first days of their protests, movement organizers actively disseminated their demands, announced their non-violent method, and reported on state brutality through non-state media, pamphlets, and posters. For instance, at the start of the Four-eight Uprising, the public became aware of the pro-democracy movement after they came across pamphlets and BBC announcements with movement's justifications and demands that were distributed across universities, schools, and crowded areas: "The pamphlets before August 8th announced that there would be a demonstration on August 8th. [...] They described the disqualification of the government, the poverty of the people, and the arrested and killed students" (Interview 94). Similarly, in 2007, many residents recall listening to the protest leader, U Gambira, announcing about the imminent monk demonstration on TV: "We heard announcements from DVB by U Gambira. He announced what time they will take action and so on. [...] People also went to teashops to listen. They made announcements at 8pm. People gathered, listened, and watched DVB. People who did not have satellites went to houses with satellites and listened" (Interview 97).

This pattern of exposure is also applicable to my interview sample and crucial to my qualitative analysis of causal mechanisms in this chapter. As I present in the introduction chapter, I conducted in-person semi-structured interviews mostly with Yangon residents from diverse demographic (age, gender, occupation, and ethnic/racial group) and political (no interest in activism, some interest in activism, and some experience in activism) backgrounds. Since I tried to mirror the geographical representation of Yangon residents in my sample, and mostly recruited the “average Joes” who claimed to have little interest in political affairs, I can take advantage of the largely accidental exposure and non-exposure to protester images among the interviewees in order to isolate the independent effects of these images on bystander responses.

Figure 1 shows my interviewees’ points of witness of protest events in 1988 and 2007 in Yangon. As represented in the maps, these points spread throughout various townships in both downtown (e.g. Kyeemyindaing, Latha, Pabedan, Kyauktada, Botahtaung, Pazundaung, etc.) and outskirt areas (e.g. Dala, Insein, North Okkalapa, South Okkalapa, Mayangone, Yankin, etc.).

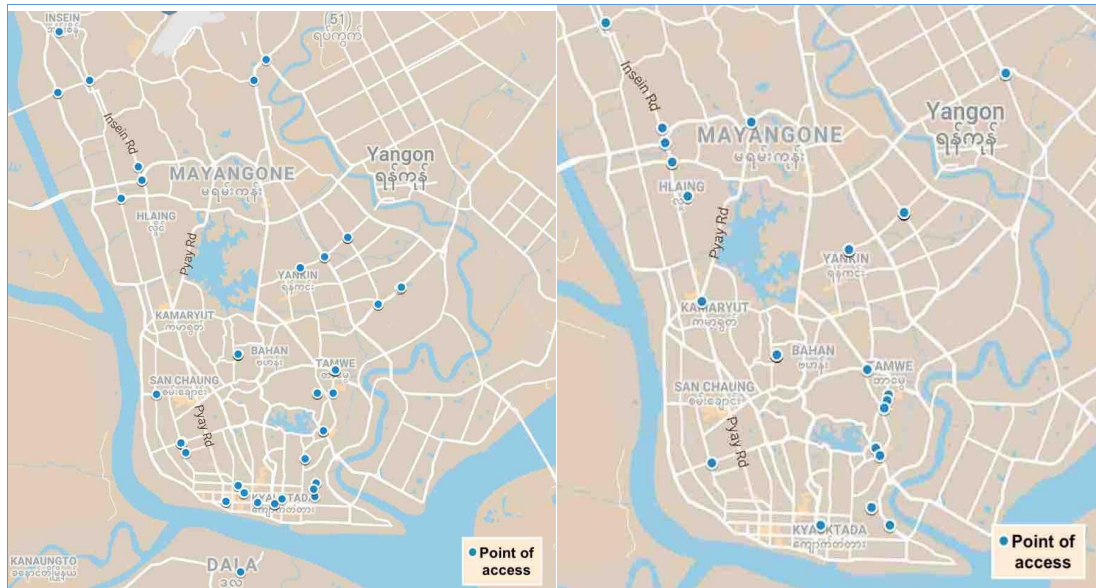


1988

2007

Figure 1. Maps of interviewees' points of witnessing the 1988 and 2007 protests in Yangon (point precision at township level)

Figure 2 represents the townships where my interviewees accessed mass media reports on the 1988 and 2007 events. Similar to Figure 1, the points of media access are located throughout urban and suburban Yangon.



1988

2007

Figure 2. Maps of interviewees' points of accessing mass media on the 1988 and 2007 protests in Yangon (point precision at township level)

In order to assess the external validity of my findings, I later also interviewed witnesses of the 1988 and 2007 events outside Yangon. Hence, my interview sample extended to cities and towns in different parts of Myanmar, including Hmawbi (Yangon Region), Mandalay (Mandalay Region), Magwe (Magwe Region), Mawlamyine (Mon State), Myitkyina (Kachin State), Tedim (Chin State), etc. In short, the interviewees' mostly accidental exposure to the protest events enables my causal identification strategy in this chapter.

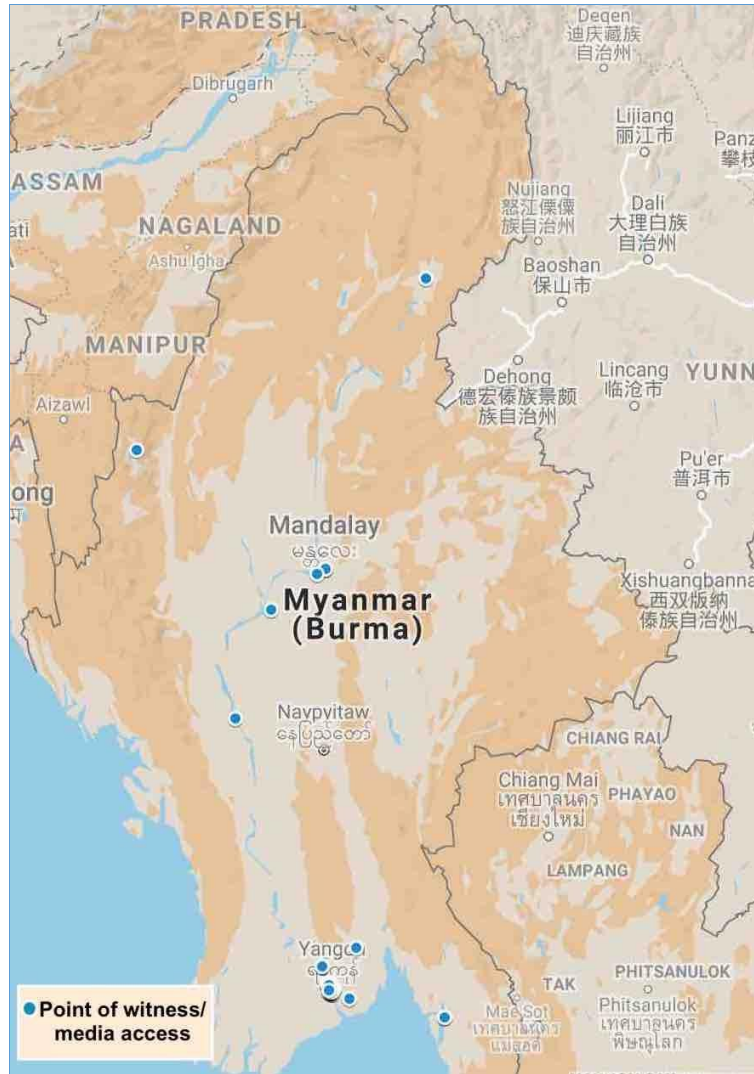


Figure 3. Map of interviewees' points of witnessing/accessing media on the 1988 and 2007 protests throughout Myanmar (point precision at city/town level)

3. State's and movement's framing of protesters: *hsu pu thu* vs. *pyi thu lu du*

In both 1988 and 2007, the regime and opposition both avoided using the word “protesters” to describe movement participants. Instead, the state mostly called them “rioters” (*hsu pu thu*) in order to promote criminal images; and vice versa, the movement constantly addressed them as the “general public” (*pyi thu lu du*) in order to suppress such criminal charges. Those two terms embody the core of the two

competing framing strategies.

a. State's framing of protesters

During the 1988 and 2007 events, the state worked actively to increase resonance of protester images with criminal frame and decrease resonance with victim frame, hence provoking the general public's hostility and diminishing sympathy toward movement participants. Specifically, the government constantly employed multiple strategies in order to build up images of the movement as controlled or infiltrated by thugs, robbers, and convicts and the government's response to such criminals as proportional. State media and agents not only spread rumors about criminals mixing among protesters and placed their *agents provocateurs* among protesters in order to stoke disturbance, but also hid their mass repression from public knowledge.

In order to discredit the opposition movement and, ultimately, to legitimize state repression, the regime rolled out these strategies with a specific temporal order. At first, as each protest was gaining popularity, the government did not crack down right away but started broadcasting its allegations of protesters as criminals. At the same time, state agents disguised as civilian bystanders, penetrated the protest, and instigated unrests. Only after these two strategies took effect, did the regime begin their mass repression campaign. I represent this order in Figure 4 below.

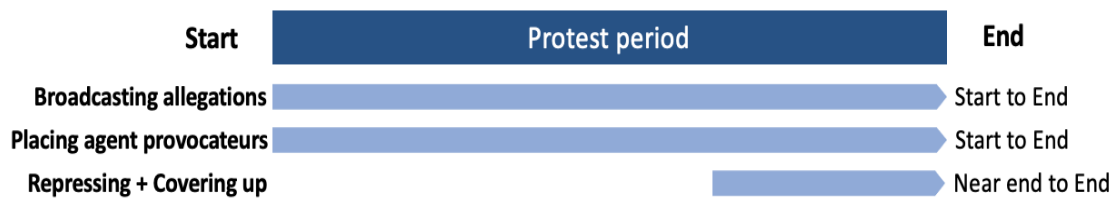


Figure 4. Temporal order of state's framing strategies during a protest period

First, during both the 1988 and 2007 events, many interviewees recalled how the government spread news through mass media that “rioters”, *hsu pu thu*, hid among monks and layman demonstrators in order to rob properties, poison food and water, burn down cars, and destroy factories and offices. By broadcasting about multiple communal unrests across different townships in Yangon, the authorities wanted to make the public perceive an immediate threat from protests. These types of news about localized crimes reached many neighborhoods. As a result, most of my interviewees heard these rumors or saw their neighbors arrest suspects, even though they did not actually witness the alleged sabotages.

Secondly, to further produce optical illusions of protesters as criminals, the state used their own agents to infiltrate peaceful protests and instigate riots. In 2007, these agents attacked the security forces with bricks and rocks, so that the military could use this as a justification for soldiers to shoot protesters later on. One interviewee details one such account: "Some other people, not part of the demonstrators, came and hit the soldiers with rocks. I think this group was instigators between the soldiers and the general public. As a result, the soldiers got really angry. So when they got the command to shoot, they started to shoot the people" (Interview 91). At the height of the Four-eight Uprising, the state also had their agents poison the

water wells and road-side water jugs in different townships so as to make local residents believe in their allegations and become hostile toward all suspicious-looking strangers, including protesters (Interview 109). At the same time, it shut down government offices for weeks and blamed *hsu pu thu* for the shutdown, charging them with vandalizing these offices. A former civil servant recalls how she received “news” about her office’s destruction at the time: “I was told to take all of the important papers with me. We were informed that rioters were going to destroy the office. [...] [The next morning] the office head called us at 8 am and told us not to go to work. [...] [I heard] people broke the doors and windows, took our fridge and air condition, and also burned down the office papers” (Interview 114).

For the groups of protesters that the government already had publicly labeled as criminals, it displayed cruel repression toward them in public. Besides shooting, in one instance in 1988, a local resident saw "the military arrested some people as thieves. They had to kneel and bite a grenade. The soldiers said if the grenade dropped, they would die. At the same time, they had to shout their names, their parents’ names and admitted that they were thieves. It was a fascist style” (Interview 101). Thus, most forms of public repression were targeted toward individuals or groups that had been framed as criminals.

Nonetheless, since charging the majority of protesters as criminals might not be as convincing, the Burmese dictators were still cautious not to have public witness or media access to scenes of mass repression. This was in order to decrease bystanders’ exposure to protester images as victims, hence precluding public commiseration that might facilitate bystander protection toward movement

participants or backlash protests against the authorities. As a result, as for the third part of the state's framing strategies, the security forces used different methods to reduce the need for mass crackdown in broad daylight. Particularly, before each bout of mass crackdown, the state gave advanced official warning so as to have the protest crowd disperse willingly and preclude mass violence under the public eye. For example, during the 2007 protests, an interviewee who witnessed the monk demonstration in Magwe township recalls that the government sent the Chairman of the Myanmar Monk Association to negotiate with the protesting monks in Magwe township before arresting the protest leaders; hence, there was no bloodshed on the street.

Most interviewees also remember that right before or during crackdowns, military troops patrolled around different neighborhoods and aimed their guns at houses, or shot rubber bullets to dissolve the crowd and to threaten people not to stay out or watch. Other Yangon residents detail how the regime also had its spies take photos of protesters so that, instead of cracking down en masse in daytime, its security forces could arrest these protesters after dark behind the public's eye. In addition, in order to make absolutely sure that no one could witness the regime's brutality, it imposed night curfew and shut down electricity during night arrests. According to one witness of the demonstration in downtown Yangon on August 8, 1988: "There was no violence all day. At that time, the military was following international law. There were soldiers holding guns along the march, but they turned their backs to the march. So I was very delighted. But at night the military shot everyone" (Interview 94).

Furthermore, in order to erase all traces of violence, after each crackdown, the

government tried to gather and bury or cremate the dead bodies right away. For example, interviewees who used to live across from a major cremation site in Yangon said they saw such operations at night in 1988: “At night, people were killed. There used to be a cemetery, just across over there. It was a big space. People were killed brutally, bulldozed and cremated” (Interview 96). My interviewees also confirmed that many people they knew were disappeared after the 2007 event. An interviewee shares about one such loss in her own family: “My husband’s cousin disappeared since 2007. He came out from his house and went along with the march. Then he disappeared. We checked with different institutions like hospitals and the government’s death list from the 2007 event. He wasn’t included. He was also not in the prisoner list. So we couldn’t find him. I think he is dead” (Interview 93).

b. Movement’s framing of protesters

In order to counteract the state’s framing, protest leaders and followers combined various tactics to discredit the “criminal” charges as well as evoke public sympathetic support toward the protesters who were “victims” of state repression. Specifically, individual organizers and participants themselves had to (1) display their “clean record” or clear themselves from the government’s criminal charges; (2) prevent or neutralize agents provocateurs, and (3) publicize the government’s mass crackdowns.

Simultaneous with the state’s process of rolling out its framing strategies, movement leaders’ promotion of protester images also had to be timely in order to maximize public support toward the movement and movement participants, especially during bouts of state repression. As early as the planning stage, movement organizers

had already chosen protest leaders from groups that could identify with the general public (*pyi thu lu du*) and that the state would find difficult to criminalize, i.e. students, Buddhist monks, housewives, etc. Protesters also had to rebuke the criminal charges as soon as they were broadcast and expose the regime’s sabotaging schemes. Moreover, during protest marches, the organizing committee formed security teams to keep strangers out and break up mob riots. Last but not least, protesters quickly disseminated information on their suffering of state repression either through mass media or word of mouth in order to rally bystander protection or retaliation against the security forces. I illustrate this temporal order in Figure 5 below.

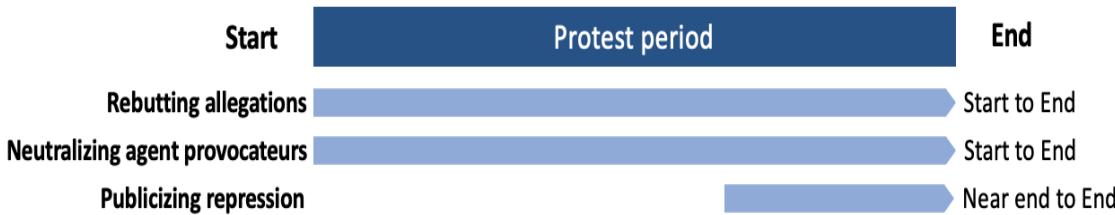


Figure 5. Temporal order of movement’s framing strategies during a protest period

First, in order to distance themselves from the government’s criminal framing, protesters either emphasized their innocent background or, if they had already been accused, cleared their names in public. For instance, since the beginning of the 1988 and 2007 events, the actual organizers of many protests were experienced activists but they did not reveal themselves in public, because the government had already framed them as anarchic rebels with ulterior motives. They placed other figures as public leaders of the protests, such as students or monks, who the general public were familiar with and who were free from any criminal allegations. Specifically, one of the National League for Democracy’s (NLD) core activist in 2007 describes the extensive

network involved in planning the protest yet staying low-key and only promoting the All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA) as the official protest leader: "Originally U Gambira was just a normal person then transformed into a monk. He was mainly based in Mandalay. Then he created a network [of activists]. Then we started the 2007 movement. At that time, our [NLD] side had direct contact with Gambira" (Interview 102).

In order to showcase their genuine dedication to the movement's cause, student protesters in 1988 even held hunger strikes and monk protesters in 2007 calmly and orderly marched everyday despite September's heavy rain. Moreover, in 1988, when the state spread rumors of many protesters being criminals, protest organizers also had to hold instant "press conferences" along their marching routes to vindicate themselves: "We started giving speeches to explain the regime's defaming of the movement that demonstrators were breaking public stores and acting as if they were under the anarchy, as we were so afraid that people would be convinced by those lies" (Interview 4).

Second, in terms of neutralizing agents provocateurs, in both 1988 and 2007, many activists did not allow strangers to join their protest march in order to prevent government spies or government-hired thugs from infiltrating and provoking commotion. They tried to screen bystanders who wanted to join the march. One bystander recalls: "During the first marches, they didn't allow outsiders to join. Students and the public held hands and formed lines, because they were afraid that informers would come and destroy the march, and spread rumors, so they didn't let them join" (Interview 94).

During the latter period of the Four-eight Uprising, when the government closed down administrative offices, township strike committees, which were originally formed to coordinate protests, even established their own versions of township administration in order to maintain law and order across their wards. Members of the strike committees, such as activists from professional unions or township unions, worked together as police, and Buddhist monks acted as local judges in order to mediate communal conflicts, prevent state agents from instigating riots, and stop local residents from attacking the criminal suspects (Interview 108).

Finally, when the regime resorted to repression in order to quell the protests, activists frequently publicized the crackdowns and, sometimes, even spread unverified rumors about mass brutality by the security forces. They emphasized the innocence of the protesters who suffered unjust state violence in order to create resonance with the victim frame and rally public sympathy. For example, in 2007, many local residents remember seeing activist and actor Zaganar appeal to public sympathy on mass media by quoting the Buddhist script of loving kindness while mentioning how the well-meaning monks were attacked by the riot police. He then asked people to come protect the monks.

Similarly, after each large-scale crackdown during the Four-eight Uprising, student activists went to different high schools to mobilize support from high school students by emphasizing incidents of state brutality against well-behaved students. Later on, as repression against the protests intensified with repeated bouts, in order to highlight the government's heavily violent crackdowns on young and helpless victims, movement leaders selected and broadcast the image of Win Maw Oo, a 16-year-old

schoolgirl, being shot with blood all over her body while being carried by two doctors to the hospital as the symbol of the pro-democracy movement. One interviewee contemplates the strategic nature of popularizing this image: "One well-known story in 1988 was about a female student, Win Maw Oo, being killed. But she was not the only one. There were many other people who were killed like her, but her story was the only popular one" (Interview 99).

Moreover, many interviewees reported on receiving false rumors of state violence that were intended to rally public support toward protesters. For instance, former student activists recall how their colleagues in 1988 fabricated stories of female student activists being sexually harassed by the police during detention. Similarly, one interviewee remembers hearing many rumors of mass crackdowns in 1988: "There was a lot of wrong information. Before the coup, I heard that in front of city hall people were shot during demonstration. So I gathered my friends and went to see at night, but we did not see anything" (Interview 95).

Overall, the state and movement employed various combinations of framing strategies from the start until the final days of the 1988 and 2007 events in order to compete in influencing the public's perception of protesters either as criminals or victims. I summarize the main examples of the state's and movement's framing of protesters in Table 1 below.

State's strategies	Movement's strategies
<p data-bbox="321 254 797 359"><i>State broadcasting criminal charges and criminal images</i></p> <p data-bbox="321 401 846 947">Examples: State TV and newspapers calling protesters “rowdy”, “unsavoury”, “violent”, “looters”, and “destructive elements”; displaying photos of severed heads in public and blaming local residents; charging protesters with causing the most casualties, arsons, and looting; etc.</p>	<p data-bbox="878 254 1312 359"><i>Movement broadcasting rebuttal against state's criminal charges</i></p> <p data-bbox="878 401 1398 947">Examples: Movement organizers having foreign TV and radio channels broadcast interviews with movement organizers who claimed their sincerity; placing figures with a “clean” record as protest leaders; denying the charges with public speeches and pamphlets; etc.</p>
<p data-bbox="321 991 776 1096"><i>State placing agents provocateurs among protesters to incite violence</i></p> <p data-bbox="321 1171 850 1423">Examples: State agents throwing rocks and bricks at the security forces who were only guarding alongside the protest; poisoning water sources; etc.</p>	<p data-bbox="878 991 1357 1171"><i>Movement maintaining control over protest marches and neutralizing agents provocateurs</i></p> <p data-bbox="878 1209 1369 1682">Examples: Protest leaders supervising the marches; Security lines around marches not letting strangers enter; Strike committees forming local administration; Foreign media promoting these images to the general public; etc.</p>

<p><i>State circumventing and covering up mass violent repression</i></p> <p>Examples: State announcing curfew and martial law on mass media; cutting off electricity at night; patrolling and ordering people not to look outside; burying or cremating bodies at night; denying mass repression on state media; etc.</p>	<p><i>Movement publicizing or spreading rumors of mass violent repression</i></p> <p>Examples: Protesters running into neighborhoods revealing ongoing crackdown and asking for help; Movement distributing pamphlets or foreign media broadcasting reports and images of repression to the general public; etc.</p>
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Table 1. State’s and movement’s competing strategies to shape public perception of protesters

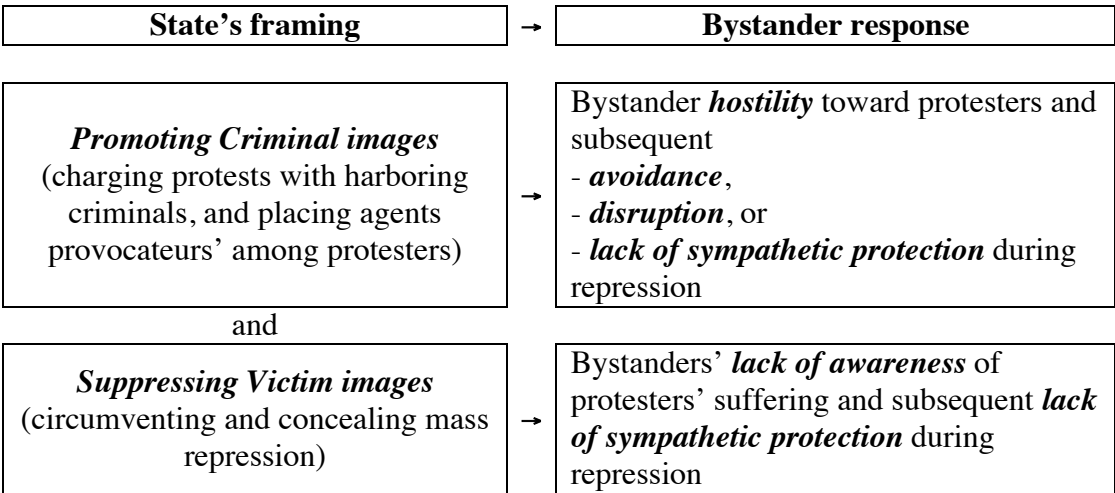
4. Effects of state’s and movement’s framing strategies on bystander protection and disruption

Since the general public were exposed to competing framing strategies by the state and movement, their perception of movement participants was shaped and reshaped accordingly. Hence, I find many examples of bystanders in my interview sample vacillating along the spectrum of hostility-sympathy toward protesters during the protest periods. Overall, the evidence from the case studies corroborate my theory on the effects of criminal and victim images on bystander’s emotional and behavioral reactions.

a. Effect of state’s framing

During the 1988 and 2007 events, exposure to the state’s framing of protesters

was likely to make bystanders become hostile toward the alleged “criminals” and make able-bodied men morally motivated to confront these protesters to defend their families and communities. The state’s cover-up of mass violence also diminished the public’s awareness of the state’s cruelty, hence precluding bystander sympathy toward victims of repression. I illustrate these effects in Graph 4 below.



