

# Preface

Beginning with the insight that highly-centralized state structures have historically provided a unifying target and fulcrum for the mobilization of contentious nation-wide social movements, this work investigates the hypothesis that decentralized state structures in authoritarian regimes impede the development of forms of popular contention sustained and coordinated on a national scale. As defined in this work, in a decentralized state, local officials assume greater discretionary control over public expenditures, authority over the implementation of government policies, and latitude in managing outbreaks of social unrest within their jurisdictions. As a result, they become the direct targets of most protests aimed at the state and the primary mediators of actions directed at third-party, non-state actors. A decentralized state therefore presents not one but a multitude of loci for protests, diminishing claimants' ability to use the central state as a unifying target and fulcrum for organizing national contentious movements. For this reason, decentralized autocracies are expected to face more fragmented popular oppositions and exhibit higher levels of durability than their more centralized counterparts.

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Hess, S.

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