Graph 4. Effects of state’s framing strategies on bystander responses

First, when bystanders were exposed to protester images as saboteurs to their communities, they became hostile toward protesters and either stayed away or confronted the suspects. Since direct confrontation was a high-risk act where bystanders might have to engage violently with the “criminals” that could result in casualties, bystanders tended to stay away from crowds that were alleged to harbor *hsu pu thu*. For instance, during the peak of the Four-eight Uprising, Yangon residents were exposed to rumors of vandalism promulgated by state media, such as armed robberies and thefts, burglaries, arsons, and public water’s poisoning in different neighborhoods. Thus, to most local residents, every stranger was a suspect, including protesters: “[People] had to live with fear. [...] They didn’t trust anyone, or any

strangers” (Interview 23). As a result, people would also rather stay safe at home and guard their own places instead of going outside to support protesters. Similarly, since the beginning of the 2007 event, due to fear of criminals mixing among protesters, many interviewees stayed away from protest areas and avoided traveling out of town, as it was considered unsafe: “We were aware that there were burglaries so we stayed at home” (Interview 99). “At the time, people couldn’t travel from township to township, because everyone didn’t believe each other. The country was not safe” (Interview 97).

Nonetheless, as I have hypothesized, due to their moral identity, able-bodied men were more likely to confront protesters. The criminal images activated their hostility toward movement participants as well as their paternalistic moral obligation to divert imminent danger away from their families and communities. Hence, even though their family members stayed away from protest events due to fear of mob attacks, young and middle-aged men disrupted the protesters. For example, in 2007, worrying about the harm that aggressive rioters might cause to others, one male witness tried to prevent them: “I saw some people throwing rocks at the security forces. This would make the soldiers angry and shoot innocent people. So I went to confront these instigators” (Interview 91).

Moreover, in the latter days of Four-eight, the fact that the government also closed most administrative offices while simultaneously spreading these rumors made people become more morally obliged to secure their own street and confront “criminals”. One interviewee recalls: “There was no administration at the time. So men from each ward had to patrol and build fences at the entrances of their wards.

And they made gates and waited and guarded at the gates” (Interview 94). These self-organized vigilante teams, which were separated from the activist-led township strike committees, armed themselves and blocked protests from passing through their areas in order to avoid risks of crimes directed at their loved ones. One male leader of his neighborhood security team in 1988 describes: "Each patrol has eight people. There are day and night groups. In day shift, [we had to watch out for] the thieves who pretended to be demonstrators and robbed houses. [...] In night shift, we had to carry swords and shooting devices with steel balls and glass balls” (Interview 101). Other male bystanders violently attacked the alleged water poisoners in public, without calmly analyzing or verifying the rumors. In some areas, local residents even tortured or killed the suspect poisoners. One resident who witnessed such event recounts: “During the Four-eight Affair, the people here heard rumors that some people poisoned the drinking water at Cho Phyu, so they arrested a suspect. [...]. Later, people beheaded him and tied his body to a pole” (Interview 97).

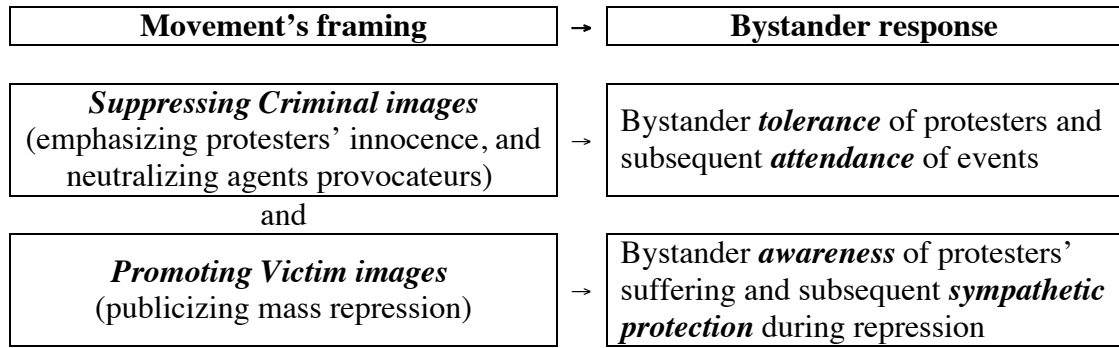
In addition, when protesting groups were presented to the public as “criminals”, that also precluded bystanders from sympathizing or coming to the protesters’ rescue during government crackdowns. According to my interviewees, most bystanders just stood by when the military or police dealt with the accused *hsu pu thu* in 1988 and 2007. Thus, protester images’ resonance with criminal frames prevented many bystanders from helping suffering protesters during government crackdowns.

Last but not least, the security forces also barricaded off protest areas or made surrounding residents stay indoors when they started to crack down, so that the regime

could cover up its heavily violent repression from public witness and prevented bystanders from sympathizing with the victims of the state's cruelty. Hence, even when bystanders did not consider the majority of protesters as criminals, after they heard or saw the regime's public warning of an imminent dispersion of protest, their instinct was usually to stay away from the event in order to avoid risks as well. Many bystanders in 1988 describe: "Before the coup was announced on the radio, the public was still on the street. But once they were told about the coup in the afternoon, nobody was on the street anymore" (Interview 98). Similarly, a downtown resident remembers experiencing a clear warning from the regime in 2007: "I couldn't even go out the balcony, because the soldiers were on the streets and showing their guns, making threats that they would shoot people who watched" (Interview 92). Thus, state strategies to block the public from scenes of mass repression also led people to stay away from protesters, decreasing their exposure to victim images as well as their potential sympathetic support toward the suffering crowds.

b. Effect of movement's framing

In contrast with bystanders' exposure to state's framing, their exposure to movement's framing of protesters as *pyi thu lu du*, who were innocent from the government's criminal charges yet still enduring excessive state violence not only built bystander tolerance of protesters but also their sympathy toward the victims of repression and moral obligation to provide protective support. Particularly, the need to uphold their moral identity enabled bystanders' acceptance of high risk in rescuing the suffering victims. I present the causal mechanism in Graph 5 below.



Graph 5. Effects of movement's framing strategies on bystander responses

For this particular mechanism, it is important to note that the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar had to both suppress the criminal allegations as well as publicize victim images in order to obtain bystander protection during state repression. Rolling out only one aspect of the strategies by itself was not effective. For instance, without defending protesters' innocence or countering agents provocateurs, some protests in 1988 and 2007 were unable to make bystanders tolerate protesters, let alone rescuing them when they suffered violence. Vice versa, without quickly spreading news about mass brutality against movement participants, many protesters could not receive timely protection from bystanders either.

First, perceiving movement organizers and participants as politically non-provocative and well-behaved *pyi thu lu du* encouraged bystanders to watch and increased their tolerance of protesters. For instance, one organizer of the 2007 protests recalls the appealing visual effect that the marches achieved since the first day: "It was a very beautiful scene. [The monks] did not chant any anti-government slogans. They just chanted *Metta Sutta* and marched" (Interview 26). A local resident also describes public tolerance of the movement as a result of this strategy: "As it was led by the Buddhist monks and the monks peacefully chanted *Metta Sutta*, so everybody was

interested and went to help by themselves. People came out voluntarily because they liked the movement led by the monks chanting *Metta Sutta* for a good cause” (Interview 91). In addition, my interviewees recount how, in both 1988 and 2007, most demonstrations marched in an organized and friendly manner across different neighborhoods, instead of only staying in town centers, in order to garner public support.

Moreover, since the general public had access and frequently paid attention to foreign radio and TV channels, the broadcasting of images and stories of brutal repression against protesters also played a significant role in invoking bystander sympathy. This strategy worked in 2007, as many Yangon residents remember how, as soon as government crackdowns commenced, they and their neighbors cried when they saw images of monks demonstrating for hours under heavy rain and getting beaten by the security forces. As stated by one observer: “This government was destroying Buddhism, they did not care at all about the monks. So that was why the people like us came along and locked arms to protect the monks” (Interview 25). Similarly, another interviewee details the immediate effect of her exposure to news of state violence against high school and university students at the beginning of Four-eight on her subsequently sympathetic support toward the students: “The BBC Burmese service motivated people by announcing about students being killed on the streets. They were at the age of high school and university students. Because we got the information, all university students from around there came out” (Interview 99). Hence, the movement’s framing of protesters as innocent *pyi thu lu du* was necessary for bystanders to rescue later on when protesters become victims of mass brutality.

Nonetheless, activists' fabrication or exaggeration of state repression did make the public become skeptical of the news that they received from the movement side. According to a Yangon resident in 1988: "We had to compare news from the media with news from people around us, and decide what was correct. There were also university students that lived in my neighborhood, whose information contained both facts and rumors. So we had to judge on our own" (Interview 22). However, even though such skepticism made people hesitant from running to rescue protesters and, instead, motivated them to verify the news through other sources, it did not seem to create backlash against protesters. Overall, people still considered protesters as potential victims of state violence and were still willing to protect them.

Furthermore, due to the public's moral identity to rescue suffering victims, people became risk-acceptant and ready to help, shelter, or hide protesters at the height of state repression. Most of my interviewees did not even mention risks when they discussed the dangerous circumstances when they offered protective support. For instance, in 1988, many bystanders rushed to send injured protesters to the hospital after government crackdowns. One bystander recalls: "At Thein Phyu, the soldiers were blocking the road with cars and aiming the guns at the crowd of protesters and public speakers. Later, I saw that a student was shot and I sent him to the clinic" (Interview 101). Others directly attacked the riot police in order to force them to stop injuring protesters. A student activist in 1988 describes: "We were blocked by police force when we reached near Myae Ni Gone township. When students tried to go through the police, they were beaten and arrested. When the people from quarter saw that sight that students were injured brutally by the police, they came out and threw

rocks at the police. So, the police were injured too” (Interview 3).

Similarly, in 2007, many people came to the monks’ rescue during the peak of military raiding of monasteries: “At a monastery in South Okkalapa, when things happened there, my neighbors went to watch. I saw the police forces surrounding the monastery and people came to see and fight them back, throwing rocks” (Interview 19). A movement participant in 2007 recalls the generosity of strangers when the riot police were chasing after him: “We ran into every street and asked for help from the houses nearby and hid there. The house owners were nice people, so they watched for us. We didn’t leave until it was safe” (Interview 19). One movement leader also remembers: “On September 26th and 27th, after the soldiers shot the monks, the people were not afraid anymore. Because they were very angry and shocked: they even shot the monks – the first class of the country. So people and students followed the demonstration” (Interview 26). Moreover, throughout the protest period, other activists even received intel from their neighbors, who typically shunned political involvement, about the police coming to arrest them: “The student union leaders used to meet at my house. Whenever the soldiers came with their cars, our neighbors always told us that the soldiers were coming to the front of our house and we had to run away” (Interview 96). Thus, as the evidence from the 1988 and 2007 events corroborate, the public’s moral obligation to rescue victims of unjust suffering was crucial in motivating Yangon residents’ protection of protesters during the government’s heavy crackdowns.

5. Broader implications

My research complements the current literature on the 1988 and 2007 events

by presenting a more comprehensive picture of the emergence and variation of an important yet largely neglected component of bystander responses. Since most of the studies do not analyze bystander reactions from the point of view of all bystanders but only from movement participants' and organizers' perspectives, they mainly discuss protest participation while failing to account for the other forms of bystander response: disruption and protection. As a result, these studies cannot explain such responses, which were actually much more common than protest participation in both 1988 and 2007.

Moreover, even though the existing literature might argue that the state's and movement's strategies were not intended to facilitate either bystander disruption or protection toward protesters, their accounts still provide a number of evidence that illustrate these strategies' observed effects in accordance to my theory. First, the existing works on the 1988 and 2007 events might present a different goal that the state had in mind when it created criminal images of protesters, abandoned administrative posts, or spread rumors of criminals sabotaging communities across Yangon. Instead of trying to encourage bystander disruption toward protesters, according to these studies, the regime's alleged goal was mainly to create an anarchic situation in order to make the general public become disillusioned about the movement and revive their support for the government's provision of "law and order" (Ferrara 2003). However, the government's actual intentions are difficult to verify, and more importantly, mostly irrelevant here. What I argue and what these studies corroborate is the effect of these state strategies on bystanders' confrontational mode toward any suspicious strangers, including protesters.

Similarly, movement organizers and participants might not have intended to encourage bystander protection when they contradicted the government's criminal accusations or publicized unjust state brutality against innocent protesters in 1988 and 2007. According to the current literature, their main purpose was to mobilize public participation in the movement or backlash protests against the authorities. But, again, the intentions of movement members are hardly relevant here. Overall, most of the literature's available anecdotes on bystander disruption and protection in the Myanmar cases are consistent with my theory.

First, they present several instances of bystander disruption that resulted from the public's exposure to the state's criminal charges of protesters. According to Bertil Lintner's (1989) depiction of the military coup that ended the Four-eight Uprising on September 18, 1988, in order to disseminate allegations of the movement as harboring criminals before the government crackdown, the state widely announced a night curfew and banned "gathering, walking, marching in procession, chanting slogans, delivering speeches, agitating and creating disturbances in the streets by a group of five or more people regardless of whether the act is with the intention of creating disturbances or of committing a crime or not." In this broadcast, the state clearly labeled any protest participants as violent delinquents. Such intentional framing was more blatant later on as the state media – Burma Broadcasting Service - on September 22 reported that: "The destructive elements [...] attacked the security personnel with slingshots and jingles." The junta even announced that most deaths on the 18 were caused by "looters and other unsavoury elements" and emphasized the military's "kindness and benevolence" that such criminals took advantage upon. A month later,

on October 28, the SSB escalated its accusation of the movement as a violent rebellion that robbed the police: “Some rowdy elements seized 23 weapons from members of the security units stationed on the upper floor of the Ministry of Trade on 17th September.”

As a result, Boudreau (2004) finds that the protests in 1988 were “exceptionally vulnerable” to the government’s provocation of violence from protesters as well as from bystanders, since movement leaders did not have a strong grassroots structure. At the height of 1988, fear and distrust shrouded Yangon: “When word spread that convicts were poisoning food and water supplies, and shooting at crowds, a kind of panic set in, rooted in the impossibility of screening movement participants or verifying rumors” (Boudreau 2004). Similarly, Fink (2009) reports how people were terrified at the news of prisoners and thugs mixing among the population: “Many families feared that the mobs would not stop at the government warehouses but would raid their shops and houses too.” Hence, bystanders took up a highly vigilant stance toward strangers, including protesters: “At night, young monks in some towns armed themselves with sticks and patrolled the streets, watching not only for soldiers but also for criminals hoping to take advantage of the breakdown of order” (Fink 2009a). This also led to widespread bystander disruption: “Local committee captured, interrogated and eventually beheaded a couple caught with what seemed a bomb (later discovered to be equipment pilfered from their workplace)” (Boudreau 2004).

In addition, other studies describe the regime’s strategies to circumvent and cover up its mass crackdowns, hence diminishing public awareness of state brutality. For instance, Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007) argues that Ne Win’s public declaration in July

1988 that the army would “shoot to hit” made a number of protesters hesitant to continue their activities and many bystanders reluctant to come support since they wanted to avoid violence. Christina Fink (2009) also presents how the government in the latter days of the 2007 event tried to frame state response toward protesters as lawful and avoid public mass repression by broadcasting advanced warning toward all movement members and cracking down on protesters after dark. They had the state-backed Buddhist council “urge all monks to stay out of secular affairs” as well as “declared a night-time curfew and warned the monks to get off the streets.” They later raided monasteries and detained the protesting monks at night, most of whom were secretly killed, imprisoned, or ordered to return to their hometowns.

In order to hide mass repression from public knowledge, the security forces were also instructed to shoot anyone that had a camera. This type of order was placed during the 2007 protests when Kenji Nagai, a Japanese journalist, was shot dead. Moreover, throughout the protest period in both 1988 and 2007, the regime made a list of movement leaders and participants with their photographs in order to arrest them at night, after having been able to frame them as “destructive elements” on mass media. Fink (2009) details this process: “the authorities benefited from the new technologies, in particular by using the images produced by themselves and others to identify and hunt down those who participated in the demonstrations.”

At the same time, in terms of the effect of movement’s strategies in 1988 and 2007, the existing studies also present some evidence on how bystanders’ exposure to the non-criminal and victimized images of protesters has led to sympathetic protection. For instance, Fink (2009) argues that the fact that the 2007 marches stayed

orderly and well-supervised all throughout helped distance protester images from the government's criminal allegations.

“The daily marches were well organized, with logistics handled very professionally. Individual monks volunteered on the spot to plan and lead the marches. Once lay people joined in, the leading monks took steps to ensure that the demonstrations remained non-violent. [...] All of this made it difficult for the regime to claim there was anarchy on the streets.”

Moreover, as Fink (2009) reports, bystanders sympathized with the suffering protesters and organized “support services for the marchers, providing water, face masks, and medical treatment as necessary.” Boudreau (2004) also presents cases of bystander protection when working-class neighborhoods hid student protesters who were running away from riot police.

Overall, my theory is reinforced by the evidence in the existing literature on the 1988 and 2007 events. More importantly, it complements this literature by presenting a more comprehensive picture of the emergence and variation of bystander disruption and protection toward protesters, under the dual influences of state's and movement's framing strategies. In addition to their framing strategies, in order to promote and sustain these types of public responses, the regime and opposition leaders also carried out mobilization for collective action through members or agents embedded at the neighborhood level. I detail these strategies and analyze their significant effects on bystanders' collective rescue and confrontation in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

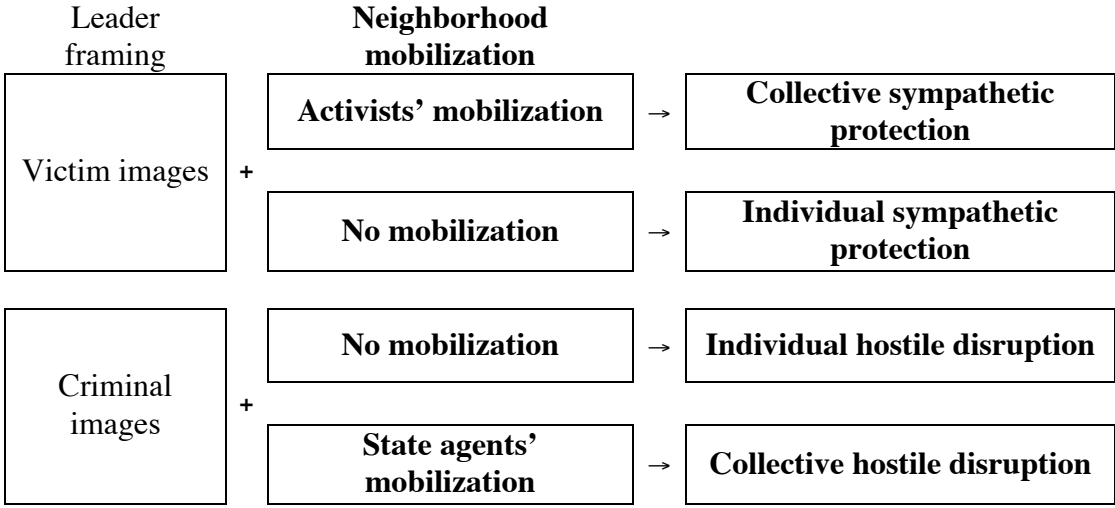
NEIGHBORHOOD MOBILIZATION FOR COLLECTIVE RESPONSE

This chapter complements the mechanisms of bystander response presented in Chapter 3 and offers an explanation to why bystanders take part in collective protection or disruption of protesters. Specifically, in the case of Myanmar, how did ordinary citizens bring themselves to join mob killings against other people in public? On the other hand, how did strangers actively collaborate with each other to donate, protect, and rescue protesters? As I find in Chapter 3, leader framing was crucial in motivating bystander hostility or sympathy toward protesters in the 1988 and 2007 protests. However, in order to turn individual emotions into collective actions, I hypothesize that either government agents or movement's rank-and-file activists who are embedded at the neighborhood level play a significant role in mobilizing and/or organizing such actions. Why is it important to distinguish and elaborate on the emergence of these types of collective response? They are different from other types of bystander response not only in the scale of their participants but also because they comprise some new forms of action that are not possible without the above-mentioned mobilizers, and that have considerable impact on activist survival and movement resilience. Below is the hypothesis that I will examine in this chapter:

H3: Sympathetic bystanders are more likely to participate in collective protection if they are exposed to grassroots activists' mobilization. Meanwhile, hostile bystanders are more likely to participate in collective disruption if they are exposed to embedded state agents' mobilization.

In this chapter, I focus on the types of collective disruption and protection toward movement participants during the 1988 and 2007 protest events that were very common, yet would have been implausible without neighborhood mobilizers. These mobilizers played various roles, from coordinating or aiding existing participants, to setting examples to inspire others to take part, to directly arousing and framing unfamiliar forms of collective responses as appropriate and moral acts to the general public.

I illustrate the causal mechanism in the graphs below. Graph 6 demonstrates the complementarity between the causal mechanisms in Chapters 3 and 4, while Graph 7 details the specific manifestations of these variables in the case of Myanmar.



Graph 6. Complementarity between Chapter 3 (leader framing) and Chapter 4 (neighborhood mobilization)



Graph 7. Manifestation of neighborhood mobilization in the case of Myanmar

Before delving in, I would like to revisit the core concepts of this chapter: disruption, protection, and collective action. Disruption refers to physical violence against protesters, blocking protest marches, or reporting on movement activities to the authorities. Protection is the opposite of disruption, and includes a variety of acts such as forming a protective human chain around protesters, donating food and medicines to protesters, advising protesters on how to stay safe, hiding protesters from the authorities, taking protesters to hospital, and giving medical treatments to protesters, among others. Collective action refers to people consciously contributing toward a group effort and collaborating to achieve a common goal. This concept is important to note since some types of bystander response, such as individuals offering food and drinks to protesters, might appear as collective action due to a large number

of people doing similar things in one place at the same time. However, if these bystanders donate by themselves at their conveniences, instead of communicating with others regarding donation goals, then this is not collective action. This distinction also reveals the significance of collective response, which enables the sympathetic/hostile mass to impact protesters in a more efficient way.

While collective disruption included the most violent form of mob attacks in the latter half of the Four-eight Uprising, collective protection took on various benevolent forms in terms of group donations and human chains in 2007, and medical rescue in 1988. I exclude from this analysis mob attacks and medical rescue in 2007, as well as group donations and human chains in 1988. Even though there were mob attacks against protesters in 2007, they were mostly carried out by state-hired thugs disguised as normal civilians instead of by the general public. Hence, these attacks cannot be classified as collective action by the general public, and therefore, lie outside the scope of this study. Moreover, these attacks did not amount to the level of widespread public executions as in 1988, which makes the cases in 1988 even more intriguing to examine. As for medical rescue, I came across very scant evidence of collective rescue in terms of medical operations or treatments in 2007. Similarly, there is no evidence of human chains from 1988.

Finally, in terms of group donations, even though such acts were prevalent in 1988, they mostly occurred during the period after General Sein Lwin resigned and before the military coup, essentially a period when the government announced its withdrawal of martial law and allowed the protests to flourish. Thus, this context falls outside the scope of this study as well, since my focus is on repressive periods where

the state made clear its intentions to crackdown upon dissident movements and imposed constraints on protest mobilization. Nonetheless, the fact that these types of collective response vary between 1988 and 2007 is worth scrutinizing, and the variation in grassroots mobilization across these two events can be said to be a relevant causal factor. That said, there are surely other potential explanatory variables for this inter-event divergence and the small n of the protest events (n=2) does not allow me to rule these other explanations out. Hence, for the purposes of this chapter, I only examine variations in response among members of the general public within each event, exploring the mechanistic links between the strategies employed by state and movement agents, and collective responses.

I draw from a large number of original in-depth interviews with ordinary residents, as well as written testimony by local journalists and political activists based mainly (but not exclusively) in Yangon. By triangulating across these different types of evidence, I can guard against confirmation bias and assure the validity of the causal mechanism, in terms of the effect of neighborhood mobilization for collective disruption and protection.

1. Collective response during the Four-eight Uprising and the Saffron Revolution

It is conducive to study mob attacks and collective medical rescue in 1988 and group donations and human chains in 2007 due to the availability of micro-level data that show the variation in the emergence of these collective actions across different towns and neighborhoods.

a. Collective disruption: Mob attacks

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the Burmese dictators in both 1988 and 2007 not

only framed movement participants as rioters, or *hsu pu thu*, they also placed *agents provocateurs* among protesters in order to instigate unrest and convince the public of the protesters' criminal nature. As the Four-eight Uprising was gaining momentum by the end of August-early September 1988, the BSPP government alleged that protesters were breaking into and vandalizing government properties, which "forced" the government to close down a whole host of offices, including township and ward administrations (lower-level administration under a city). As a result, local residents became distrustful and hostile toward protest groups. Activists from across Yangon and other towns responded by setting up strike committees in order to serve in administrative roles.

During these latter weeks of the Four-eight Uprising, mob attacks in the name of punishing criminals occurred in many townships in and beyond Yangon. Did the mob attacks target protesters? Since the purpose was to penalize the perpetrators of criminal activity, people actually mainly targeted criminal suspects or alleged government spies who acts as agents provocateurs. However, since these suspects were rumored to be mixed among the public, including among protest groups, most people did not allow protest groups to pass their neighborhoods, and were ready to arrest any trespassers. According to the experiences of political activist and writer Ma Thida (2012) who was a medical student in Yangon at the time, after the first week of September, the increasing number of looting and robbing incidents at public factories across Yangon invoked distrust among the public, and local residents started to behead strangers who were suspected of poisoning or injuring the public. In addition, monk and writer Min Wai Naing (2013) recounts how, since news and rumors about mob

attacks were widespread across Yangon, people did not even trust Buddhist monks. Once, the strike committee of his neighborhood caught a monk with three *jingalees* (home-made weapons, sometimes poisonous, usually made out of bicycle spokes or wooden rods) and detained him. After Min Wai Naing interrogated him, the strike committee let this monk go but made him leave the *jingalees* behind (Min Wai Naing 2013).

A Yangon resident in 1988 expresses his frustration toward the number of senseless killings of innocent people who were falsely accused of crimes: “The people who were beheaded were not guilty. But because people heard false news, they killed the suspects in order to protect their neighborhoods. The neighborhoods were not harmed. But people killed each other a lot” (Interview 116). A former student activist in 1988 who patrolled different townships across Yangon during this period shares the same sentiment: “The worst was in North Okkalapa and Thaketa townships. [...] People arrested the ones suspected as government spies or police, without hearing any explanations. Some even beheaded them” (Interview 121). Overall, people witnessed mob attacks in many townships in and beyond Yangon that resulted in an alarming number of gruesome killings or beheadings, which traumatized the general public.

b. Collective protection: Group donations, human chains, and medical rescue

Various forms of collective protection toward the pro-democracy movement participants were also prevalent in 1988 and 2007, including group donations, human chains, and medical rescue.

Group donations

Many sympathetic Yangon residents donated and accommodated the monks’

needs during the Saffron affair in 2007 as they regarded donations to monks as a form of protection toward innocent, highly respected figures. People either donated individually, as they saw the monks march barefoot by their work or houses under scorching heat, or contributed toward group donations. As for individual donations, for example, a resident in Ahlone in 2007 recalls: “Whenever Buddhist monks came to our neighborhood, everyone came out and moved forward and offered food and water and then they went along with the monks” (Interview 92). A downtown office staff in 2007 also supported the monks immediately when they saw the march: “My colleagues and friends supported. We were office staff. This was office time during weekdays. So when the monks arrived, we went down and offered cold drinks, food, water, etc. and prayed with the monks” (Interview 23).

At the same time, there were also many group donations delivered to the monks that were important in providing them with what they needed in order to persevere and prolong the protest marches. A former NLD activist in Thingangyun township describes how he came to collect and organize donations: “I gathered water bottles and medicine from donors and donated to the monks. At the time, the monks did not wear shoes so their feet hurt” (Interview 135). These instances of organized donation were prevalent across my interview and archival data.

Human chains

In 2007, many local residents also formed security lines, more popularly known as “human chains,” on both sides of the protesting monks as people came to regard this action as protecting the “good” monks from state *agents provocateurs*’ infiltration and government crackdowns. Most of my interviewees corroborate this. A

movement-sympathetic office staff in Yangon in 2007 describes immediately becoming eager to participate in a human chain after she went to support the protest and saw the chain: “I took leave from work because I seriously wanted to go watch the demonstration. [...] Every religion, even Hindu and Muslim, supported the monks. Everybody surrounded the monks and held hands to protect the monks. So I joined the chain with my friend. Even though the guy behind me was a stranger, we clasped each other’s hands. We were very friendly and united” (Interview 103).

Many interviewees were impressed at the discipline and determination of the security lines in defending the monks against state violence. A university student in Yangon who passed by Ahlone, Kamayut, and Hledan townships in 2007 recalls: “I saw that near Hledan, the police tried to ask the march to stop but the people did not stop. The police wanted to get into the monks’ rows and to open the hand clasps but the people stood still and the police could not break them up” (Interview 119).

Similarly, a resident of South Okkalapa township in 2007 who was part of a human chain emphasized people’s unity in order to ensure the monks’ safety: “The monks from the Kyaikkasan monastery went out to protest. From my neighborhood, we, young and old people gathered and surrounded the monks. We held hands. When the shooting happened, in one area, the police were waiting with three or four cars and they said: ‘If you get into this area, we will arrest everyone.’ But from our side, monks and people kept marching and shouting” (Interview 19). Hence, these human chains exemplify high-risk collective protection during the Saffron event.

Medical rescue

Last but not least, as medical rescue was considered by most people as a form

of protective support, many people individually provided medical support to protestors, but others also participated in collective operations during the bloodiest days of the Four-eight Uprising. In terms of individualistic acts, many local residents across Yangon sent people who were injured by government crackdowns to the hospital out of sympathy to their plight. One resident of South Okkalapa township in 1988 remembers clearly: “In my quarter, one guy was shot and he was bleeding seriously. So my neighbors immediately sent him to the hospital with a trishaw” (Interview 103).

Nonetheless, parts of the sympathetic general public also contributed to collective rescue attempts in 1988. According to Naung Kyaw’s (2013) testimonial, after the second day of the Four-eight Uprising, there were many fewer people protesting on the streets. Instead, the Rangoon General Hospital (RGH) was full of injured protesters and many local residents came to volunteer and donate blood, medicine, and food. Since many people came to RGH to help every day, it naturally became a key assembly point for the Four-eight Uprising later on, where movement organizers had access to a large audience for their anti-government pamphlets and public speeches.

2. Existing explanations

In this section, I discuss existing explanations in the literature and show how they do not account for the majority of collective disruption and protection in my case studies.

a. Collective disruption

Why were some local residents more likely to become enraged and involved in

mob killings than others during the latter half of the Four-eight Uprising? Most of the existing literature either presents the murderous incidents as state-hired attacks (Ferrara 2003, Mya Maung 1992, Lintner 1989) or normalizes the killings as a logical consequence of people's hostility, with no external provocations (Boudreau 2004, Mya Maung 1992, Lintner 1989, Fink 2009a).

First, Ferrara (2003), Mya Maung (1992), and Lintner (1989) describe how in some cases people were hired and “trained” to attack and kill protesters. For instance, according to the accounts in Lintner's book, in South Okkalapa township, some factory looters were captured by the local strike committee and confessed that a military intelligence sergeant directed them to “lure monks and students to be killed” and offered them “rewards for the head of each student or monk in the local citizens' committee.” In another instance, a teenager who was captured while shooting *jingalees* at protesters in South Okkalapa said that a military officer paid him and others to disturb protesters.

Moreover, according to these and other studies, local people and vigilante groups, who were not “hired thugs”, on their own accord also beat and beheaded criminal suspects out of anger on a daily basis (Boudreau 2004, Mya Maung 1992, Lintner 1989, Fink 2009a). For instance, Lintner (1989) reports that when people who were accused of poisoning a water tank near the Children's Hospital refused to talk, “an angry crowd beat them in the street” and “a man came forward with a sword, decapitated the three and held up their blood-dripping, severed heads to the applause of the mob”. Similarly, Fink (2009) also writes about an incident that was told to her by a local strike committee member, who said that: “Those who carried out the

beheadings didn't have proof. [...] They just suspected or hated that person, so they killed.”

Others ascribe such mob attacks to a number of armed vigilante groups that considered public execution of criminals a legitimate form of punishment and deterrence. According to testimonials by photojournalist and writer Tha Yan (2013), local resident Thitsa Ni (2013), and former Student Union member Min Zaw Lwin (2013), groups like Yaung Gyi Bway (Hair-knot man) were notorious at the time across townships like Yankin and North Okkalapa. They beheaded suspected robbers, spies, informers, arsonists, and poisoners, saying they were dealing with these matters in the “people’s way”. Overall, these accounts paint a picture of mobs with uncontrollable rage that committed widespread capital punishments of alleged perpetrators across Yangon.

However, if the violent reactions were actually so logical, how come they were not widely expressed by all of the affected residents? How come these killings created so much distress among the Burmese population that such public trauma still lingers until present day? In addition, these exact same studies also provide evidence for many vigilante groups’ non-violent and “humane” methods of dealing with criminal suspects. For example, Lintner (1989) *also* describes how local citizens’ committees, instead of attacking prisoners who escaped from jail during this period, fed the prisoners so that they would not feel the need to steal or rob. Furthermore, Fink (2009) and Lintner (1989) present many instances where the strike committee members tried very hard to break up mob attacks and prevent violent killings. Rather than killing alleged perpetrators, these committees usually brought them to monasteries, had

monks interrogate them, and simply detained them for a while (Lintner 1989). Overall, while the literature presents these diverging responses by the general public toward criminal suspects, it has not offered an explanation for this disparity—instead simply alluding to people’s different levels of temperament as a possible cause.

While I do not rule out the presence of state-hired attacks, or deny the role of naturally occurring anger among the population, these accounts do not make up the majority of cases. From my interview and archival data, there were no discussions or evidence of ordinary residents being paid or emotionally motivated to organize mob attacks. Even though the mobsters who committed public executions were alleged to be from low-educated working-class slums, people who knew about them mostly did not associate them with existing hot-tempered or violent traits. Furthermore, other slum residents, even including male members of neighborhood security teams, were quite appalled by the mob attacks.

Although the public were hostile toward criminal suspects and wanted the neighborhoods to be safe from them, not everyone considered mob attacks to be a legitimate way to deal with alleged perpetrators. Moreover, since there was news of beheading in many townships, the Rangoon General Strike Committee (GSC), worried about the government’s ploy to label the people’s uprising as anarchic, even released a public statement requesting people not to kill criminal suspects. Many people were also legitimately frightened by the killings and beheadings. A resident of South Okkalapa township in 1988 shares her traumatic memory: “I witnessed *the killing field* as well. It happened right in front of my house. [...] My house was situated at the corner of the streets, and at every corner, there was killing happening. People accused

each other like: ‘You are a traitor and government spy.’ The accused were burnt alive or their heads were cut, just in front of my house. *It was quite a nightmare*” (Interview 28).

A former student activist in Thingangyun township in 1988 likewise recalls how shocked he was when he himself witnessed the mob attacks in his area. Even though with his moral imperative to safeguard his community, he was involved in detaining the criminal suspects, but he did not condone killing them:

“We had to carry the suspects that people arrested with our car to send to the monks. At the time, the monks were judges and they investigated those people. Then, we took them to our school where we detained them. On the way, a group of people dragged them down and killed them. In front of my face. They were very angry. Here, at the famous Four-eight park near my house, seven people were beheaded, even including the father and son who sold ice lollipops here. At that time, people had no fear before they killed” (Interview 108).

Hence, although the general public were motivated to defend their communities against thieves, robbers, murderers, and arsonists, most of them only participated or supported neighborhood security teams and followed a certain due process when arresting criminal suspects. Self-organized mob attacks were not the norm, and were even opposed by many bystanders.

In short, regardless of neighborhoods, ordinary citizens tried very hard to stay away from mob violence and avoided participating in executions. At most, hostile bystanders only self-organized in arresting and detaining the criminal suspects.

b. Collective protection

The existing literature on collective protection either omits participation by ordinary citizens or fails to represent the moral imperative to rescue victims that was central to these acts. For instance, in terms of human chains in 2007, Fink (2009) and Beatty (2011) only briefly describe how activists led the human chains and assume that the chains were made up of movement participants and protesters. Without providing testimony from members of the chains, they miss the fact that normal bystanders also joined the chains, not as a form of protest participation, but as protection for innocent monks against *agents provocateurs*' infiltration or government crackdowns. Then, in terms of collective rescue in 1988, by quoting only one witness, Lintner (1989) also just briefly mentions how a medical student who sympathized with protesters in 1988 took the initiative to volunteer and assist doctors and nurses at RGH to take care of injured protesters in the midst of government crackdowns. Last but not least, none of the literature describes public participation in group donations in 2007.

Although most of the sympathetic bystanders wanted to help protesters, based on the evidence in my case studies, they only knew it was possible to act collectively after watching activists setting public examples or organizing these group donations, human chains, and medical rescue. For instance, participants of human chains or medical rescue that I interviewed did not know about the chains or the rescue before observing the leading examples by activists, nor did they know how to join or assist before receiving instructions by the organizers. Overall, most people tried to assess possible ways to support protesters by watching the activists' models before engaging or copying such models.

Moreover, in terms of group donations, even though ordinary citizens were the ones who initiated the collective act by contacting and asking local activists to organize donations to the monks, these active residents were reluctant to take on the organizing role themselves and did not coordinate the group donations. This is because most average citizens preferred to contribute at their own convenience and keep their activities low-key in order not to draw attention from the regime. Thus, average bystanders were not prone to self-organize collective protection.

In the next section, I fill the gap in the literature by showing the important role of embedded state agents and grassroots activists in mobilizing public participation in collective disruption and protection, respectively.

3. Neighborhood mobilization as main driver for collective response

My main explanatory variable is neighborhood mobilizers' leadership, mobilization, and organization, which explains bystanders' collective response. I argue that, in the cases of 1988 and 2007, hostile bystanders mainly participated in mob attacks after being provoked by state agents in different ways, whereas sympathetic bystanders mostly contributed to group donations, human chains, or medical rescue when they were exposed to grassroots activists' models of collective action and coordination.

Specifically, as for hostile disruption, although most neighborhoods formed their own vigilante teams to defend themselves in the latter half of Four-eight, *local residents were more likely to participate in mob attacks to punish "perpetrators" if these residents were exposed to state agents' mobilization.* Even though most local residents became distrustful of strangers and hostile toward criminal suspects, and

most male residents felt the moral imperative to prevent or capture rioters in order to safeguard their communities, people in general did not approve of and were not motivated to commit violent punishment or to participate in public executions. During my interviews, the word “angry” was frequently used to describe mob participants who killed or beheaded alleged criminals, which is completely different from the vocabulary used to describe the general public (“scared”), or neighborhood security teams (“protect”). This divergence represents disparities in people’s emotions and motivations to guard the neighborhoods versus to take part in mob killings. Thus, while the former action came from general distrust toward strangers and moral imperative to defend one’s own communities, the latter was motivated by rage, which gave rise to the desire to penalize the “perpetrators” in proportion with their crimes. Here, I argue that state agents played a role in arousing public anger and hostility and framing the brutal action as in line with people’s moral imperative, i.e. exacting revenge for their families and communities and making the perpetrators “pay”. Thus, we see deadly mob attacks in neighborhoods where state agents mobilized bystanders.

In terms of protective support, in 1988 and 2007, even though many bystanders offered protection at their own will, *the general public were more likely to contribute to collective protection if they were exposed to grassroots activists’ role models and/or coordination*. The common denominator of these diverse forms of collective protection is how they varied among neighborhoods, and mostly occurred where grassroots activists were organizing. This suggests that the activists played an important role in facilitating these actions. First, people were more likely to participate after they understood the meaning of collective action, so activists had to lead by

example and frame the collective responses—especially the unfamiliar act of creating a human chain—as protection toward innocent victims. Moreover, as my interview data shows, since organizing a collective act required more effort and experience in terms of planning and coordinating, and since grassroots activists had certain connections with movement organizers and knew which types of responses would benefit protesters, sympathetic bystanders tended to defer to the activists to organize collective protection. Most residents also wanted to avoid government attention and preferred to contribute to an already organized act after school, after work, in their neighborhoods or offices, etc. Hence, if there were no one organizing, they would support the protests individually rather than taking the initiative to organize on their own. As a result, grassroots activists played a significant role in making collective protection become much more prevalent and consistent.

a. State agents' mobilization for mob attacks

For many of the mob executions in Yangon and beyond, people became outraged and participated in mob attacks as a result of provocation by state agents. Specifically, state agents' mobilization was necessary because, as I have shown, most of the general public, when hearing about or witnessing riots, responded either by staying put within their communities or patrolling their neighborhoods in order to prevent riots from spreading to their areas. Even when the neighborhood security teams happened to capture a criminal suspect, they preferred to stay non-violent and just interrogated and detained the person. Most strike leaders tried to discourage violence, and local residents tried to avoid it, by any means. According to a former student activist in 1988 who patrolled different townships across Yangon

during the period under strike committees' administration, most people were not involved in mob attacks without state-led mobilization: "People normally did not do such things. Our monks told us not to kill. So we think the government used tricks to take over the city" (Interview 108).

So how did state agents instigate mob attacks against innocent protesters and strike participants? One strategy was to drug local residents in order to cloud their judgment and manipulate them into publicly executing strike members. A detailed account was provided by Zaw Myint's (2013) testimonial as a former member of South Okkalapa township's Youth Union. In September 1988, 50 factory workers who lived in Project Housing 1 in South Okkalapa were drugged and attacked the township's strike committee members with home-made *jingalees*. When these people were arrested by the strike committee, they could not say anything during interrogation. Their faces looked red and dazed. Zaw Myint later found out that military cars entered the Project Housing 1 before this event happened and injected those people with drugs (Zaw Myint 2013). Not only did state agents drug people, in many instances, they even arrested these people later on in order to cover up the government's involvement. A resident in the town of Mawlamyine recalls how one of her acquaintances fell into this trap: "The police gave my classmate's brother drugs and ordered him to behead others in public. He was a student leader. He beheaded a suspected spy. But whether that person was a spy or not, only God knows. Then the soldiers arrested him and put him in jail" (Interview 133).

The state's next strategy was to have the police provide guns and home-made weapons to neighborhood vigilante teams in order to facilitate violent attacks and,

later on, these vigilantes were arrested or executed as well. A strike committee member in South Okkalapa township recalls that after the *jingalee* attacks in Project Housing 1, he and other members discovered the government's involvement: "The next morning, we went to the location of fighting and saw the *jingalees*. Those were not handmade but actually produced by a government's weapon factory" (Interview 147). In another instance, a former student activist in Thongwa - Kyauk Tan towns in 1988 describes how her adoptive father was framed: "The people who accepted weapons from the police officers had to go to jail. My adoptive father was arrested since he accepted the weapons. Three or four other people were also arrested and charged with looting the police station" (Interview 111). Another student union member in Yenangyaung city, Maung Maung Wun (2013), met the same fate. After Dr. Maung Maung took over and ended martial law, the police in Yenangyaung offered to work with the student union to take care of the city's security. The police chief himself gave Maung Maung Wun a gun in the name of equipping the student union to provide law and order and Maung Maung Wun was later accused of stealing this gun and jailed for two years (Maung Maung Wun 2013). Hence, state agents in many cases armed vigilante groups in order to enable deadly unrests, then arrested these vigilantes in order to silence them.

In cases where the public captured the killers who were drugged or armed by state agents, these agents infiltrated public interrogations of criminal suspects, aroused public anger, and provoked people to behead those they had arrested. This was in order to create more images of communal unrest, while simultaneously preventing the perpetrators from revealing the state's involvement. During the chaotic time at the end

of 1988, one Yangon resident describes one such intervention: “A person was accused of poisoning the water that protesters drank so people captured him. There might have been informers who worked for military intelligence at the time, so these people disguised as normal people and they aroused the public and said Let’s behead that person. So the angry mob beheaded him” (Interview 92). Many other witnesses also corroborate the presence of state agents in inciting brutal punishment of captured criminal suspects in similar cases.

Immediately afterwards, the government also arrested the local residents whom its agents provoked: “These agents who instigated the beheading, they also informed again to the police. And the police and soldiers came and captured the people who did the beheading” (Interview 92). Finally, the state agents at the same time photographed and filmed these incidents of public executions and broadcast them as evidence of the Uprising’s anarchy. A Yangon resident recalls: “The moment when people were killing the suspected poisoner was video recorded. Those video records were broadcast among public after the Uprising. At that time, no ordinary citizen could afford to buy video cameras. So I inferred that they all were planned by military intelligence” (Interview 4). Hence, these records were broadcast to eventually justify the military coup that ended the Four-eight Uprising.

Overall, as testimonies by local residents and activists corroborate, the Burmese dictatorship was ruthless and ready to use various means to deceive and provoke the general public toward brutal killings. To instigate mob attacks, state agents not only drugged and provided weapons to local people and vigilantes, but also aroused public anger and instigated public executions as punishment for “murderous

criminals.” These strategies to mobilize mob killings of protesters, and later exterminate mob members, were deployed on a large scale in Yangon and beyond, in order to decimate the movement’s strength, construct images of an “anarchic” Uprising, and provide a legitimate pretext for the military’s violent takeover of the country in September 1988.

b. Collective protection: Activists’ mobilization, role models, and coordination

In contrast to mob attacks, various forms of collective protection, while prevalent in 1988 and 2007 events, were not mass-mobilized by grassroots activists due to their fear of government surveillance and arrest. Instead, in this section, I show that grassroots activists mobilized their own political circles, and these circles then set examples of collective actions for sympathetic bystanders to emulate, and aided these bystanders in contributing toward collective protection. In essence, while a large number of local residents offered protective support toward protesters at their own will, they only participated in group donations, human chains, or medical rescue after they were inspired by grassroots activists’ examples, or came into contact with activists that could turn their goodwill into concrete (albeit discreet) support for protesters.

Grassroots activists mobilizing their political circles

There is very little evidence of grassroots activists mobilizing the public to either join protests or contribute to collective protection. Part of the reason why the grassroots activists did not mobilize the masses was the risk of getting arrested, in which case they would no longer be able to continue working for the movement. So these activists would only ask trusted people or mobilize their close friends from

school, work, social organizations, or neighborhoods to join in collective support in order to protect the monks from harm. According to the monk Ashin Htavara's (2015) memoir of his experience as a leader of the Saffron Revolution, famous social service groups and activists, such as U Kyaw Thu, Sayama Than Myint Aung, and Daw Shwe Zee Kwet from the Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS), led their members to donate collectively at Sule pagoda on the first day of Saffron, September 18, 2007 (Ashin Htavara 2015). Other leading donor groups included U Zaganar's actor group and Daw Phyu Phyu Thin's HIV-AIDS support group.

A grassroots activist describes how he organized donations among his trusted friends: "I gathered my friends who had the same interest. And then I collected money from them and bought breakfast, water, and medicine for the monks. Because the monks had to walk from dusk to dawn, so they needed medicine" (Interview 20). In addition, a former student activist in Yangon in 2007 describes how he did not participate in a group donation until encouraged by his activist friend: "At that time, mainly I was taking class at the British Council. Then on the 24th, I went to offer alms to the monks when my friend, an editor of a political magazine, told me to follow him to donate to the monks. He worked with Ko Zaganar" (Interview 19).

Similarly, in terms of human chains, fear of getting arrested if one mobilized the wrong crowd was pervasive. As a result, there were only small-scale mobilizations within groups of trusted political colleagues. On September 23, according to monk Ashin Htavara's 2015 memoir, the Sangha Representative Group requested political activist groups that had been supporting the monks to help form protection lines on the sides, since the monks worried that the government would infiltrate the marches with

fake monks in order to attack the genuine monks. The following day, the monk protest leaders and the different activist groups, including the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), discussed how to arrange security during the march. They agreed that the monks would march in the middle, while the students and young people would clasp hands and surround them on both sides, and other people would follow behind (Ashin Htavara 2015). The organizers and initial members of the security line were provided with yellow armbands and saffron/maroon pins to wear on their shirts so that everyone could identify their duty. According to a Student Union leader in 2007: “Guys that were part of the human chain had a maroon piece of cloth pinned in front of their t-shirts. That was a piece of monk robe. This was to signal that they were security people for the demonstration” (Interview 29).

These student and young activists then mobilized their own circles to form the first human chains. As an underground activist of a political party that was involved in the 2007 protests in Yangon describes: “Our action was only to surround and protect the monks, and to assist their needs. I worked together with other members of my party. [...] Then, people came to join the protection line by themselves. We did not call them” (Interview 131). A student activist in Magway city also recalls how monks and student activists there coordinated with each other to mobilize other activists to form protective human chains in 2007: “In Magway, there were many universities and student activists from these universities mobilized their friends. In total, maybe about 50 student activists joined. [...] We did not ask the public to join. Because if I persuaded people, the government would catch me” (Interview 120). As these experiences suggest, government spies were thought to closely follow political

activists, hence, the activists faced a high risk of arrest and only worked within their trusted circles.

Similarly, in terms of collective medical rescue, politically active staff at RGH only mobilized among themselves to offer treatments to protesters who were shot during the most brutal days of the Four-eight Uprising. While a number of clinics and hospitals turned away injured protesters out of fear for government retaliation, RGH, where the military “dumped” the most number of injured or dead demonstrators on August 8, ironically later became the hub of rescue. It was the only medical center in Yangon that immediately announced to the public that it supported the pro-democracy protesters and would remain open twenty-four hours a day to treat any victims of violence. Dr. Tin Myo Win (2013), who was an RGH staff and later the president of the Supervisory Committee for Student Movement (SCS) in 1988, remembers very clearly that this announcement was his and his colleagues’ first collective response to the excessive violence that protesters suffered at the beginning of the Four-eight Uprising. This is exactly because witnessing firsthand the regime’s brutality made the politically aware staff at RGH feel sympathy for the protesters, which motivated them to save the protesters’ lives.

Grassroots activists setting role models

Even though grassroots activists did not mobilize the public, they played an important role in providing examples of collective protection that the public could emulate. The first group donation, human chain, or medical rescue was carried out by these activist groups, then the general public followed suit. In terms of group donations, many Yangon residents that I interviewed knew about and admired the

dedication of U Kyaw Thu's FFSS, U Zaganar's group, and Ma Phyu Phyu Thin's group. A student activist in 2007 describes how his group, among others, followed the model of group donations set by these pioneering moral leaders: "Actor U Zaganar led movie actors and actresses. Poet U Aung Way led poets and writers to make offerings to the monks. Then, for us young people, we prepared the donations, ordered food, and gave water to the monks" (Interview 25).

Similarly, in terms of human chains, as many sympathetic bystanders in 2007 corroborate, even though they were exposed to very little or no public mobilization for providing protection to the monks, since they knew the "good" monks were in danger, they wanted to help keep them safe. Nonetheless, local residents in 2007 mostly reported that they did not initiate the human chains, but instead observed first what others were doing to protect the monks. Hence, when they saw the human chains, they understood why they were necessary and useful. Thus, the grassroots activists organized themselves first and the general public emulated after seeing these "first movers" performing this act of protection.

According to a downtown resident in 2007: "Most people participated after they went to watch. People gradually joined together. [...] Due to previous incidents, we did not expect the government to accommodate the monks and we knew the government would shoot and repress, just not knowing exactly when. That was why people surrounded the monks to protect them" (Interview 145). A local resident from Thamine township also describes how he got involved after the student union members led collective support: "At first, I went to see what was happening for 2-3 days. Then, the ABFSU started to participate and I joined them" (Interview 106).

Thus, examples set by student activists and their colleagues were crucial in motivating others to expand the human chains.

Finally, in terms of collective medical rescue in 1988, the leading examples of collective rescue by RGH staff motivated nearby residents and office workers to contribute to these life-saving attempts and actively volunteer at the hospital. As my interview and archival data suggest, most of the people who participated in collective medical rescue were people who lived or worked near RGH in Lanmadaw and Latha townships. It appears that proximity to RGH is a relevant factor in facilitating bystanders to take part, since they got to know and were motivated by how RGH staff and other social organizations voluntarily treated victims of state violence. A sympathetic government civil servant who worked near the hospital in 1988 shares how she was touched by the nurses' model of collective rescue:

“At that time, my office was closed after 12pm. On my way back home, I saw a lot of injured people with gunshot wounds at the Rangoon General Hospital. Many nurses with goodwill came and treated those people. They themselves felt the same pain with the public and helped out of sympathy. There were also many social groups at the Yangon Hospital who also helped people who were suffering. So I volunteered with that as well” (Interview 118).

Thus, as these accounts illustrate, most sympathetic bystanders wanted to protect and rescue protesters, but many of them only became active after being exposed to models of collective protection that they could either emulate or participate in.

Grassroots activists coordinating collective protection

Last but not least, grassroots activists played an indispensable role in

coordinating mass participation in collective protection. In terms of group donations, when local residents felt the moral imperative to support the monks and knew about activists in their neighborhood, they usually contacted the activists and, in private, entrusted them with donations. This is because people wanted to avoid government attention for public organization and because the activists, with their political knowledge and connections, were thought to be more likely to distribute the donations effectively. As a former NLD activist in Thingangyun township describes: “Some people wanted to donate but they were scared of being arrested so they contacted us and gave us medicine and water bottles” (Interview 135). Hence, most of the reported group donations involves some organizing role by grassroots activists.

According to monk Ashin Htavara’s (2015) testimonial, the Way Ya Wit Sa committee, which was elected by Saffron leaders in order to take care of the monks’ well-being, also collected donations from sympathetic and supportive local residents to deliver to the monks. In addition, an NLD activist recalls how she guided interested donors and organized group donations from local supporters in 2007 with U Zaganar and other NLD activists: “Although we did not officially mobilize the public, we helped them to contribute to medicine donations. [...] I worked together with Zaganar. I received medicines from donors and then I distributed back to participants who have marched all day, especially for the older senior monks” (Interview 96).

Similarly, in terms of human chains, not only were the grassroots activists crucial in setting examples of collective protection that motivated sympathetic bystanders to join, they also played an important coordinating role. A former NLD activist recounts:

“Mostly people got involved because the monks were beaten, so people could not stand it. I saw a lot of students surrounding the monks. The All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) organized this. In terms of the youths in my neighborhood, some of them joined when they knew about the demonstration. They wanted to surround the monks because they could not stand the unjust violence. There were only a few of them on the first day. However, gradually, more students came to surround the monks” (Interview 112).

Thus, as this quote suggests, these human chains did not emerge until rank-and-file activists led by example with their own groups and coordinated others to participate.

A student activist mentions how his fellow activists organized other members of the public who were interested in joining the security lines: “Old political prisoners that I knew – activists from 1996, 1998, 1988, and the NLD – organized and managed people from their own townships on how to protect the monks. People saw it all” (Interview 26). Such coordination was critical in helping the human chains expand while keeping it disciplined. A local tuition teacher from Tarmwe township remembers the way the activists directed how he and his friends could take part in the human chains: “The activists made security lines, but I and other people on the sides of the roads wanted to join the lines so they let us join. One joined after another so the march became big” (Interview 101).

As for medical rescue, right after the initial bouts of repression against protesters in 1988, the RGH staff worked with civilian volunteers to treat injured people in a timely manner. When members of the public came to volunteer, the hospital staff assigned them with specific responsibilities so that medical treatments

would be efficient. A resident who lived near RGH in 1988 recalls his important duty as a medical volunteer after the bloody coup September 18 occurred: “I volunteered at the Rangoon Hospital at Lanmadaw township. At the time, many people were shot by the military during the military coup. [...] After the shooting, the injured people had to be taken with ambulances to the Rangoon Hospital. At the time, there was no fuel for the ambulances, so I had to go around and asked for fuel. People donated a lot” (Interview 116). There were many different tasks involved in rescuing injured protesters. The coordination by RGH staff was crucial in delegating, hence making the rescue missions more effective in saving people’s lives.

Overall, in terms of collective protection, grassroots activists’ willingness to serve as role models and to coordinate bystanders were critical in promoting and sustaining collective protection of movement participants. Not only did they encourage their trusted circles and set examples for the public to emulate, they also assisted sympathetic bystanders to efficiently contribute to group donations, human chains, and medical rescue. As a result, ordinary citizens were able to provide meaningful support towards protesters, allowing the movement to persist.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the role of state agents and movement activists in promoting collective response among bystanders. While state agents were heavily involved in instigating mob killings in the latter half of the Four-eight Uprising, movement activists were crucial in inspiring and facilitating collective protection, including group donations, human chains, and medical rescue, toward protesters in both 1988 and 2007.

By illustrating these causal mechanisms, I also hope to contribute to the Burma studies literature by refuting the claims that the general public in Yangon were exceptionally “savage” or “political” in any sense. First, they did not automatically become violent revenge mobs when there were no functioning state institutions, as the Myanmar junta and some scholars claim. People did try to stop strangers from entering their neighborhoods or detain them, but most people were disgusted and traumatized by public executions of criminal suspects. People were mainly under the influence of state-led mobilization when they engaged in such collective assaults. On the other hand, Burmese people were not so politically active as to readily organize collective support toward an opposition movement either, as certain literature on social movements in Myanmar claims. Even though sympathetic bystanders participated in collective protection at their own will, these activities were mostly possible thanks to the coordination and leadership of grassroots activists.

In order to facilitate collective disruption in the form of mob attacks against state-alleged rioters in 1988, the regime’s agents secretly infiltrated local communities, provoked the public to punish criminal suspects, and aided these attacks by providing weapons to vigilante groups. Taking advantage of the lack of lower-level administrations in the latter half of the Four-eight Uprising, and in order to create the image of a “wild anarchy” under the general strike committees’ supervision, the central government amped up its agents provocateurs’ sabotages and even actively promoted public hostility and violent mob killings against any alleged rioters, including movement participants. However, in order to deny potential responsibility and make the mob attacks appear as local residents’ own initiatives, the state did not

publicly mobilize these violent responses, but had their agents secretly infiltrate and provoke members of the general public toward such acts, by arousing public anger and framing capital execution as an appropriate punishment for protesters. These agents even drugged and provided weapons to local vigilantes in order to facilitate the attacks. Finally, in order to cover its own tracks, the government arrested the mob participants after the killings, accusing them of being bloodthirsty anarchists.

On the other hand, to facilitate collective protection, the pro-democracy movement's activists mobilized their own circles, set examples for the general public to emulate, and coordinated existing sympathetic supporters. Due to risks of arrest, grassroots activists generally did not mobilize the public but only their own circle of trusted people to form group donations, security lines, or medical rescue. But bystanders who were sympathetic toward protesters were inspired to take part in collective protection when they saw trustworthy activists (famous philanthropists, local activists, or doctors and nurses) performing these collective acts in public, and/or knew activists that could help them—sometimes discreetly— to contribute as well. As a result of the activists' mobilization, example setting, and coordination, members of the public were able to entrust local activists with donations, join the human chains, and volunteer with medical rescue at the hospital.

Although there are similarities between the roles of state agents and movement activists in enabling collective response, their differences are obvious. Without any concern about casualties of innocent people, the regime deceived and manipulated the public into activating their most destructive side toward each other, only to serve the state's ulterior purpose of branding the Uprising as “an anarchy” and justifying its

violent crackdown at the end. On the other hand, as for collective protection, most of the general public were not encouraged by the movement activists, but were themselves eager to support after the activists showed possible examples and made it more convenient and less risky for sympathetic bystanders to contribute.

Combining the insights from this chapter and Chapter 3, we can see that while a large part of the general public under the Burmese dictatorship were reluctant to participate in political protests, many of them were sympathetic to the protesters' suffering and willing to provide protective support in one way or another. Moreover, when grassroots activists presented models of collective protection and took the lead in coordinating interested supporters, it encouraged more ordinary citizens to take part. Thus, in addition to mobilizing protest participation, the more the movement activists pay attention to organizing collective protection, the more the public can meaningfully contribute toward the movement's persistence.

At the same time, these two chapters also demonstrate the considerable capacity of a repressive regime not only to demonize an opposition movement, but also to engineer gruesome public attacks against movement participants. Thus, as I have shown in chapter 3, it is critical that opposition movements not only defend its morality but also actively prevent and neutralize *agents provocateurs* in order to maintain public trust and minimize lethal disruptions.

CHAPTER 5

BYSTANDER RESPONSE AND ACTIVIST SURVIVAL

In this chapter, I examine the effect of bystander disruption and protection toward activists, especially how local residents' different responses shaped activist operations throughout the Burmese pro-democracy movement between 1988-2010. I argue that dissidents' long-term involvement with a movement under a repressive regime depends on two main factors: whether they survive violence and arrests, and whether they are committed to continue activism afterwards. Studying the Four-eight and Saffron protest events and the non-protest periods in between, I find that actions by non-political, ordinary citizens directly affected these outcomes. Specifically, collective hostile disruption in the forms of widespread surveillance and killings led to more casualties among movement participants as well as their withdrawal from the movement. On the other hand, bystanders' protective support helped activists to escape crackdowns and arrests as well as bolstered their attachment to the movement by building their pride and validation in dissident work. Below are the main hypotheses to be tested in this chapter:

H4a: Activists who encounter bystander disruption are more likely to suffer casualties or withdraw from the movement.

H4b: Activists who receive bystander protection are more likely to survive state repression of protests and stay committed with the movement.

This study also complements the literature on the Burmese pro-democracy movement by highlighting the role of non-political bystanders' purely moral acts of

protection and disruption in shaping activists' outcomes. Moreover, it contributes to the social movement literature by providing new evidence to challenge the conventional wisdom that state repression and movement organizational resources are the only main factors affecting movement strength or dissidents' decision to take to the streets. In this chapter, by studying the role of ordinary citizens' actions toward activists throughout the ebb and flow of a repressed movement, I show that extensive bystander disruption and protection can also generate the same decisive effect on activist operations that is distinct from the influence of the other, known determinants. Furthermore, I also make a contribution to the authoritarianism literature by demonstrating that, beside the presence of loyal security forces (Chenoweth et al. 2017, DeMeritt 2016, Koren 2014, Bellin 2012), cooperation/non-cooperation of average citizens also significantly moderates the effectiveness of state strategies, by influencing the level of penetration and success of government crackdown, surveillance, and arrest.

I divide an opposition movement timeline into protest and non-protest periods. While during protest periods, most dissident activities are public and "above-ground" and the state mostly represses them by violent crackdowns; during non-protest periods dissidents either cease all activities, flee abroad, or work "underground" to plan for future protests, and state strategies usually take the forms of surveillance, harassment, and cooptation of the activists (Figure 6). This characterization is in line with the literature on the protest-repression nexus that finds the interdependence and adaptiveness of activism and repression tactics (Chenoweth et al. 2017, Carey 2006, Boudreau 2004). Moreover, under a repressive and capable dictatorship, while protests

are usually explosive events that occur intermittently, non-protest periods tend to last for months or years. How opposition members operate during these critical, “quiet” times determines whether large-scale public demonstrations will re-emerge (Taylor 1989, Sawyers and Meyer 1999, Beatty 2011). In this chapter, I will show that disruption and protection by ordinary, non-political local residents not only affect activist operations during protest periods but also during these non-protest periods as well.

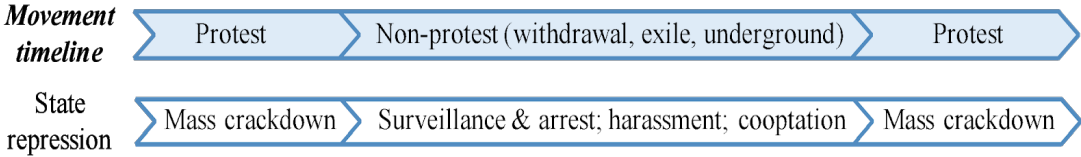


Figure 6. State repression strategies against an opposition movement, during both protest and non-protest periods

In order to examine the independent effect of bystander actions in protest periods, I study hard cases where the presence of other factors, such as state repression or movement organizational resources, should have led to the opposite outcomes. First, to study the effect of bystander disruption on activists’ casualties and withdrawal from the movement, I focus on the periods when the state did not repress and the opposition movement was well organized, i.e. the height of the Four-eight Uprising and Saffron Revolution. In contrast, in order to highlight the effect of bystander protection on activist survival and commitment, I analyze the periods of devastating repression that crippled the movement’s leadership, i.e. the final days of Four-eight and Saffron.

As for the non-protest periods, I scrutinize the months and years in the 1990s-

2000s when public activism was absent. The 1990s and 2000s were not always “quiet” in Yangon. There were notable public protests at various points, such as the 10D movement in 1991, student protests in 1996 and 1998, NLD activists’ Tuesday prayer campaigns throughout the 2000s, the 88 Generation’s White Sunday campaign in 2007, etc. However, in this chapter, I only focus on the non-protest durations in between these bursts of demonstrations.

These non-protest periods are crucial for dissidents to build clandestine networks and secretly devise plans to successfully launch future campaigns. However, knowing the importance of such periods, the Burmese regime tried to nip future protests in the bud by surveilling and arresting, harassing activist families, and coopting activists into becoming government spies. Among these three main tactics, I find that whether the state strategy of surveillance and arrest was effective or not depended on the extent of ordinary bystanders’ protection and disruption toward the opposition members. While bystander disruption mostly took the form of ubiquitous and penetrative civilian surveillance—i.e. local residents monitoring dissident activities in their own areas and reporting to the authorities—bystander protection usually came from the activists’ sympathetic acquaintances and manifested in their neighbors, friends, and local authorities providing intel, sheltering, or helping the activists to escape arrests. I find that while the prevalence of citizen informants made it highly challenging for movement members to operate and discouraged many dissidents from staying on with the opposition; bystander protection during both protest and non-protest periods allowed and inspired these dissidents to carry on, making them more risk-acceptant and boosting their pride and conviction in the

movement.

In order to account for other important factors that might affect activist commitment during non-protest periods, i.e. harassment of activist families and cooptation of activists, I first examine whether such harassment and cooptation actually had any effect in my case studies. By analyzing my in-depth interviews and archival data, I find that the state's constant harassment of identified dissidents did little to prompt these people to quit the movement. Since the harassment persisted regardless of whether they left or stayed with the movement, there was no visible pay-off for quitting. Moreover, other studies on the Burmese pro-democracy movement even find that such harassment inadvertently motivated the activists to devote more to the movement since they could no longer return to a normal life.

On the other hand, state cooptation, i.e. bribing dissidents into working as government spies to report on their colleagues' activities, was reportedly more effective due to its considerable material pay-off and made a number of people turn their backs on the movement. However, as my data reveal, many people were able to resist these cooptation attempts. But even for the activists who had strong conviction in the movement and were unaffected by bribes or harassment, bystander actions still made a difference in whether these dissidents quit or continued their work. Hence, by studying these cases, I can demonstrate the independent effect of surveillance or assistance by ordinary neighbors, friends, and other local residents on activist operations during non-protest periods.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first lay out my case studies, the existing explanations, and my findings on the effect of bystander disruption and protection on

activist operations during protest periods. Then, in the second half of the chapter, I focus on discussing how ordinary citizens' actions also shaped activist survival and commitment in non-protest periods as well.

1. Activist operations during protest periods

To examine the independent effect of bystander disruption and protection, I take into account the role of state repression and movement organizational resources and focus on hard cases during the Four-eight Uprising and Saffron Revolution. First, to study how bystander disruption impacted activist casualties and withdrawal, I focus on the height of Four-eight and Saffron, i.e. the second half of Four-eight and the first week of Saffron. During these times, all security forces either stood down or withdrew from protest areas. Since most protest groups in the city of Yangon also more or less connected and collaborated with one another, their morale and capacity were relatively high across the board. Accordingly, these two periods make up my hard cases for activist casualties.

On the other hand, in order to examine how bystander protection affected activist survival and commitment, I zero in on the final days of Four-eight and Saffron. Once the order to crack down was issued in these periods, state repression became systematic and widespread. No protest units were spared and movement leadership was damaged. Hence, these are hard cases for activist survival (Figure 7). Furthermore, as I will present below, the hard cases remain across localities in Yangon as well, since the levels of state repression and movement's organizational resources were relatively uniform across protest areas in the city.

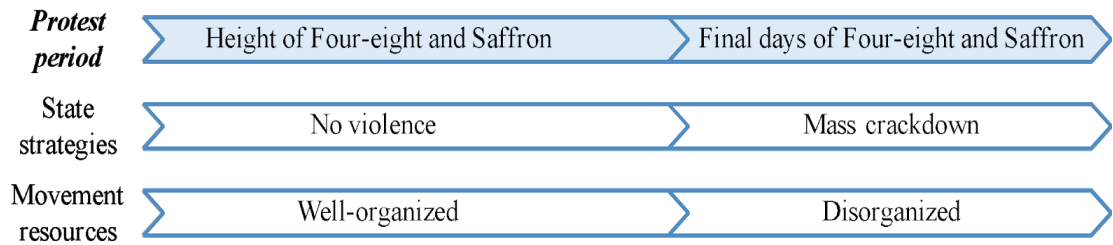


Figure 7. Timeline of hard cases for activist casualties (height of Four-eight and Saffron) vs. survival (final days of Four-eight and Saffron)

a. Activist casualties and withdrawal

The hard cases: Height of Four-eight and Saffron

In terms of activist casualties and withdrawal, I study the second half of the Four-eight Uprising and the first week of the Saffron Revolution when the state refrained from violent repression and movement members were organized and enthusiastic about their movement.

As for the first case study, during the second half of Four-eight, specifically after August 24 when the BSPP government removed its security forces from the streets, lifted martial law, and promised a referendum on multi-party democracy, protests and independent media flourished. Almost every township and profession joined the marches with their own signboards across Yangon. The most notable event was Aung San Suu Kyi’s public speech on August 26. in front of hundreds of thousands of protesters and supporters, calling for discipline and unity in the ongoing pro-democracy struggle. Most of my interviewees recount how the speech by General Aung San’s daughter gave them the impression of an imminent political transition.

Four-eight from that point forward became a joyous celebration of all walks of life, where even government and military departments participated and demanded

democracy. Even when a number of local administrative offices stopped functioning, the movement leaders very quickly organized a General Strike Committee to oversee protest activities as well as general law and order. The opposition members worked systematically in full force in order to maintain the movement's momentum and pave the way for its success in enabling a democratic transition. However, the festive mood started to recede and fear started to seep in among the activist groups in early September, which resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of active protest groups as well as protest marches each day.

How did such a sudden change occur? I argue that the emergence of bystanders' collective disruption played the single most important role here. As I have presented in Chapters Three and Four, due to state propaganda and mobilization strategies, mob attacks against protesters proliferated in outskirt townships, and fear of vigilante killings was widespread throughout the city. Most of my interviewees who are former activists express how they expected that these public executions could occur in their own areas, regardless of whether they lived in downtown or suburban Yangon. Moreover, neighborhood barricades were also constructed everywhere in Yangon to deter any strangers from passing. Hence, in a matter of days, Yangon transformed from a friendly and peaceful community into a hostile environment for public protests. In the next section, by analyzing testimony by Yangon residents and activists on this phenomenon, I will show how these forms of collective disruption led to significant casualties and withdrawal of activists from the movement.

In terms of the second case study, similar to the celebratory atmosphere at the height of August 1988, during the first week of Saffron, the protesting monks marched

along the main roads in Yangon without obstruction by the authorities or security forces. The movement participants grew exponentially from thousands to tens of thousands of monks. The protest became more and more systematic as the monks later on established a Sangha Representative Group to keep the marches peaceful and disciplined as well as to take care of the protesters' well-being. Hence, the marches proceeded every day from late morning to early evening with the monks calmly walking row by row, reciting the *Metta Sutta* discourse on loving kindness and maintaining the demands toward the SPDC regime to resolve people's hardships and begin political reforms toward national reconciliation. As Saffron reached an unexpected level of prominence, later on a large number of student activists and NLD members started to follow the monks and openly chanted political demands and held protest placards as well.

Since the beginning of Saffron, due to state propaganda and agents provocateurs, bystander disruption also occurred across Yangon, though they were not as widespread nor as organized as in 1988. As previous chapters show, individual residents confronted protesters whenever these bystanders encountered protesters' or agents provocateurs' destructive behavior. However, I will present in the next section that even though bystander disruption was present, the marches still kept growing day by day and there were no significant activist casualties. Thus, I use this case study to highlight the ineffectiveness of individual, unorganized disruption and emphasize the importance of collective disruption in the Four-eight case.

In both cases of Four-eight and Saffron, we can see that hostile disruption only occurred at the height of the protests but not during the final government crackdowns.

This pattern confirms the theory that I have presented in the previous chapters on the role of the state in mobilizing and demobilizing bystander actions. It also enables my study to scrutinize the independent, negative effect of bystander disruption on activist operations when state repression was absent. As I have demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, during the second half of Four-eight and first week of Saffron, the state alleged that movement participants were criminals but its security forces appeared calm and did not take any actions. This was in order to drive down public support for the movement and, more importantly, legitimize the state's eventual mass crackdown. This tactic also increased bystanders' wariness of criminals mixing among protesters at the height of these events, and encouraged hostile disruption during these periods. However, once the military started to move in to put an end to the protests in both 1988 and 2007, it announced curfew, ordered everyone to stay put indoors, and banned public gatherings, so that the state could cover up its mass brutality and discourage movement supporters from showing up. Hence, most neighborhoods deserted their security barricades and vigilante groups retreated. Moreover, since the majority of mob attacks during the second half of Four-eight were staged or instigated by state agents, there were no more communal killings when these agents stopped mobilizing at the end of Four-eight. Instead, the military troops marched into town to annihilate the whole movement. Thus, in 1988 and 2007, bystander disruption only occurred before but not during government repression, and this allows me to examine such disruption's independent effect on activist casualties and withdrawal, in the absence of state brutality.

Existing explanations

In terms of the existing literature, while many studies on Four-eight and Saffron neglect the presence of bystander disruption (Fink 2009b, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2008, Boudreau 2004), some other studies did mention the emergence of these responses as well as variation in activist casualties during 1988 and 2007 (Lintner 1989, Ferrara 2003). Nonetheless, even for these latter studies, due to their lack of micro-level data, they were not able to draw clear connections between the two phenomena either.

For instance, the most well-known study on mob violence in the second-half of Four-eight is Federico Ferrara's 2003 paper "Why Regime Creates Disorder: Hobbes's Dilemma during a Rangoon Summer." He constructs a dataset on protest events during Four-eight from different news sources and finds that, in response to the "anarchy" that the government engineered in September 1988—i.e. agents provocateurs' destruction and mob killings—the number of protesters in Yangon significantly decreased on a daily basis. However, without interviews, surveys, or other micro-level data, he was not able to provide a convincing explanation for this plunge in protest participation. Instead, he was only able to make an abstract claim that the number of protesters withered because "the population" in general stopped supporting the movement: the "anarchy" made them start to regard the movement as the cause for social instability. Hence, according to Ferrara (2003), "many reluctantly chose autocracy over anarchy and a stationary bandit over a multitude of roving bandits." Nonetheless, Ferrara does not present any concrete evidence that indicates either a general attitude of wholesale defection from the movement, or people's wish for the dictatorship to return. Thus, Ferrara's interpretation is problematic. Not only does he

lack data to back up his blanket assumption, but he also fails to consider a much more sensible explanation for the decrease in the number of movement participants, despite the fact that they still largely supported the Uprising. By analyzing original micro-level data, I will next show that many protesters in Yangon stopped showing up on the streets not because of their disapproval of the movement but due to their own casualties or fear of imminent mob attacks.

Effect of collective disruption

In this section, I present my finding on the independent effect of bystanders' collective disruption on activist casualties and withdrawal from the opposition movement, right at the height of Four-eight and Saffron.

Bystanders' disruptive responses that thwarted protests or harmed protesters took the form of people blocking protesters from passing through their neighborhoods or directly attacking the demonstrators. There were many cases where local residents or ward leaders refused to let a protest march through, physically attacked protesters, or detained and interrogated demonstrators. These actions weakened the activist movements and ultimately led to their demise.

In terms of physical casualties, in the case of Four-eight, the period when the strike committees flourished was also the period when neighborhood vigilantes and mob attacks proliferated. These attacks and hostile confrontations created a harsh environment for public activism. There were numerous stories of protesters being accused as criminals and executed in public. The NLD's co-founder and leader, U Tin Oo (2013), remembers that while the movement was gaining momentum, there were so many violence and beheadings at outskirts areas like North Okkalapa and South

Okkalapa, that he was even requested to write a public statement to help settle conflicts between groups and to take control of the bad situations. These incidents were causing an alarming number of casualties.

In addition, a former student activist from ABFSU describes the difficulty of carrying out public protests at the time due to neighborhood vigilantes killing strangers and blocking the streets: “Most organizations could not march around town or carry out any activities. People only recognized the ABFSU at the time. If other strangers entered their neighborhoods, they would kill. We were students and we had our flag, armbands, and uniforms. So after they asked us where we were going, they allowed us to pass. We headed out since early morning and were allowed to pass until 6-7pm. After that, people cut down coconut trees and blocked the roads. Cars were not allowed to enter” (Interview 121).

In addition to such direct attacks on movement participants, other movement members who did not suffer from mob attacks in 1988 also report about how these attacks discouraged most of them from continuing their protest marches around Yangon. Even though they might have known the role of the state in drugging or provoking local residents into these acts, that did not lessen their fear of widespread, senseless killings by the hostile general public. Thus, despite the fact that there were no riot police or soldiers on the streets, many protest groups were inactive. For instance, a movement participant in downtown recalls: “At the time, I could not go to other wards. I could only stay on my own street. When things worsened, no one would go to South Okkalapa township from downtown, or vice versa. People told each other not to go since there would be killing. The word-of-mouth rumors were very scary.

[...] Since the government made neighborhoods fight each other, people did not believe each other. So they lost their interest in politics and just worried about themselves” (Interview 116). Hence, protesters in 1988 were equally wary of pervasive mob attacks as well as they were of mass crackdown.

These mob attacks and hostile confrontations by neighborhood vigilante groups also heightened activists’ own distrust toward local residents, which discouraged the activists from carrying out protest mobilization in public as well. A former activist in 1988 remembers the sense of disconnection between the movement organizers and the general public at the time: “I could not discuss with them what to do next as I could not trust all of them” (Interview 11). Thus, collective disruption played a significant role in deterring activists from staging large-scale protest marches.

On the other hand, in terms of bystander disruption during Saffron, as I have presented in Chapter Three, while such disruption was present, it mostly manifested in the form of separate individuals confronting protesters instead of neighborhood blockage or mob attacks. It was also not so widespread as in 1988 that it could have stalled protesters either. For example, as a movement organizer in 2007, Ashin Htavara was well informed of violence and danger that protesters faced, including incidents of individual civilians throwing rocks or provoking fights with the movement participants (Ashin Htavara 2015). However, since these were isolated events, his protest group was able to ignore the instigators and, later on, change the marching route in order to avoid future clashes. Other activists and sources also do not report casualties due to bystander attacks in 2007 either. Hence, without collective mobilization and organization, bystander disruption had little discernible impact on

activist operations during Saffron. Overall, by examining both the Four-eight and Saffron cases, we can see that not all types of hostile disruption led to activist casualties or withdrawal, and that only widespread and *organized* forms of *collective* disruption led to activist casualties. In the next section, I will detail the opposite effect by bystander protection on activist survival and commitment to the opposition movement.

b. Activist survival and commitment

The hard cases: final days of Four-eight and Saffron

In terms of activist survival, I study the hard cases of the final days of Four-eight and Saffron, when there was brutal repression against the movement and its leadership was severely damaged. In the case of 1988, even though the number of protest groups decreased in the second half of Four-eight due to collective disruption, some were still active, especially groups under the banner of the ABFSU. Then, on September 18, 1988, General Saw Maung publicly announced a military coup, set up night curfew, and banned gatherings of five or more people. Soldiers and military trucks started patrolling across all townships and were ready to fire at anyone caught in the streets. Hence, the protesters who defied the order received heavy crackdown and suffered a large number of casualties: “Because of the military coup, students and dissidents were repressed. At that time, protesters in front of the City Hall were shot. A lot of people died. In Sagaing, about more than 300 people also died. Students in Mandalay were also shot and cracked down. There were a lot of damages and destruction everywhere” (Interview 2). Writer U Tin Soe (2013), an NLD member who was arrested nine times since Four-eight, also compares Four-eight to a

“nightmare” with brutal state violence, imprisonment, and torture.

Nonetheless, many opposition members were able to escape and either ran to the border to form armed rebellion, continued underground work in Yangon, or worked for opposition parties to compete in the 1990 general elections. For instance, a former student activist recalls: “When the military aimed to shoot, I was scared. When the shooting started, I turned back and ran. We were hiding in nearby buildings. But this fear was just temporary. We tried to find different ways to be successful. So I did not get hopeless” (Interview 94). Another activist carried the same spirit: “In 1989, after the military coup, we re-organized the Basic Education Student Union. In 1990, we raised the Fighting peacock flag to demonstrate on the street again. We could not be cracked down” (Interview 24). Other dissidents started to help opposition parties in the 1990 elections: “If we stopped our work after the military coup, we knew that the military would win the game forever and we would never achieve our goal. So, we continued our struggle. [...] We advocated people to vote for NLD. We help NLD candidates at their election campaign” (Interview 4).

So how did these activists manage to survive the military coup and maintain their commitment toward the severely persecuted pro-democracy movement? As evidenced in the previous chapters, mainly due to bystanders’ exposure to the victimized images of protesters, ordinary citizens engaged in protective support across downtown and suburban areas, wherever violent crackdowns happened. I argue and will show in the next section that bystander protection at the end of Four-eight—in terms of informing, rescuing, sheltering, and helping opposition members to escape—played a significant role in keeping these activists alive and committed to the

movement.

In the case of the Saffron Revolution, in the event's final days, the SPDC regime announced to start taking actions against the protesters and banned gathering of five or more people. For days, monasteries across Yangon were violently raided at night and the remaining monks and activists who kept demonstrating on the streets were shot and beaten by the security forces and hired thugs—Swan Arr Shin—as well as attacked by military trucks and tear gas in broad daylight. Thus, the Revolution officially ended a couple of days after the first bouts of mass crackdown. Nonetheless, a number of movement organizers and activists were still able to escape to other countries or continue underground work.

As I have presented in Chapters Three and Four, protective support in 2007 mainly took place when bystanders came across images of innocent protesters suffering severe brutality. There were many forms of collective protection during the final days of Saffron, including group donations and human chains, that kept the monks safe and helped them to continue marching. Hence, in the next section, I will demonstrate how pro-democracy activists in 2007 were able to survive and continue their political work mainly thanks to protective support from the public.

During both Four-eight and Saffron, we can see that even though there were instances of bystander disruption at the height of these events due to people's distrust toward protesters, many local residents still offered protection toward the activists throughout the protests and in the midst of the government's final crackdowns. Why is that so? As I show in Chapters Three and Four, even though ordinary people became skeptical of strangers, when these residents encountered images of dissidents who

appeared harmless yet who suffered under violent repression, such images still made them acknowledge the existence of genuine protesters and induced public sympathy with the “innocent victims”. As a result, I will show that a large number of desperate activists got sheltered, rescued, and transported to escape Yangon.

Existing explanations

The existing literature emphasizes the trials and survival of the Burmese pro-democracy activists, but most studies overlook the prevalence of bystander protection. Bertil Lintner’s 1989 monograph *Outrage: Burma’s Struggle for Democracy* is the only major publication that accounts for the general public’s protective support toward movement members in the midst of the military coup that ended the Four-eight Uprising. However, his lack of extensive micro-level data prevents him from drawing clear connections between bystander protection and activist survival.

Lintner (1989) describes in detail how local residents in Yangon systematically erected barricades on the date of the military coup in order to hamper troop movements that threatened to annihilate any remaining protest groups:

“Once again, throughout the city, people began felling trees and overturning street-side wooden stalls to make barricades, as they had done in August. Their faces were downcast and the atmosphere electrifyingly tense. The barricades were not only in small streets in residential areas but they also extended along main roads like Prome Road, which leads to the army camps north of the city. Electric wires were cut and streetlights destroyed to hamper the movements of the troops everybody was expecting to appear any minute.”

However, he does not discuss the effect of these barricades. Similarly, in his account

of the “mass exodus” of dissidents fleeing the cities at the end of Four-eight to go to border areas in order to start an armed struggle, there was also no discussion on how these students were able to escape the military troops that were densely stationed in urban areas either. Even though, as he presents in a previous section, “any crowd of people in sight was mowed down methodically as the army trucks and Bren-carriers rumbled down the streets”; about ten thousand activists were still able to board buses, trains, etc. to leave “the cities, towns and villages of central Burma for the border during the last weeks of September” (Lintner 1989). Thus, Lintner’s narrative leaves unanswered how a large number of activists managed to flee, despite brutal and widespread state crackdown. The next section highlights the significant role of bystander protection in keeping activists and their operations alive.

Effect of bystander protection

In contrast to collective disruption, bystander protection in the final days of Four-eight and Saffron saved activists’ lives. Local residents, neighborhoods, monasteries, and mosques were quite dedicated in their rescue attempts (Figure 8). They donated and formed human shields around protesters. People also informed activists of spies and security forces who were looking for them. In some cases, local residents witnessing protesters being hurt even threw rocks and attacked the perpetrators, who were in fact riot police. When protesters were injured while running away from riot police or soldiers, people either treated the injured at home or sent them to the hospital. They helped opposition members to hide, get a place to sleep, get new clothes and disguises to pass government checkpoints, and escape. Of course, not all activists that received protective support survived crackdowns and manhunts, but

they were more likely to survive if they obtained such help during these very high-risk situations.

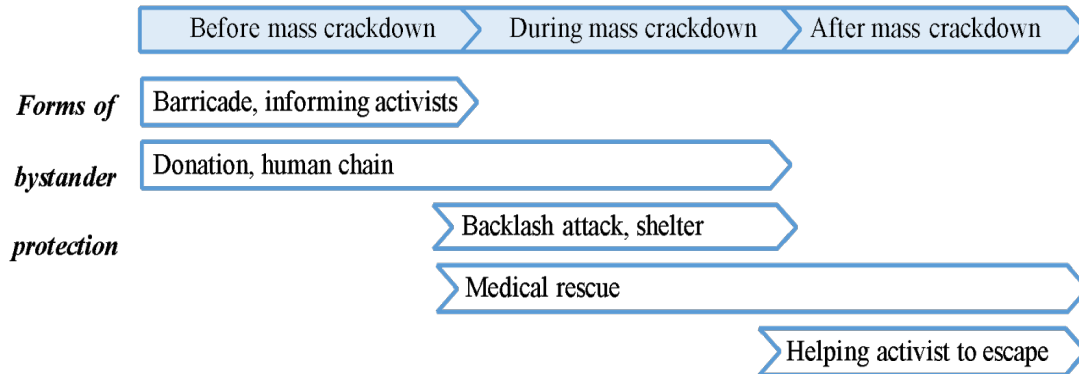


Figure 8. Temporal order of bystander protection toward protesters during government crackdown

First, before the mass crackdowns began, an important form of bystander protection that helped protesters to avoid repression and arrests was local residents informing the protesters of government threats and troop movements so that they could go into hiding in advance. A protester in 1988 recounts his experience: “When the government announced the military coup, I did not know about it because I was participating in the march. So after the march was dismissed, when I was on my way back, I saw a sign written with chalk near downtown that said: ‘There was a coup announcement in the afternoon, so go back home.’ Some ordinary residents were worried that after curfew, all the people on the streets would be shot or killed by the soldiers. So they made the signs to inform the demonstrators” (Interview 24). Many activists were also informed by their sympathetic neighbors to flee when the military came looking for them as well.

Another form of collective protection in terms of barricades against troop

movements was also crucial in shielding a large number of dissidents from state repression. A resident of Thingangyun township in 1988 recalls: “Military troops from other towns wanted to enter Yangon in order to help the troops here repress the protesters. We knew that if the troops get to downtown, they would make the children and protesters suffer. So our neighbors cut down coconut trees in order to block the military cars” (Interview 130).

Moreover, collective forms of protective support, including group donations and human chains, were critical in helping many movement members to survive and continue staging more protests. In terms of the role of group donations, for instance, during Saffron, according to testimony by Ashin Htavara (2015), because of donations and support from U Kyaw Thu, U Zaganar, other popular artists, and the public, the monks were very delighted and able to carry on their marches even during days of heavy crackdown. Ashin Htavara also remembers clearly that when he was hiding from the government and sleeping at train stations to avoid the military raids of monasteries, concerned residents who heard about the raids gave him food and took care of him.

Human chains both helped to separate the protesters from the security forces and also gave the protesters conviction in the strength of the movement. For example, on September 26, 2007, according to Ashin Htavara’s own experience, he and other movement participants were beaten near Shwedagon pagoda. Despite their injuries, they kept chanting *Metta Sutta* and marching to Sule pagoda. In the midst of repression, many bystanders then immediately joined the human chains to protect the monks and others clapped and cheered for these protesters. It was an unforgettable

moment of public unity that inspired the movement organizers to move forward (Ashin Htavara 2015). Similarly, a former NLD activist in Bogalay city expresses his gratefulness for the human shields that separated the movement speakers from state-hired thugs: “On September 5, thirteen people demonstrated. Then, I encouraged people in the city to participate and surround the thirteen speakers to protect them from Swan Arr Shin. So they were able to give public speeches” (Interview 147). Thus, such protection allowed the Saffron movement to persist in his town.

In addition, backlash attacks against violent security forces and shelters for runaway activists helped a large number of dissidents to escape arrests in the midst of crackdowns. A former student activist in 1988 attests to this: “When the people from this quarter saw that students were brutally injured by the police, they came out and threw rocks at the police. So, the police were injured too. [...] As a result, we were able to separate from our colleagues and hide in safe places. I was not arrested” (Interview 3). Protesters were also able to avoid arrests by taking shelters at sympathetic bystanders’ houses and monasteries: “The security forces were looking for me. So I had to take refuge at people’s houses and sometimes had to stay all night in the restroom.” (Interview 132); “After the military took over, the student activists could not go back home. Here, the Maggin monastery is very famous for hiding the activists” (Interview 108).

Furthermore, these secret shelters helped movement members to continue staging protests without being caught by the security forces. A South Okkalapa resident describes: “When the protesters saw the police car, the march dispersed. They went into the neighborhood to hide. Then, when the military cars were gone, they

gathered again and continued demonstrating” (Interview 103). Another protester details how sympathetic bystanders downtown helped him to evade the military in multiple ways: “I was protesting near a market on Maha Bandula street. Then, four military cars arrived and soldiers came out. People from inside the market yelled ‘Go inside this market!’ so everyone ran in there. Then we opened the back door of the market and escaped to another street. At that time, people on that street told us not to move together but break up into small groups of two or three people. Later, we were able to reconvene at another site to protest again” (Interview 106).

However, not all protesters were able to escape crackdown. For the dissidents who were injured, medical rescue was critical to their survival. Thanks to timely assistance by medical professionals and local residents, many activists were able to get treated and carry out further protests. A student activist recalls the role of sympathetic supporters in providing temporary treatment during Four-eight: “The military used teargas to disperse us so we had to run into the nearby neighborhoods. The smoke was so terrible that we could not stand it. The local residents there saw this and became very upset as well. So they gave us water” (Interview 137). Moreover, a lot of opposition members were only able to survive and rejoin the movement after receiving operations at the Rangoon General Hospital, as a large number of accounts from my interview and archival data confirm.

Finally, bystanders’ discreet assistance in various forms was crucial during activists’ eventual escape from Yangon. For instance, a former student activist in 1988 remembers very clearly how he could not have fled from the government’s manhunt without strangers’ help: “That very evening, I had to leave Yangon. There were many

security checkpoints. I did not feel safe so I used a handkerchief to cover my mouth. When I reached the checkpoint, a group of female students approached me and said: ‘We know you are a student leader, give your bag to us. Women’s bags are not thoroughly searched.’ So they helped me carry my bag” (Interview 7). Ashin Htavara was also able to flee Yangon after the government crackdown of Saffron thanks to a local resident who generously sheltered him and gave him civilian clothes to disguise himself, and a sympathetic taxi driver who took a personal risk to help him to get out of Yangon (Ashin Htavara 2015).

More importantly, not only did ordinary citizens’ protection save activists’ lives, it also served to encourage and inspire these dissidents to stay committed to the movement and stage further protests. For example, although student activists experienced constant crackdowns at the end of Four-eight, among those who survived, whether they continued these high-risk acts, I find, depended on their sense of public support. Whenever they recount their experiences during Four-eight, each mentions how the public came out to cheer, to donate, to protect, or to rescue them. Bystander support served as a resounding validation of the importance of their work.

During Saffron, Ashin Htavara (2015) also emphasizes the public’s warm and enthusiastic support and patronage as a main motivation for the monks to start protesting and marching on September 17, 2007. Later, he refers repeatedly to the group donations, human chains, and collective rescue throughout his experience during Saffron to show the impressive extent of public support and solidarity with the movement and express his pride in the movement. Student activists in 2007 also consider widespread support as a main source of hope for movement success: “We

told the people that if we all participated in the demonstration, not only in Yangon but all over the country, we believed that there would be change” (Interview 25). Thus, despite repeated crackdowns during the final days of Four-eight and Saffron, public support was constantly deemed a very important factor that inspired protest leaders to try again to stage new protests. Therefore, bystander protection not only helped a large number of opposition members survive, but also bolstered their commitment to the movement, significantly limiting the effectiveness of state repression.

Overall, in this section on activist operations during protest periods, I show the independent effect of bystander disruption and protection toward activist survival and commitment, by analyzing hard cases from the Four-eight Uprising and Saffron Revolution. In the next section, I will demonstrate how these bystander actions are also crucial determinants of activists’ devotion to the movement during non-protest periods as well.

2. Activist operations during non-protest periods

Under a repressive regime, non-protest periods are a critical time for capacity building during which opposition members create clandestine networks and secretly devise plans to successfully launch future protests. Taylor (1989) calls the movement survival mechanism in these periods an *abeyance structure* – “a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another.” However, knowing the importance of these periods, in the 1990s and 2000s, the Burmese regime tried to nip protests in the bud by surveilling, arresting, harassing activist families, and coopting activists with bribery to become government spies. Nevertheless, I find that the

government tactics of harassment or cooptation of activists were unproductive in many cases, and that the effectiveness of surveillance and arrest largely depended on the extent of bystander disruption or protection toward the dissidents.

First, in terms of disruption, I argue that local residents' cooperation with the authority to surveil and report on opposition activities prevented activists from being able to carry out secret planning for future protests. This led to a number of arrests, and drove down activists' eagerness to remain involved with the movement. On the other hand, bystander protection in the forms of sympathetic neighbors, friends, or local authorities informing, sheltering, and helping dissidents to escape arrests by the security forces allowed these activists to continue working and remain committed to the movement. In the following sections, by analyzing the original testimony from my interviewees, I demonstrate these independent effects of bystander actions, and further back up my findings with more evidence from the existing literature on the Burmese pro-democracy movement. Before doing so, I will first explain why other variables, i.e. state harassment and cooptation, are insufficient for explaining activist commitment in my cases.

a. Alternative explanations: State harassment and cooptation

First, state harassment was relentless for any families whose members were known to have organized or mobilized public protests, including the Four-eight and Saffron events. This harassment lasted years even after the activists stopped their political work and served as harsh public warnings for anyone who aspired to join the opposition. Harassment took the form of destroying activists' family businesses, driving activists and their families homeless, stunting the education or career

development of activists' family members, censoring artist activists, and others.

Under the Burmese dictatorship, once the protest mobilizers were identified by the state, they would suffer from constant harassment regardless of whether they decided to leave or stay with the opposition. People witnessed the destruction of their own businesses, career, or education. Many activists recall: "Because I distributed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they destroyed my mechanic workshop. In 2001, General Khin Nyunt's prodigy, Brigadier General Than Htun destroyed my workshop himself" (Interview 132); "Because I was participating in the 1988 and 1990 demonstrations, I was banned from going to the university. So I had to take distant education. I was also not allowed to hold a passport until U Thein Sein government" (Interview 24). Many artists, writers, singers, and actors were also banned from ever publishing or performing again because of their participation in Four-eight: "A lot of artists like me [who were involved in the Four-eight Uprising] were restricted from publishing art. At that time, singer Sai Htee Saing were not allowed to sing or perform. Actresses Daw Aye Aye Thin and Ma Than Shwe were not allowed to film for a long time either. They got secluded, even until now" (Interview 2).

Not only did the activists suffer, but their families were also severely punished. Many could not have a permanent residence: "After 1988, we worked for the NLD in Thongwa town. So the military government destroyed us. We did not have a house but had to move from place to place. Wherever we rented, the government came and put pressure on the landlords. So we had to move every six months" (Interview 111). Others' family members were constantly spied upon: "When my little brother and

sister went to school, the informers followed them” (Interview 19). A large number also became unemployed. For instance, due to actress Daw Aye Aye Thin’s leading role during Four-eight, later her husband Captain Aye Myint was sacked from his job in the military (Daw Aye Aye Thin 2013). Another former activist sums up such harrowing experiences: “For all activists who were involved in the Four-eight Uprising, their families were in a really bad situation. Their businesses were not in a good shape; they could not get a good job. If those activists’ family members were government staff, they could not get promotion and were frequently sent to remote places” (Interview 28).

Nonetheless, these forms of harsh punishment did little to sway the commitment of these existing dissidents, exactly because such harassment would follow them and their families for years even if they quit from organizing protests. Hence, there was no incentive for the activists to stop working—they would be punished in any case. This relentless repression could have even incentivized these people to become *more* involved in the movement because they could not do anything else (studying, working, or opening businesses). For instance, a former activist shares how he became committed to the movement since the government made it impossible for him to return home: “I was a university student activist when I was arrested and imprisoned in 1999. After I was released, I could not go home, so I continued to work with other political activists like Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi. I went to visit my family when I missed them but I could not stay at home” (Interview 19).

The existing literature on the Burmese pro-democracy movement also confirms the low level of effectiveness of state harassment during non-protest periods. As Fink

(2009), Beatty (2011) and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007) find, constant harassment did little to dissuade existing movement members from continuing their high-risk work because there were no clear payoffs for their quitting. Since the government was determined to persecute dissidents, no matter how much they tried to work within the legal confines, they would be attacked anyway.

According to Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007), “since the government has issued a plethora of executive decrees and laws to control political activists, it is impossible for them to do anything political without breaking the laws.” During the 1990s and 2000s, NLD MPs and other activists were constantly harassed by the regime, they lost their jobs, their businesses were vandalized, their children were expelled from school, etc. (Fink 2009a, Beatty 2011). Hence, it was impossible for these dissidents to retire and return to a normal life as ordinary citizens. As a result, their only option was to keep working for the opposition. For instance, despite constant harassment and warning of long prison sentences, many activists, including the NLD members, 88 Generation Students, ABMA monks, etc., led a campaign to ask people to vote down the SPDC-drafted 2008 Constitution (Fink 2009b). Overall, state harassment had little impact on the commitment of many dissidents toward the pro-democracy movement.

In contrast to protracted harassment, state cooptation gave activists a clear incentive to leave the movement and report on their colleagues to the government. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the government attempted to bribe key dissident figures into working for the authorities to expose their networks and spy on their colleagues. A former activist recalls:

“The military arrested us and beat us during interrogation. Then when we were

released, the military asked us: ‘Do you want to sell lottery? Do you want to do business? You can sell in front of your house and no one will bother you. Yangon police will not arrest you either. We will tell them to leave you alone. If they arrest you, just give them our phone number and you will be ok. But you need to work with us and give us intel about your political colleagues and what they are doing.’ It was under the Than Shwe – Khin Nyunt time. General Khin Nyunt’s intelligence force was very notorious at the time” (Interview 121).

Such “bribes” did convince a number of dissidents: “There were people who did not comply but there were also some others that gave the military intel and moved to the U.S. and got rich. Some of them came from my township, some from other places” (Interview 121). However, many devoted activists could resist these cooptation tactics and turned down their junta’s offers. Thus, in these cases that I will analyze in the next section, state harassment and cooptation had little effect on their commitment to the movement. On the other hand, I find that bystander disruption or protection played a much more important role in influencing dissidents’ survival and commitment during the non-protest periods of the 1990s and 2000s, through moderating the effectiveness of state surveillance and arrest.

b. The role of bystander actions

Effect of bystander disruption

Bystander disruption was key in deterring activist operations during non-protest periods and such disruption manifested in local residents cooperating with the state in surveilling and reporting on the opposition’s “criminal” activities. “Citizen surveillance” was ubiquitous during the SLORC and SDPC eras. As a former student

activist shares: “We would never be free from government surveillance unless we lived abroad. [...] So, every day and every second I spent my life in worries” (Interview 13).

Such widespread and penetrative surveillance was crucial for state repression since it enabled the government to detect early signs of protest mobilization and arrest active dissidents. According to a former activist: “It was not legal to talk about politics, and there were so many detectives and spies. So we had to talk about politics only with ones who were freed from prison or with just our own group” (Interview 19). Other movement members also became extremely cautious about their contacts and had to take extra steps in disguising their activities: “We could not tell anyone except closed ones where we were going to meet. Right after we got together at the meeting point, we had to leave there and went to another place to discuss what we were going to do later” (Interview 6)

Accordingly, this close watch made it impossible for many people to plan future demonstrations and discouraged them from staying involved with the movement in the long run. According to a former activist about his experience in 2007: “When the [Saffron] protest was gaining momentum, the organizers came to call me to join but I could not join since the informers in the ward knew me” (Interview 135). Other old opposition members were equally hesitant: “Most of the well-known activists were very wise or shrewd, because they must have known what would have happened to them if they had taken active part, so they kept a low profile” (Interview 24). Other dissidents even had to escape Yangon because local informers found out about their underground activities: “The informers got information about our “book

club”, so the military came to question and interrogate the families of the members. Many club members ran away and only a few remained” (Interview 25).

Such ubiquitous surveillance not only affected existing members but also discouraged potential recruits from joining the movement. A university student in Magwe town during the 2007 event recalls: "I was so excited about joining them, but there were some students who were afraid. The government had intelligence personnel with local wear, not uniform. They were everywhere at that time. If they saw us, it would not be good for our education. So we decided not to be involved” (Interview 100). Hence, the close monitoring by ordinary informants everywhere created an extremely hostile environment for activists to trust strangers, recruit new members, connect with other activist groups, or organize large-scale public protests.

Effect of bystander protection

On the other hand, bystander protection in the forms of neighbors, friends, and local authorities informing and helping activists to escape arrests had the opposite effect of “citizen surveillance” and allowed many people to stay committed to the movement. Many dissidents were able to escape arrests thanks to ordinary, sympathetic neighbors who told them of approaching state security forces: “Whenever the soldiers came with their cars, our neighbors always told us: ‘The soldiers are coming to the front of your house. You have to run away.’ The student unions, like the Yangon Student Union, Basic Education Student Union, and ABFSU, used our house as a meeting place and whenever the neighbors informed us, they ran away from the back door” (Interview 96).

Other movement members attest to how sympathetic neighbors also played a

crucial role in helping them to flee to other towns. A former activist in Yangon recounts how he was able to safely leave the city thanks to the help of a close neighbor: “There was an older woman who I treated as a mother. There were some informers in my ward. She overheard from the informers that the soldiers would come to my house to arrest me at night. So she told me to run away. I told her that I did not have enough money to flee. So she gave me 30,000 kyats, which was a large amount of money at the time. She said: ‘Don’t think about repaying me, just run away tonight.’ So my wife and I left home for another town” (Interview 135).

Beside having a direct impact on dissidents’ survival, bystander protection during both protest and non-protest periods also has an indirect, positive effect on activist commitment by helping them to avoid imprisonment. Due to the harsh conditions in prison, numerous political prisoners either died or suffered from severe injuries or chronic diseases: “I spent fourteen years in prison. I had to live in a very small confined place. I used to eat, use toilet and sleep there. I was also isolated and not allowed to speak to anyone for two years” (Interview 6). Hence, this not only shrank the number of movement members but also discouraged many former political prisoners from openly or actively organizing demonstrations since they knew the brutality of imprisonment first-hand. For example, the harsh experience in prison made a former NLD activist become much more risk-averse and avoid directly participating in Saffron: “In 2007, I wanted to avoid arrest and ran away because I knew that staying in prison is not good. I already spent six-seven years in prison since 1988” (Interview 96). A former student activist of the U Thant affair in 1974 also expresses reluctance to get involved in Four-eight: “We were still waiting. Because I

was arrested once before so I had experience. So I was watching how to participate so that I would not get arrested” (Interview 149).

On the other hand, for opposition members who escaped arrests thanks to the help of sympathetic bystanders, the lack of punitive experiences in prison made them become more risk-acceptant and willing to take the leadership role in order to organize future protests. A former student activist in 1988 recalls: “NLD stood as an opposition party and ABFSU as a student organization to overthrow the military regime. After these leaders were arrested and put in prison, we carried on the organizations’ task. We led the second line” (Interview 11). Another dissident shares the same determination: “The military intelligence from the dictatorship arrested the student leaders and imprisoned all of them. However, students that remained outside, with their small resources, continued to gather young people. We gathered the next generation to rebel” (Interview 2).

Other opposition members who kept staging demonstrations after heavy government crackdowns were also motivated to do so thanks to the public’s unwavering support. According to a former student activist: “After 1988 when the government crushed the movement, people were afraid and did not dare to participate in demonstrations. But wherever students demonstrated, people went there and clapped. They supported the students. In some places, they gave us money, snacks, water, and towel” (Interview 18). Such continuous bystander support was a crucial stamp of validation for the Burmese pro-democracy activists and encouraged them to carry on. Thus, in contrast to ubiquitous surveillance by citizen informers, sympathetic protection and support from ordinary neighbors, friends, and acquaintances throughout

the ebb and flow of the pro-democracy movement enabled a large number of people to survive and stay dedicated to their high-risk dissident cause.

c. Evidence from secondary sources

Further support for this argument comes from the literature on activist survival and commitment during non-protest periods in Burma. Fink's 2009 *Living Silence in Burma*, Kyaw Yin Hlaing's 2007 *The State of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Authoritarian Burma*, and Linnea Beatty's 2011 *Challenge and Survival: Political Resistance in Authoritarian Burma* together offer an informative description of bystander actions that backs up my causal mechanism.

Bystander disruption in the form of civilian surveillance was documented by both Fink and Beatty as having deleterious effects on the activists' morale and efficiency. In Fink's (2009) account, a former military officer disclosed the surveillance mechanism: "[The government] monitored citizens through local informers [in every ward]. [...] Informers come from various backgrounds. Some are nationalists who can be persuaded to see dissidents as people who are being used by foreigners to destroy the country, while others provide information because they are intimidated or they need money." Hence, bystander perception of activists as criminals was one important motivation for local residents' cooperation with state authorities.

According to both authors, due to ubiquitous surveillance, there was low level of trust between activists and non-activists, which leads to movement members only organizing among their own circle of close friends and denying membership to strangers, even to "legitimately interested citizens willing to oppose the regime" (Beatty 2011). Furthermore, the hostility from the public, including activists' own

family members and neighbors, was damaging to their commitment. According to Fink (2009), “it is not the repression by the authorities which is so painful, for that is expected; it is the lack of support from neighbours, friends and sometimes even family members which makes it so difficult for activists to maintain their morale. [...] They realize that they cannot make a change happen unless there is widespread participation.”

Despite such harsh surveillance and widespread distrust, Fink and Beatty also discuss how a large number of dissidents were able to continue their work and escape arrests thanks to unwavering protective support from sympathetic acquaintances in high-risk situations. As Beatty (2011) finds, activist families served as critical channels for information transfer and networking, effective cover for political meetings, and important source of financial support. Discreet help from sympathetic neighbors, friends, and local authorities also plays a significant role in Fink’s (2009) account of dissidents’ steadfast commitment with the opposition under the SPDC regime:

“Some activists told of ward authorities who would warn them in advance about house searches, giving them time to hide any incriminating books or documents. Others believe they were able to escape arrest because local authorities, who were also their friends, did not search for them as thoroughly as they might have. One person even told of the local police secretly releasing a political prisoner for a few hours so that he could celebrate a holiday with his family.”

Such protective support undoubtedly increased activists’ chances of survival as well as boosted their conviction in their work of public activism, motivating them to carry on

with the arduous work of opposition politics.

Furthermore, in congruence with my discussion on the longer-term effect of imprisonment for Burmese opposition members, according to Fink's account, the tough experiences during interrogation and imprisonment made many activists abandon their political commitments:

“Torture is carried out both to extract information and to destroy the morale of activists, and includes intense physical pain, intimidation and humiliation. Conditions in Burmese prisons are extremely difficult, with insufficient food, medicine and bathing water frequently leading to debilitating health conditions and the premature deaths of many. Prison sentences can range anywhere from a few years to one hundred years, and prisoners can continue to be held even after they have completed their sentences. [...] Some former political prisoners wash their hands of politics and look for jobs in the private sector. Others try to contribute to society through teaching or writing” (Fink 2009a).

Thus, dissidents who were able to escape arrests thanks to bystander protection and did not have to suffer the harsh conditions in prison were more likely to continue leading the movement. As Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007) presents in his research, student activists who avoided state brutality after Four-eight remained highly committed to the movement:

“The government later arrested Min Zaya, Min Ko Naing and many of their friends on the charge of organizing underground activities and communicating with antigovernment groups from border areas. This did not bring an end to student protests. The ABFSU and other small student organizations and networks kept themselves alive and engaged in antigovernment activities whenever they could.”

Overall, the existing literature on the Burmese pro-democracy movement between 1988-2010 offers additional evidence that is consistent with my argument. More importantly, my study makes an important contribution to this literature by presenting a coherent causal story that highlights the independent effect of bystander disruption and protection on activist survival and commitment during non-protest periods.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I show that activists' long-term dedication to the Burmese pro-democracy movement during 1988-2010 depended on two main factors: whether they survived violent attacks and whether they had the commitment to continue activism. Furthermore, I find that bystander response directly affected these outcomes during both protest and non-protest periods. In terms of activist casualties vs. survival, while bystander disruption in the form of mob attacks and citizen surveillance led to many dissidents being harmed or arrested, many other opposition members were able to escape state repression and survive thanks to bystander protection. As for activist withdrawal vs. commitment with the movement, while bystander disruption discouraged public activism by intensifying dissidents' perception of risk in continuing protest, bystander protection heightened activist commitment by reinforcing their pride and sense of public validation for their work. Furthermore, such pride and validation also made these people become more risk-acceptant and dedicated to the opposition movement. In the next chapter, I will detail how the continued involvement of these activist shaped the pro-democracy movement's resilience.

CHAPTER 6

ACTIVIST SURVIVAL AND MOVEMENT RESILIENCE

In this chapter, I analyze the role that experienced activists and protest organizers played in the launch of new bouts of protests for the Burmese pro-democracy movement during the repressive military rule of 1988-2010. During this period, with mass crackdown, surveillance, and arrest, the Burmese junta incarcerated a large number of activists and turned the rest toward political parties or exile/border armed struggle that the regime could control. Nonetheless, the opposition movement did not perish but was sustained through dozens of large-scale opposition campaigns in the 1990s and 2000s. I argue that this was possible mainly thanks to the survival and commitment of movement veterans, who had invaluable experience in organizing previous mass protests.

The central hypothesis that this chapter examines is:

H5: If experienced activists continue to be committed to their popular movement, the movement is more likely to launch new mass protests, and hence, to be more resilient.

By analyzing my interviews with former movement activists, their written testimony, and reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UN Special Rapporteurs on pro-democracy protest events and dissident incarcerations, I find that mass protest events in Myanmar were more likely to materialize and become large-scale if they received leadership or guidance by experienced activists. These veterans inspired and passed down knowledge on how to plan protests secretly and

avoid being discovered by the regime. Experienced activists from different groups within one movement or different movements also connected with each other and contributed toward the emergence and efficient operations of new pro-democracy protests. Last but not least, these activists worked with independent mass media and international organizations to build awareness on the movement inside the country and abroad, resulting in increased public interest in activism as well as sustained advocacy to free political dissidents.

Many activists who escaped government repression carried on the momentum of the pro-democracy movement throughout the 1990s and 2000s, including grassroots NLD activists, members of the 88 Generation Students group, and other movement veterans who staged or assisted public activism under a hostile regime. A former Four-eight activist describes this mechanism:

“Gradually, since 1988, 1990, and 1991, we continued until 1995 and 1996. [...] After the military government cracked down heavily on us at the end of Four-eights, during 88 and 89, we were highly persecuted, so we distributed pamphlets with a guerilla-like system. In order for people to have political awareness, we distributed pamphlets that said the military was not good. [...] During 1996, a big student movement happened. However, because of government repression, the event was mostly dispersed. Then, we also tried to make the Four-nine event [September 9th 1999] happen. In terms of these events’ meaning, we wanted to carry the spirit of the Four-eight Uprising forward. For example, there were famous Four-eight student leaders like Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and Ko Htay Kywe. When they were in prison, the next generation, the students remaining outside, continued activism” (Interview 2).

Throughout the years, all of these protest events bore the signature slogan of the movement: *Dimokarasi Ya Shi Ye! Doe A Ye!* – To get democracy! Our cause! Although regime dissidents, old and new, might belong to different activist groups (student unions, monk groups, artist groups, insurgent groups, etc. across towns and generations), they all shared knowledge, experiences, and support for one another and considered themselves part of the umbrella pro-democracy movement. Accordingly, when protests led by new activists failed to galvanize the public or ended within a few days, these activists usually attributed such outcome to the lack of support or guidance from their “seniors” in terms of concealing protest plans from government spies, connecting with other activist circles, or appealing for mass public support. They also blamed the lack of popular legitimacy of their protests on the absence of well-known and well-respected veteran activists, who refused to participate. Thus, activists across different generations all acknowledge the crucial role of movement veterans to the resilience of the opposition.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first present Myanmar under military rule during 1988-2010 as a hostile environment to the survival of the opposition movement. I then explain why other factors, i.e. foreign support and new activists’ capacity, do not explain the variation in emergence of mass protests in the Myanmar case. Last but not least, relying on my interview data and activists’ written testimony, I elaborate on the important role of experienced dissidents in helping to launch major cases of large-scale pro-democracy campaigns throughout 1988-2010.

1. Myanmar military rule during 1988-2010: A hostile environment for pro-democracy movement

In the aftermath of the Four-eight Uprising, thousands of activists fled to the border areas or abroad, and the Burmese military junta attempted to confine the domestic opposition movement toward a highly restricted form of party politics that the regime could control. It did so by making all dissident activities illegal, detaining thousands of prominent activists, issuing arrest warrants for other thousands of activists in exile, and allowing only political parties with no campaigning activities to be legal. It also tried to curb anti-regime protests by making empty promises of political negotiations to draw up a new Constitution with the legal parties. Moreover, the junta constantly operated widespread surveillance and arrests against active dissidents in order to nip mass protests in the bud. Overall, civilian surveillance was pervasive, government critics were censored, opposition demonstrations were brutally crushed, and thousands of political prisoners were incarcerated after unfair trials (Amnesty International 2010, Human Rights Watch 2007). As a result, the opposition movement was split into four groups: activists who were imprisoned, activists who went into exile, activists who joined legal political party, and the rest that persisted with underground work inside the country to continue staging protests.

In terms of party politics, the military imprisoned leaders and members of the main opposition party, NLD, for years and forcibly shut down most of their offices (Human Rights Watch 2008). Aung San Suu Kyi, the co-founder and leader of NLD, was put under house arrest for fifteen years. The regime even staged anti-NLD rallies

and attacked NLD members at various times, including Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade during her tours.

As for underground activism, the surveillance of regime dissidents remained penetrative and widespread throughout this period. Various activists reported being constantly followed after they were released from prison. Activists who possessed or distributed independent journals from overseas were also punished. Universities were closed for years and relocated in order to prevent further student protests. Religious bodies were under government control, and Buddhist monks and nuns who boycotted or demonstrated against the regime also received heavy sentences.

Mass imprisonment of these activists was a major blow to the movement during most of 1988-2010. Across the two decades of military rule, the number of political prisoners in Myanmar ranged between several hundreds and the low thousands. The largest numbers of incarceration usually followed government crackdown against mass pro-democracy demonstrations. Hence, the regime handed down the highest annual numbers of prison sentences between 1988-1989, 1991-1992, 1999-2001, and 2008-2010 (Figure 9). Activists of various protests received sentences of up to 65 years in prison (Human Rights Watch 2009).

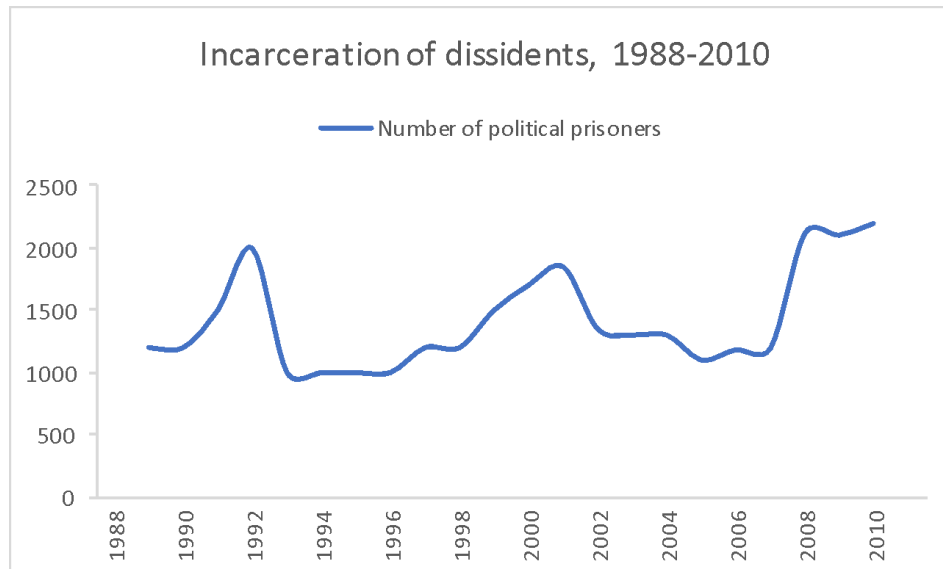


Figure 9. Number of political prisoners in Myanmar during 1988-2010

Data sources: Reports by Amnesty International, Reports by the Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar to the UN General Assembly

First, during late 1988 - early 1989, General Saw Maung's military brutally cracked down on the Four-eight Uprising, causing thousands of deaths and thousands more arrests. Then, in 1990, as the main opposition party, NLD, won a landslide in the May 1990 general election, the ruling junta dismissed the results and started to arrest hundreds of opposition party members and activists. Hundreds of student activists were also detained after they held a pro-democracy demonstration in December 1991 in celebration of Aung San Suu Kyi's 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. As a result, the number of political prisoners exploded to around 2,000 in early 1992.

Later on, in May 1996, the Burmese junta continued to crack down on hundreds of NLD activists in May 1996 when the party announced to draft a separate Constitution. Then, after 1998, when thousands of students protested and, along with NLD members, advocated Aung San Suu Kyi's call for the convening of a parliament,

the military regime again ratcheted up its arrest campaign between 1999-2001. This resulted in a total of more than 1,800 activists imprisoned in 2001. Finally, in the aftermath of the 2007 Saffron Revolution. The number of dissident incarcerations doubled after Saffron to more than 2,100 and showed no sign of moderating during 2008-2010.

An Amnesty International report in 2004 summarizes the most infamous cases of the regime's heavy-handed crackdown against dissidents during the 1990s and 2000s:

“Student union leader Ko Ko Gyi is one of those who are still imprisoned for their part in 1991 demonstrations calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. Aung Tun, Central Executive Committee member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), and other former student leaders and political veterans have been imprisoned since 1998 for their part in the preparation of a history of the student movement. [...] At least eight prisoners are still serving sentences for trying to send information from prison about human rights violations in prison to the United Nations, including Zaw Myint Maung, a NLD MP elect and doctor, who has been imprisoned since 1990. Win Htein, a businessman and senior NLD advisor has been in prison since June 1996, and is serving a 14-year prison sentence because authorities alleged he had instructed a former prisoner to speak to a foreign journalist about the use of torture in interrogation, and had received a video from farmers of the poor rice crop to give to the NLD leadership. NLD MP elect Saw Naing Naing, and senior NLD members U Soe Han, a lawyer in his 80s, poet and journalist Aye Kyu and poet Aung Myint have been sentenced to 21 years’ imprisonment for issuing a statement protesting the house arrest of Daw Aung San

Suu Kyi and restrictions on the NLD. [...] U Khin Maung Swe, a geologist, and two NLD MPs elect, who are a medical doctor and newspaper editor, have been imprisoned since 1994 for possessing journals produced by opposition groups in exile and for reportedly passing these to others. Individuals with political affiliations have also been imprisoned for possessing equipment to access satellite television channels, without official permission.”

Overall, these consecutive bouts of mass arrest embodied the unrelenting repression of the military regime against the urban pro-democracy movement, making it highly challenging for this movement to survive. So how did it manage to endure throughout the two decades?

In the next sections, I will present possible alternative explanations and show how these explanations do not hold in this case study, while my theory offers the most plausible account.

2. Existing explanations

a. Foreign technical and financial support

As for international support toward the domestic movement, most forms of assistance were largely ineffective. Training and financial assistance from foreign countries went to exile organizations instead of domestic activists, since the Burmese regime was highly repressive against opposition activities inside the country.

According to Kirsten Duell (2014):

“The [exile] movement’s principal donors of funds, training, and travel grants were the American National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Soros Foundation’s Open Society Institute (OSI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI), but there were also many other significant donors. Major governmental donors

(principally the development agencies but also the foreign ministries) included the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Sweden (SIDA), and the Netherlands' National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO).”

On the other hand, the majority of domestic activists perceived very little tangible assistance from exiles or foreign governments during 1988-2010. According to a seasoned NLD activist: “The first organization that supported NLD or political activists in Burma was DVB [Democratic Voice of Burma] in 2008. No [exile organizations] supported us before” (Interview 102). Only a small number of activists in Myanmar were able to access information from the Internet, exile publications, or training in the use of communications technology to launch protests (Duell 2014, Zaw Oo 2006). Overall, with heavy crackdown and widespread surveillance of domestic activists and active blockage of foreign support for the opposition, Myanmar's military rule during 1988-2010 makes up a very hostile environment for the pro-democracy movement.

b. New activists' capacity

There was no shortage of attempts by new activists to launch demonstrations, commemorations, speeches, boycott, conference, and publications of opposition materials recorded. However, most failed to galvanize wider participation. In 1992, the reported dissident activities were only in the form of labor activists or non-Bamar politicians distributing statements that challenged the regime. In 2000, students also

got arrested and failed to organize a commemoration of the death of Phone Maw in March 1988. In 2003, once again, five university students tried to form a student union among several universities and planned a students' conference on Human Rights Day, December 10th. However, their plan got intercepted and they were immediately arrested.

Moreover, many other small-scale demonstrations were cracked down before they reached sizable attendance. For instance, in 2002, a number of university student activists were arrested right as they staged a protest outside Yangon City Hall to call on the regime to start a political dialogue with NLD (Amnesty International 2004). Then, in 2003, twenty novice monks at a monastery in Yangon were also immediately apprehended after staging a religious boycott by refusing offerings by Military Intelligence officials. Finally, during 2008-2010, after Saffron's mass arrest, most events by new activist groups were small-scale and only took place in 2008, including Generation Wave's distribution of anti-regime materials.

In the next section, by analyzing cases of mass protests during 1988-2010, I will demonstrate the various roles that veteran activists played in inspiring, facilitating, and leading prominent protest events.

3. Case studies of mass pro-democracy protests during 1988-2010

In this section, I show that movement veterans played a crucial role in (1) inspiring and passing down movement spirit, tactical knowledge, and underground political network to the next generation of dissidents; (2) directly organizing, supporting, or leading public events in new protests; and (3) publicizing the

movement's claims and the regime's human rights abuses throughout 1988-2010 in order to mobilize public support and international advocacy.

The current literature on the Burmese pro-democracy movement also emphasizes the critical role of experienced activists in keeping the movement alive. According to Beatty (2011), state repression against the opposition was relentless during military rule; nonetheless, thanks to "activist family networks" created by veteran activists who survived repression, the movement was able to carry out various survival tasks, including "distributing pamphlets, giving political speeches, issuing statements and holding commemorative ceremonies," and recruiting new members. Specifically, these family networks became "an alternative institution of political organizing" that helped to verify the credibility of new recruits and prevent infiltration by pro-regime informers.

Similarly, Christina Fink (2009) also finds the significant role of veteran activists in training new generations of protest organizers. According to her monograph, despite the regime's severe crackdown on all forms of dissent:

"if a group of committed individuals can develop a vocabulary to describe the country's problems, propose alternatives and organize themselves into effective networks, they may be able to mobilize the general population. Many of the student leaders in the 1988 and 1996 demonstrations had previously been members of study groups or had worked with private tutors from dissident backgrounds, and some had been involved in writing and distributing political literature before the demonstrations broke out."

This study contributes to this literature by providing a more comprehensive and detailed picture of the various ways that the survival of veteran activists is critical

to the resilience of the Burmese pro-democracy movement throughout decades of junta rule. Specifically, in this section, I traced the role of movement veterans during protest events that took place during 1988-2010, including more than 30 small and large pro-democracy demonstrations, boycotts, commemorations, conferences, prayer vigils, and petitions that Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported. Due to the availability of various sources of information from inside the country, including activist reports sent to exile and international organizations as well as government news that framed these protests as destructive anti-regime agitations, the international coverage on urban pro-democracy demonstrations in Myanmar was quite comprehensive. Hence, along with my interview data and written testimony, the detailed accounts provided by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch capture almost all of the cases of interest. I present these cases in Figure 10 and elaborate on the role of experienced activists in mobilizing large-scale events in the following sub-sections.

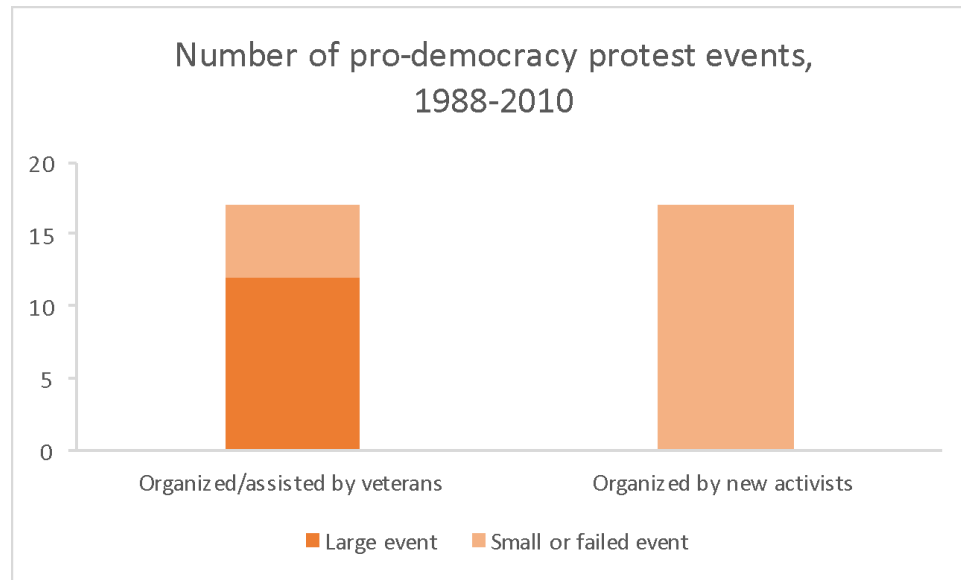


Figure 10. Number of pro-democracy protests organized by activists in Myanmar during 1988-2010

Data sources: Reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch

According to Figure 10, even though not all protests organized by veteran activists during 1988-2010 were successful – there were those that could not take off or expand; however, if veteran activists were involved in directly leading or strategizing, there were more likely to be large-scale protest events. As a matter of fact, under a repressive dictatorship like the Burmese junta, only a small minority of people could stage public activism and the overwhelming majority of them, who were both willing and capable of organizing protests, were committed activists that had already participated in Four-eight, 10D, 1996, 1998, Saffron, etc. These explosive events were the breeding grounds for a large number of future protest leaders. Other parts of the population that did not directly take part in these events had little chance to become inspired or knowledgeable about staging protest. According to Duell (2014), most of the general public were “discouraged from engaging in politics” by

their family and became “neither interested in, nor informed about, politics.” Hence, in other words, without the survival of these crucial veterans, there would be very few opposition demonstrations in Myanmar.

In terms of the large-scale campaigns during 1988-2010, most of them emerged when many movement veterans were involved. The first of such campaigns after Four-eight was a series of protests in 1989 that occurred throughout the country involving hundreds of student activists and opposition party leaders. One prominent event was a student protest in Yangon in commemoration of the July 7th 1962 event – the first student protest against the military regime. Then, in 1990, after the military junta refused the result of the general election in May where the NLD won with a landslide, tens of thousands of monks in towns across the country, including Mandalay and Yangon, organized a nationwide boycott against the military by refusing to take their offerings to perform religious rites for them. In 1991, university students in Yangon again held a demonstration, called the “10D Movement,” on December 10th to celebrate Aung San Suu Kyi’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize and urge for her release from house arrest (Amnesty International 1992). A few years later, in December 1996, thousands of university students in Yangon and other towns protested against the military regime and called for more students’ rights, including the rights to establish student unions (Amnesty International 1997). In September 1998, thousands of students again protested in Yangon against the junta and advocated for educational reforms and Daw Suu’s call for the convening of a parliament. The ABFSU called for an open dialogue between the regime and the democratic forces and supported domestic student movements.

During the 2000s, once again, veteran activists from Four-eight and the 1990s protests were at the forefront of organizing and promoting mass activism for democratic reform. Particularly, a group of former student union leaders from Four-eight, known as the 88 Generation Students, including Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Jimmy, Htay Kywe, Min Zeya, Pyone Cho, etc. organized various campaigns and demonstrations between 2005-2007, including the Signature campaign, White Expression campaign, White Sunday campaign, and 2007 protest against fuel price rise. Most importantly, the 2007 Saffron Revolution was launched after many movement veterans were involved in directing and assisting with protest mobilization for Saffron across the country. Hence, there is a clear pattern of correlation between the survival of movement veterans and emergence of new mass protests.

Furthermore, throughout all major pro-democracy protest events during 1988-2010, my qualitative dataset shows that veteran activists always played an important advising and networking role. In terms of passing down tactical knowledge, before the launch of the Four-eight Uprising, student protests in the 1990s, or Saffron Revolution, veteran activists inspired and trained the new ones on how to capitalize on events of state brutality or disastrous economic policy to mobilize public demonstrations for democratic reforms. Beside playing an advising role, more importantly, veteran activists were involved in directly leading and assisting most major protest events of the pro-democracy movement throughout 1988-2010. Just as former protest organizers in 1960s and 1970s led local protest marches, revived activist networks, and gave public speeches during Four-eight; veterans from Four-eight continued to lead, mobilize, and support protests in the 1990s; and activists from

Four-eight and the 1990s protests worked together to launch, promote, and participate in various demonstrations in the 2000s, including the Saffron Revolution.

a. Four-eight Uprising

Before the launch of Four-eight, student activists were connected with former protest organizers in 1962, 1974-1975, 1987, and early 1988 and learned from their experiences. Numerous activists recount their experiences in exchanging ideas and working with the veterans: “We were very afraid before 1988. We had to contact and involve in politics very secretly. The experienced activists shared their experiences and passed on their plans and tasks to us. We carried our history generation to generation” (Interview 5); “My tuition teacher was a student activist from 1974-75. He told me how to hold demonstrations and his experiences as he trusted me “(Interview 3); “The 1962 student leaders were active during Four-eight. Then there were also the Communist group from the jungle and many other veteran political groups. I didn’t know about politics very well. But they knew and they mobilized the public. They supported us and told us how to stage a revolution” (Interview 121).

The veteran activists themselves also share about how they were helping student activists to stage the Uprising. According to one of them: “We organized, supported, and helped the students to fight the government because the students were young and inexperienced. Former politicians, former political prisoners, former insurgents, former revolutionaries, etc. supported the 1988 strike” (Interview 8). They also advised new protest organizers on how to detect informers and avoid riot police during protest marches. A veteran from the 1974 U Thant Affair recalls: “I gave warning [to Four-eight student activists] about informers. I shared my experience from

U Thant affair to the new ones [about informers' appearances]" (Interview 23).

Moreover, they shared experiences in spreading pamphlets and statements about the movement. A former student activist describes his experience in Four-eight: "Four friends of mine and I went to Irrawaddy Division and persuaded students in there. We exchange tools and techniques to do statements and pamphlets. We discussed about politics and the brutality of the regime at tea shop in a way that others people around us could hear us. Then, we went on to Hinthada town and did the same things with students there" (Interview 4).

More importantly, during Four-eight, many former student activists of the 1974-1976 protests directly led local demonstrations in their towns and cities, making Four-eight become a nationwide event. A Four-eight student activist recalls: "I traveled to some parts of the country to meet with those who might be interested in the movement. Those who were interested were simply our older generations, who took part in 1974 and 1976 events" (Interview 7). The older generations also became major public speakers during Four-eight, as another Four-eight activist shares:

"The speeches in 1988 originated from the veteran politicians who were involved in the 1962 and 1974 events. In 1962, there was a student union demonstration at Yangon University. Then, the university students in 1988 talked about politics and veteran politicians in 1962 and 1974. Later, the students met and worked with these politicians. They protested during the day. At night, the students and politicians went into the quarters with their cars and they talked with a loud speaker about the political conditions in Myanmar, the repression of the socialist-military government on the citizens of Myanmar. They explained those things to people. They encouraged people to get into politics and mobilized for protests" (Interview 108).

Thus, pro-democracy movement veterans were critical in mobilizing and expanding Four-eight into a ground-breaking nationwide campaign.

b. 1991, 1996, 1998 student protests

During the 1990s, veteran activists from Four-eight who escaped government crackdowns and arrests also went on to promote the pro-democracy movement among students and transferred knowledge on how to stage further protests. According to a veteran activist, Ko Maki – who started his political career with participation in Four-eight, since most people with interest in politics were already jailed in the 1990s, there was little movement on school campuses across the country. However, the remaining Four-eight student activists outside tried to connect with one another (Ko Maki 2016).

In 1991, Four-eight student activists led the famous 10D Movement on the campus of Yangon University at the occasion of Aung San Suu Kyi being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The students called for the military junta to step down, recognize the 1990 general election results, and free Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and other political prisoners. A Four-eight activist recalls: “Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was announced as Nobel Prize winner in 1991. I was just released from prison and I organized my colleagues and discussed to hold demonstration. The idea was that we mobilized all the students from every university and protest that we hold our thumbs up on Daw Suu winning Noble peace prize. We urged for Daw Suu’s release. We started organizing from December 10, 1991” (Interview 11). According to another account by Mo Kalyar Oo, then a female Four-eight student activist, she also worked with other youth organizations in Kyauktada township in Yangon to expand the honoring ceremony for Aung San Suu Kyi from school campus into a large-scale

demonstration, where more than a thousand people participated (Mo Kalyar Oo 2016).

Then, Four-eight activists again were involved in staging further student protests in 1996 and 1998. For instance, in Ko Maki's (2016) testimony, he and his friends formed the Democratic Association of Youth and Student (DAYS) in 1992 to launch pro-democracy protests within school campuses. He went to university in 1995 and promoted the movement among fellow students in his first year. This helped to create the foundation for the student movement in 1996 (Ko Maki 2016). In addition, according to 88 Generation Student Pyone Cho's (2013) testimony, his brother, Thet Win Aung, also a protest organizer in 1988, continued the movement after Pyone Cho and other students were arrested in 1989-early 1990s. Thet Win Aung, who fled the country after Four-eight and sneaked back into Yangon during mid-1990s, played a central role in helping to organize the student demonstrations in both 1996 and 1998. Another Four-eight veteran, Mie Mie, who became an ABFSU member during 1988, was a key organizer at the 1996 event, leading and speaking in front of hundreds of student protesters at Dagon University in Yangon. Moreover, Yi Shwe Sin Nyunt who was an NLD youth member in the 1990s, shares about how she herself and many other NLD members supported and helped to mobilize the 1996 student demonstration, despite the discouragement of party leaders (Yi Shwe Sin Nyunt 2013). Since the student protesters did not know the student union song, they led the chanting song. When there was no protective cover for the speakers at the Dagon University protest, they organized it. They understood that as NLD members, they should stand up for "the people's children" and lead the people's movement.

c. 2005-2007 activism

During 2005-2007, opposition movement veterans were once again at the forefront of reviving mass protest events. Throughout the period, NLD activists and other activists held large-scale Tuesday Prayer vigils for the release of Daw Suu and other political prisoners. Then, after their release from prison in 2005, the 88 Generation Students group in October 2006 organized a nationwide signature petition campaign that attracted over half a million signers to call for political dialogue and the release of political prisoners, and a White Expression campaign where hundreds of people dressed in white to show solidarity with the prisoners. In the same year, the group led a multi-denominational prayer campaign with tens of thousands of people attending, to call for a peaceful political resolution and solidarity with political prisoners. In 2007, they also launched two more large-scale campaigns called White Sunday and Open Heart, in order to assist families of political prisoners and urge the public to write letters to General Than Shwe expressing their grievances, respectively. The Open Heart Campaign received more than 25,000 letters. In August 2007, the group continued to lead hundreds in protest marches against the rise in fuel price, which also ignited the nationwide Saffron Revolution in September of the same year. Besides NLD and 88 Generation Students activists, other movement veterans and former student leaders, like Lay Lay Mon – a prominent protest organizer during the 1996 demonstration at Dagon University, also collaborated with students and young people in 2007 to stage more large-scale protests across the country against rising fuel price (Lay Lay Mon 2013).

d. Saffron Revolution

Following the strikes in August 2007, at the launch of Saffron, former protest organizers from Four-eight and the 1990s student demonstrations worked closely with new activist leaders to prepare for a mass public campaign. A veteran activist who had organized protests in 1996, 1998, and 1999 recalls: “Since I already had some experience and knew about the Four-eight Uprising while Ko Sithu Maung and Ko Kyaw Ko Ko [ABFSU leaders during Saffron] were young people, I mainly helped to control and guide them” (Interview 19). Moreover, veteran activists also helped form a network of dissidents across the country in order to coordinate nationwide protests. An activist from the Four-eight generation was directly involved in mobilizing monks to stage protests in their respective areas: “At the time, monks in Yangon were quiet. I didn’t want the monks to stay silent but to do something. So I went to meet with monks a lot to plan for Saffron” (Interview 112). She also helped to expand the campaign into other towns: “Some monk organizations contacted me and asked me to help form a network. At that time, many monks were mobilized but they didn’t have connections with one another. [...] I encouraged the monks from Yangon to go to Mandalay to spread the movement” (Interview 112).

Moreover, new activists of Saffron themselves recognize the critical role of movement veterans in terms of inspiring activism and passing down tactical knowledge. A student activist shares about the planning for Saffron:

“Actually, U Gambira consulted about the idea to launch Saffron with an 88 Generation Student leader, Ko Htay Kywe. He had a discussion with U Gambira that 2007 was the right time to “tabeik mauk” [i.e. to stage religious boycott] because there

was a similar case in 1990. In Sangha rules, when someone insult them, they have the right to “tabeik mauk”. The discussion was how U Gambira got the idea to plan for Saffron. [...] The monks who did the 2007 tabeik included leaders of the 1990 “tabeik mauk”. So they had experiences and familiarities with each other. They were in the same prisons” (Interview 26).

In addition, the veterans were responsible for choosing Buddhist monks as protest leaders in order to gain the most public support. A senior NLD activist shares: “For 2007, our underground network’s idea was to use the highest “son” – son of Buddha [to lead protests]. That is why U Gambira transformed into a monk. [...] He was mainly based in Mandalay. Then he created a network of monk protesters. Then we started the 2007 movement” (Interview 102).

Another student leader of the Saffron Revolution also describes how he worked with veteran activists to map out safe marching routes: “The students had strategies for marching routes to avoid police stations such as in Mingalardon or Dagon township. We discussed the routes before the marches with the monks, and asked for recommendations from our network with other activists. The network includes the 88 Generation Students, monks, and students” (Interview 29). Many other monks who organized Saffron were also pro-democracy movement veterans. For instance, U Pyinya Zawta from Maggin monastery, who is a co-founder of ABMA, led the Young Monks Union of Ahlone township during Four-eight and later took part in the 1990 boycott of the military regime. In addition, Ashin Bhaddanta Vandavimsa from Shwe Taung monastery, who had also participated in the monk boycott against the military government in 1990, was a crucial figure in planning locations for holding

protests that would attract a large public audience. According to his account, the seasoned organizer planned to divide the demonstration into marches that would simultaneously pass through different routes across Yangon in order to garner maximum public attention and support (Ashin Bhaddanta Vandavimsa 2013).

Not only did movement veterans contribute to the launch and expansion of Saffron throughout the country, they themselves directly led and assisted during the protests. The 88 Generation activists, including Htay Kywe and Hla Myo Naung, led protest groups from different places across Yangon to the gathering points at Shwedagon and Sule pagodas. Moreover, many of the posters, flags, and armbands that were used during the protest were provided by Four-eight, 1996, and 1998 activists. Protest marches and public speeches led by NLD MPs who won in 1990 also helped raise the profile of Saffron among local residents. Experienced grassroots NLD activists even played a critical role in promoting the event to the general public. An NLD activist recalls: “My friends would ask me by phone about the time and place of events. Also, at that time, I always went to the NLD township office in the morning, and people would come to the office and wanted to know about time and place of events. And I myself distributed the information” (Interview 96). Hence, movement veterans played various roles that significantly contributed to the emergence and flourishing of the Saffron Revolution.

4. Other key contributions by movement veterans

Constant efforts in information distribution and international advocacy by veterans in Myanmar and in exile were also critical in strengthening broad-based

support for the movement and ensuring the survival of many political dissidents during the two decades of military rule.

a. Information distribution

Beside their collaboration with new activists to stage protests, for every single year throughout 1988-2010, despite strict surveillance and widespread arrests, veteran activists took immense risks in publicizing opposition speeches, protest images, and information on the regime's human rights abuses to a large audience. They did so by distributing these materials within the country or sending the information to broadcasting stations abroad, who then reported on these events on the radio, TV, and websites accessible to both domestic and international watchers of Burmese politics. This was crucial in mobilizing public support for the movement under such a hostile domestic environment.

NLD leaders and grassroots activists played a leading role in these activities. During 1988-2010, they continuously published criticism of the junta and promoted party statements. U Win Tin, formerly a seasoned journalist and co-founding member of NLD, published critiques of the military junta before being sentenced to prison in 1989. During his imprisonment, he and other prisoners wrote and sent an 83-page human rights report on poor prison conditions and torture to the United Nations. In 1990, two senior NLD leaders in Mandalay also published on the government's violent crackdowns of the boycotting monks in August that year, including shootings, beatings, and arrests that the military denied. Party activists in Yangon at the same time launched a satirical magazine, called *What's Happening*, that took aim at the SLORC. In 1991, other NLD activists in Yangon published a booklet on NLD's

Gandhi Hall Declarations, where hundreds of members of NLD and other opposition parties met a year earlier after the stolen 1990 election and adopted resolutions to transfer power to NLD and convene a parliament that would decide on a new constitution.

Then, continuously in 1996-2005, dozens of NLD veterans in various towns distributed criticisms against the government and written support for Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. In 1996, NLD members in Mandalay published writings that criticized the regime and National Convention and called for the convening of a parliament or forming of an interim coalition government. In 1998, NLD members in Mon State distributed anti-government pamphlets among their constituencies. In 2000, NLD leaders in Yangon again issued a party statement to call for the lifting of restrictions against party members, including members under arrest. In 2004, other NLD activists in Yangon distributed pamphlets criticizing the National Convention that SPDC aimed to revive. In 2005, party leaders in Bago Division and Shan State picked up the baton and distributed leaflets with General Aung San's speeches on democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi's international awards, and political predictions made by BBC.

Other veteran activists outside NLD were also known to consistently denounce the junta in public. For instance, regarding a draft constitution that the junta wanted to legitimize, U Shwe Ohn, a seasoned Shan-ethnic politician, distributed in 1991 an essay addressed at the SLORC-led National Convention proposing a democratic alternative that the new constitution should take. He openly criticized the military's involvement in politics and called for a power transfer to the 1990 elected

representatives. In 1992, members of the Federation of Trade Unions in Burma, an independent trade union established after the Four-eight Uprising, distributed posters in Yangon to raise public awareness on the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and call for her release. In 1993, as the SLORC-led National Convention was about to take place, veteran dissidents from Mandalay even spread anti-government pamphlets across university campuses, offices, and factories throughout major cities to raise public opposition.

In 1998, seasoned student activists continued to spread leaflets about the outlawed ABFSU in Yangon, and other Four-eight veterans composed and distributed an important book that had several volumes on the history of the student movement in order to commemorate its role in Myanmar's political activism. In the first half of the 2000s, dozens of veteran student activists also publicly condemned the regime's 2003 Seven-Step Roadmap to Democracy. Between 2002-2007, veteran activist U Myint Aye and his activist network called Human Rights Defenders and Promoters even distributed copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights across different towns and cities and called for the release of student activists imprisoned after the Four-eight Uprising. Then, during 2008-2010, Generation Wave, a pro-democracy youth movement founded by Saffron activists, creatively used music, pamphlets, car stickers, and graffiti to distribute anti-regime messages and urge people to fight for political freedoms. Their most remarkable campaigns included the distribution of hip-hop political music CDs at teashops and other public places, and bumper stickers that said "Change New Government" to cars that used CNG, or compressed natural gas.

These seasoned activists were also key in documenting and providing evidence of the Burmese junta's human rights abuses such as child soldiers and forced labor to foreign-based media to expose the regime's crimes and raise public support for the opposition. According to a Four-eight activist, during the 1990s and 2000s, he and his underground activist group investigated forced conscription of child soldiers by the Burmese military, where the group "collected information about the conscription, took photos, and sent to other countries" (Interview 20). Another Four-eight veteran described the type of government's forced labor that she documented and helped to shed light on in the 1990s: "After the [1988] coup, there was a lot of forced labor during 92-93. [...] After the military took over, they wanted to carry out reconstruction projects. Everyone had to participate voluntarily. Yangon region and Irrawaddy region had the most amount of work. These constructions all ended up in failure" (Interview 112). Hence, the unwavering efforts by movement veterans throughout 1988-2010 to publicize these materials not only helped to expose the military regime's repression and violations of human rights and raise public awareness about international human rights standard, but also strengthened the credentials and legitimacy of the opposition movement.

b. Veterans in exile and advocacy for dissidents back home

The Burmese junta's mass exonerations or releases of political prisoners were largely thanks to the effort by exile activists in intensifying international pressure against the regime's human rights abuses. Across the two decades, they contributed significantly in raising the international profile of state-sanctioned brutality against dissidents inside their home country:

“Burmese [exile] activists swiftly employed the political opportunities created by the increased attention being given to human rights and democracy, especially since the Myanmar government’s failure to respect human and civil rights provided ammunition for the movement, enabling it to generate international criticism and put pressure on the regime. The documentation of actual and structural violence, as well as, to a lesser extent, of psychological consequences, served for constructing images of injustice in order to mobilize support from international audiences. [...] The All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) linked up with international student movements, the Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (FTUB) with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), while the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) and the Members of Parliament Union (MPU) linked up with regional and global parliamentarians’ networks, such as the International Parliamentary Union. The 1990 members of parliament elect, for instance, lobbied the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the European Parliament, and the Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for parliamentary action. Over time, a sophisticated transnational pro-democracy movement emerged in both neighbouring and Western countries (Duell 2014).”

This created a “boomerang effect” where many foreign powers, especially Western states, denounced the military junta’s abuses and pressured it to respect political freedoms, release political prisoners, and allow for free and fair election (Duell 2014). As a result, there were mass releases or low sentencing rates during 1989, 1992-1993, 1996-1997, and 2001-2005 (Figure 9).

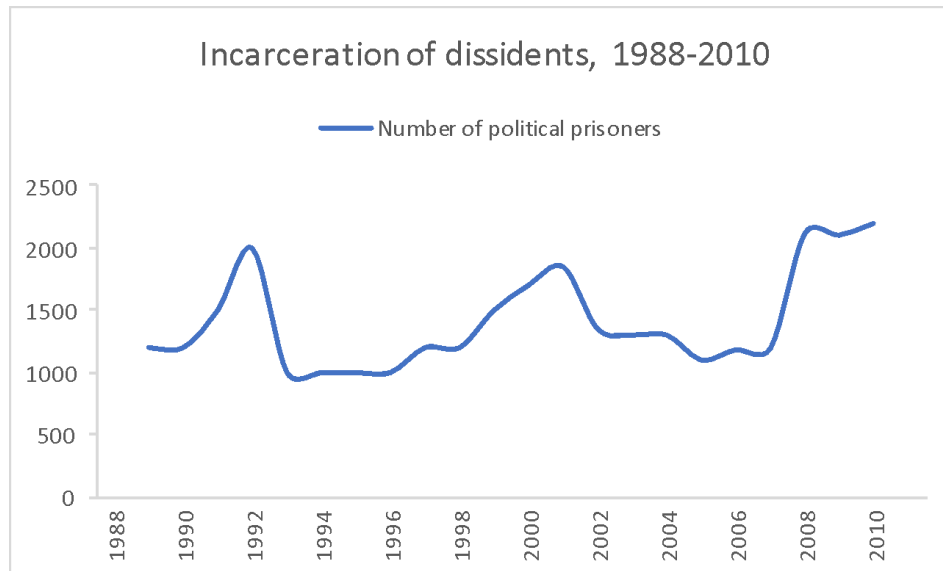


Figure 9. Number of political prisoners in Myanmar during 1988-2010

Data sources: Reports by Amnesty International, Reports by the Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar to the UN General Assembly

First, during late 1988 - early 1989, right after General Saw Maung's military coup, Western powers, especially the U.S. and EU, voiced strong criticism against the mass violence and started to suspend all aid to Myanmar. These reactions from the international community prompted the Myanmar government to hold various speeches and press conferences in 1988-1989 to cover up its brutality and promise to hold a general election, in order to legitimize the regime on the international stage. For instance, in December 1988, Myanmar sent a letter to the United Nation Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions saying that the military acted with self-restraint and only fired at those who endangered the lives and property of its citizens. In 1989, along with press conferences with foreign journalists in Yangon that General Khin Nyunt organized, Myanmar's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN even made a public statement in front of the Commission on Human Rights to defend

the security forces as using “the minimum amount of force commensurate with and required by the practical need to curb and control the calculated machinations engineered by the unscrupulous elements” (Amnesty International 1990).

Simultaneously, a lot of activists and protest leaders detained since 1988 were released in 1989. Hence, while the estimated number of political prisoners was believed to have reached 3,000 at the height of the regime’s mass arrest campaign in late 1988 – early 1989; by late 1989, it stood at 1,200.

Then, in 1992, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution that “expressed concern about ‘the seriousness of the human rights situation in Myanmar’ and called for the nomination of a Special Rapporteur to examine the human rights situation there and to report to both the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly and the forty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights” (Amnesty International 1993). In early 1993, the Commission extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and continued to call on the Myanmar government to “restore full respect for human rights and fundamental freedom” (Amnesty International 1993).

In response to such pressure, in 1992, the junta announced to release all political prisoners who did not threaten national security. The military tribunals that had been trying political prisoners since 1988 were also abolished in September 1992. In 1993, the regime started to commute all death sentences to life imprisonment and reduce all sentences of more than 10 years to exactly 10 years. By late 1993, more than 1,700 political prisoners were freed.

The third significant event occurred between mid-1996-1997 when Myanmar stood as a candidate for membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN). In order to ease Western opposition against Myanmar's candidacy and pave its way toward membership in 1997, the junta refrained from imprisoning the opposition and released many detained dissidents and NLD members. In his comments to the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 1996, including ASEAN countries and their dialogue partners such as the U.S. and EU, Foreign Minister U Ohn Gyaw insisted that the regime had always engaged with other political forces inside the country to hold a National Convention in order to draft a new Constitution. He also claimed that there were no political detainees in Myanmar, only law breakers who were punished in accordance with the law (Amnesty International 1996). After Myanmar became a formal member of ASEAN, the West and other ASEAN countries continued to monitor Myanmar's human rights situation and urge the regime to enter into a dialogue with NLD (Amnesty International 1997). Hence, despite the fact that there were various small demonstrations and a thousand-strong student protest wave at the end of 1996, the number of political prisoners did not jump significantly but hovered around 1,000-1,200.

Alarmed by the regime's new bout of violence, the UN Secretary General appointed a Special Envoy for Myanmar, Ambassador Tan Sri Razali Ismail, in order to facilitate reconciliation between the NLD and the junta. As a result, "over 100 political prisoners were released in November 2002 after one of Ambassador Razali's periodic visits to Myanmar" (Amnesty International 2005). Then, in early 2003, for the first time, Myanmar allowed Amnesty International to visit the country, interview political prisoners, and meet civil society members (Amnesty International 2004). In May 2003, after ASEAN issued an unprecedented statement expressing concern about

the human rights situation in Myanmar when hundreds of NLD members were attacked, later in the same year, Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt announced the regime's Seven-Point Roadmap to Democracy in order to initiate democratic transition. Simultaneously, hundreds of political prisoners were released, bringing the total number of dissident incarceration down to about 1,300 in 2003-2004.

Then, as Myanmar was gearing up to assume its scheduled chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006, during 2004-2005, the international community once again increased its pressure on the junta to improve its human rights record. As a result, in November 2004, Myanmar acknowledged its misuse of the justice system to detain dissidents, announced the suspension of many prison sentences, and attempted to evade international criticisms by attributing most of the abuses to former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who was earlier purged with corruption charges in October 2004. As a result of the new round of exoneration and release, the number of political prisoners went down to about 1,100 in 2005, the lowest number since 1996.

6. Conclusion

By examining a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data on the dynamics of the pro-democracy movement during the Burmese military rule of 1988-2010, I find that the experienced activists who survived state repression and remained committed to the movement played a key role in promoting movement resilience despite the hostile environment. Specifically, they were responsible for choosing ripe opportunities to stage anti-regime protest events. They revived the activist network and planned the events in a clandestine way in order to avoid repression that would nip their campaigns in the bud. They also advised new activists on how to write and

distribute statements and pamphlets, which routes to march in order to avoid police stations and garner the most public attention, how to keep protesters safe in case of repression, etc. Last but not least, they were crucial in raising public awareness and advocacy on the junta's human rights abuses and sustaining popular support for the pro-democracy movement within Myanmar and abroad. Thanks to these veterans' support and leadership, large-scale protests were able to emerge and the pro-democracy movement endure throughout these difficult years.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, my research has followed the Burmese urban pro-democracy movement during its twenty-year journey under various military dictatorships. I traced the movement's ups and downs and examined influential events and actors that have shaped the movement's dynamics, which resulted in a uniquely rich dataset. Based on rigorous qualitative analysis of this dataset, I was able to arrive at key findings that contribute to our understanding on movement resilience under repressive authoritarianism. I will highlight the main empirical and substantive contributions as well as implications for modern-day authoritarianism below.

Empirical contribution

This dissertation demonstrates the value of inductive iteration, when coupled with careful process tracing work, for theory building and testing. First, by leveraging random exposure to protest locations and making sure my interview samples reflect the diverse demographic and political backgrounds of bystanders, I was able to uncover the independent effect of framing and mobilizing strategies on bystander responses across different groups of ordinary residents. Secondly, by performing rigorous case selection and thoroughly addressing alternative explanations, I was able to show the independent effect of bystander actions in protest periods, such as the impact of bystander disruption on activists' casualties and withdrawal, as well as the impact of bystander protection on activist survival and commitment.

Moreover, by ensuring data saturation, this dissertation serves as the most

comprehensive and representative documentation of the urban pro-democracy movement in Myanmar between 1988-2010, with hundreds of original quotes by political actors and ordinary citizens reflecting on the period as well as dozens of written testimony and reports from both Burmese and English sources. Particularly, in studying collective responses during the 1988 and 2007 events, I draw from a large number of original in-depth interviews with ordinary residents, as well as written testimony by local journalists and political activists based mainly (but not exclusively) in Yangon. Then, in order to examine the effect of activist survival to movement resilience, not only do I analyze my interviews with former movement activists, but I also scrutinize their written testimony, and continuous reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UN Special Rapporteurs during the 1990s-2000s on pro-democracy protest events and dissident incarcerations. By triangulating across these different types of evidence, I can guard against confirmation bias and assure the validity of the causal mechanisms, which I summarize below in illustrating my substantive contribution.

Substantive contribution

I first demonstrate that ordinary citizens respond in myriad different ways when they encounter contentious movements. Although some of those types have gone under-documented and under-analyzed in the social movement literature, they have far-reaching effects on the very dynamics and outcomes of the movements. Moreover, I was able to discover and test a two-step process whereby (1) state and movement leaders compete and update their moral frames and mobilization strategies in order to shape public perception and response toward movement participants; and

(2) bystander response in the form of protection or disruption, in turn, moderates the effect of anti-movement violence on movement participants' survival and commitment.

In terms of the first process, my dissertation shows that leaders from both the state and challenger side are well aware of the potential impact of bystander protection and disruption, and hence, actively compete with each other in order to shape the prevalence of these types of responses (Figures 4 and 5), which results in significant variation in bystander actions. This clearly shows in the way both the state and challenger continuously rolled out different framing and mobilizing tactics in order to gain advantage over the opponent in influencing bystander perception. For instance, both sides experimented with a number of frames to depict protesters as criminals or victims, yet only a couple generated the desired effect on swaying public perception of the pro-democracy movement (i.e. "hsu pu thu vs. pyithu lu du"). Not all accusations were damaging and not all positive frames were helpful toward the movement. Hence, my study suggests new scholarship to further research on how ordinary citizens perceive different contentious frames and their resonance, from the angle of social psychology.

Moreover, in terms of mobilizing collective bystander responses, my study reveals the central roles of neighborhood mobilizers, which has direct implication for both the social movement and authoritarian control literatures. These interlocutors' rapport with and understanding of communities on the ground are key to successful large-scale actions. Specifically, the mobilizers had to experiment with various roles, from coordinating or aiding existing participants, setting examples to inspire others to

take part, to directly arousing and framing unfamiliar forms of collective responses as appropriate and moral acts to the general public. On the one hand, the movement's grassroots activists mobilized their own political circles to lead collective protective acts, who subsequently motivated other sympathetic bystanders to emulate and take part under the activists' coordination. On the other hand, in the case of mob attacks, hostile local residents were more likely to participate in public executions when provoked, drugged, and/or armed by state agents into emotional vengeance and punishment of alleged perpetrators. This finding also sheds new light on the under-analyzed topic of persuasive mobilization by repressive regimes and encourages further scholarship to investigate the breadth of dictators' mass mobilization repertoires with case studies in different contexts.

In addition, my dissertation shows that collective responses are much more impactful on activists than atomized responses, not only due to their physical scale but also because only large-scale unified actions can shape the activists' perception of society-wide sentiment and moderate their will to persist with the movement. In the Myanmar case, while collective hostile disruption through widespread surveillance and killings led to more casualties among movement participants as well as their withdrawal from the movement, collective protection helped activists to escape crackdowns and arrests as well as bolstered their attachment to the movement by building pride and validation in dissident work. Therefore, this study suggests that further research is needed to examine the scale of collective action that generates impression of social norms, hence causing socio-psychological effect on contentious actors.

Furthermore, keeping experienced activists freed and committed is central to the resilience of contentious movements under repressive regimes. I find that mass protest events in Myanmar were more likely to materialize and to grow to large scale if they received leadership or guidance by experienced activists. These veterans inspired young generations and passed down protest knowledge, coordinated their existing networks for launching new protests, and worked with independent mass media to build the foundation of political knowledge among the public in order to delegitimize the regime and increase public interest in activism.

Last but not least, in terms of foreign interventions, as evidenced in my analysis, while physical support for domestic activism did not have much impact on movement survival, event-based pressure on the regime to refrain from arresting or to release political prisoners had the most significant positive effect. Accordingly, this finding challenges the current agenda of international development organizations, which prioritize direct interventions and implementations of activities on the ground over external advocacy for freedom of local dissidents. In this way, my findings contribute to the continuous debate on the merits and impact of global democracy promotion.

Implications for contemporary authoritarian politics: Counter-mobilization over the digital public sphere

How might findings based on historical case studies from a former military dictatorship inform our understanding of current authoritarian politics? In this final section, I explore the potential implications of my theory to the case of the contemporary digital age, where contentious politics has increasingly unfolded over

social media platforms. How might traditional framing and mobilizing repertoires against contentious movements, as mapped out in my theory, transfer onto social media platforms across authoritarian regimes? Here I attempt to offer some initial perspectives and suggest what can be fruitful future research directions.

Social media has become the newest mass communication tool as they reach an incredibly large part of global population (in terms of monthly active users, there are 2.5 billion on Facebook, 1 billion on Instagram, 300 million on Twitter, and 800 million on TikTok (Pokrop 2020, Sehl 2020)), and authoritarian regime is no exception to this trend. The Arab Spring in 2011 marked the first major interaction between authoritarian politics and social media. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were accredited with facilitating mass mobilization for pro-democracy uprisings in a hostile political environment. Activists have since made use of social media to increase the costs of repression by publicizing crackdowns, and multiply the scale and diffusion of their frames and mobilization calls.

Fast forward to 2017-2018, there is now a more sober assessment of the “democratizing” role of social media and how these platforms can be abused by powerful actors. Indeed, not only dissidents but dictators have also learned to harness the power of social media to influence public opinion at a scale unthinkable before this digital age. Examples abound as various states have employed popular platforms to interfere with democratic elections, sow communal tension to justify state-sponsored genocide, build mass condemnation against independent press, and gain public support for government crackdowns of activists. In terms of contentious politics, regime leaders have increasingly taken advantage of social media penetration and users’ low

digital literacy in order to monitor, infiltrate, and disrupt contentious movements.

Accordingly, recent scholarship has called for more nuanced assessment of social media's both positive and negative roles regarding contentious politics and democratization. Based on his insightful observation of upheavals in Arab politics during the early 2000s, Marc Lynch (2011) argues that the "effects [of social media] will not be directly translated from shifting individual attitudes, competencies and preferences into political change. They will instead be mediated through the existing structures of power and control—which include massive state capacities for and experience in surveillance, repression, infiltration, and control." For instance, Aday et al. (2010) provides anecdotes of the dual impact of social media in the case of protests in Iran in 2009. While it facilitated "communication and coordination for those who could not easily meet face to face," it was also employed by the regime to encourage "government sympathizers to blog and use Twitter and Facebook and other platforms in support of the regime's position." Similarly, Gary King et al. (2017) find that in China, government employees pose as ordinary users and fabricate about 500 million social media comments per year in order to "distract and redirect public attention from discussions or events with collective action potential."

The prevalence of social media cooptation for autocratic resilience was well summarized by Seva Gunitsky (2015):

"Autocrats have begun to move beyond strategies of "negative control" of the internet, in which regimes attempt to block, censor, and suppress the flow of communication, and toward strategies of proactive co-optation in which social media serves certain regime functions. The opposite of internet freedom, therefore, is not necessarily

internet censorship but a deceptive blend of control, co-option, and manipulation.” Hence, regime leaders can take advantage of social media to counter-mobilize against dissidents, disseminate propaganda and disinformation, shape public discourse, and coordinate actions.

Based on my framework, autocrats counter-mobilize by actively manufacturing and disseminating their challengers’ criminal images and provoking collective disruption against such challengers. Moreover, mobilization is more effective when it involves state agents who are embedded in different neighborhoods and considered trustworthy. Accordingly, the more widespread a regime’s mobilization network, the more likely it is for bystanders’ collective disruption to emerge. In the digital age, this means that beyond physically distributing criminal images and inciting bystander response on the ground, states might also counter-mobilize by spreading disinformation, rumors, and calls to action on social media with anonymous accounts that pose as members of communities. As it is challenging for social media platforms to regulate account registration or ensure that people represent themselves truthfully online, the task of verifying news and detect malicious, inauthentic contents largely falls on the individual users. Hence, as state agents become more skilled in crafting false information and impersonating as local community members, it is increasingly difficult for ordinary civilians to be able to decide what to believe.

Traditional state repertoires to target challengers, as I have laid out in previous chapters, can take on many new forms over social media and engender much broader impact over the public. Through the use of inauthentic accounts, not only can state agents flood news feeds and comment sections with criminal frames of dissidents, they

can also create a fake echo chamber of strong support for state punishment and of verbal mobilization for public hostility against the dissidents. These accounts might even appear “real” if they steal others’ profile photos, use a local-sounding profile name, or post with local dialect or jargon. Moreover, they can also raise the prominence of their counter-mobilization campaign by taking advantage of social media platforms’ algorithms. Specifically, by receiving a large amount of positive engagement (i.e. reactions, comments, and shares) from other inauthentic accounts, their original posts or comments can appear at the top of ordinary users’ news feed.

Accordingly, social media might inadvertently open new doors for authoritarian agents to proliferate their provocation for public hostility and collective disruption toward pro-democracy movements at a dangerously exponential rate. As a large part of the world’s population frequently engages with social media to connect with their communities and obtain news while possessing little awareness of associated risks, these platforms might very likely become a new favorite tool for resourceful autocrats to launch counter-mobilization and other forms of informational warfare. Manipulating public perception, emotions, and behavior has never been so inexpensive, and hence highly replicable across regimes.

As a result, it is critical that future studies of authoritarianism focus on identifying the mechanisms and impact of digitally coordinated campaigns. The research findings can serve as unique, valuable evidence for advocacy against the elevated threat of modern authoritarian repression of regime dissidents. Activists and journalists can also expose these tactics and raise awareness among the general public so that states will become much more cautious and reluctant in employing them. As

bystander perception is a key factor that shapes the resilience of contentious movements, the more we can bring to light autocrats' counter-mobilization repertoires, the more we can pave the way for consequential political reforms.

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