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## **From peaceful to violent action: The impact of state repression on social movement tactics**

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# **From peaceful to violent action**

*The impact of state repression on social movement tactics*



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Bachelor Project: Social Movements and Political Violence

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## 1. Introduction

*“It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form Umkhonto we Sizwe. We did so not because we desired such a course, but solely because the government had left us with no other choice” (Nelson Mandela, 1964).*

From 1948 until 1994, South Africa was governed under a repressive apartheid system, designed to segregate the entire society based on race. The African National Congress (ANC) was one of the biggest resistance movements. Initially, the social movement adhered strictly to nonviolent strategies, (Blakemore, 2023; Braithwaite, 2013, p. 7). However, over time, the ANC underwent a strategic shift towards violent resistance when the militant group uMkhonto weSizwe was created in 1961 (“uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011).

The literature broadly supports the idea that nonviolent strategies employed by social movements have a higher success rate when faced with repression (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 2; Stephen and Chenoweth, 2008, p. 11). In contrast to violent resistance, nonviolent action contains fewer risks, increasing the incentives to join and leading to more mobilisation of participants (Schok, 2013, p. 283). Furthermore, nonviolent resistance is more likely to gain widespread support both domestically and internationally, making it increasingly challenging for the regime to maintain the status quo (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 2; Stephen and Chenoweth, 2008, p. 11; Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1676). Even though the literature presents numerous arguments for the utilisation of nonviolent strategies, many social movements still adopt violent strategies when faced with repression (Razae, 2021, p. 3). This puzzle requires to be investigated further. Additionally, the dynamics driving a movement to shift its strategy from nonviolent to violent have not been studied sufficiently yet (p. 1). With this research, I aim to contribute by addressing this gap. Therefore, my research question will be: *How does state repression influence a social movement’s choice to transition from nonviolent to violent tactics?*

To answer the research question, this study will first explore the existing literature on various reasons social movements would adopt violent strategies. I will build on previous literature to determine which causal mechanisms influence the connection between state repression and the transition from nonviolent to violent strategies, that will be outlined in the theoretical framework. The third chapter will explain the research design and methodology that will be used to conduct the research. Furthermore, for the analysis, I will conduct an in-

depth case study of the ANC under the apartheid regime in South Africa to test the theories that will be presented in the theoretical framework. The last section will reflect on this study and will provide some suggestions for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

Nonviolent action can be described as peaceful, collective action where the possibility of harming people or property is low (Medel et al. 2022, p. 1062; Schok, 2013, p. 277). This can either be done in a non-disruptive manner, including institutionalised methods such as lobbying or petitioning, or by the use of disruptive methods (Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1679). Disruptive methods of collective action interrupt daily routines while still refraining from the use of violence, such as protests and marches (p. 1679). Violent disruptive tactics on the other hand significantly interrupt daily routines by intentionally harming or risking hurting people or property (Medel et al., 2022, p. 1063; Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1679). Examples of violent collective action include riots, confronting the police, or destroying public property (Medel et al., 2022, p. 1063).

Ryckman (2019, p. 319) has revealed that even though nonviolent resistance may be a powerful tool, as stated in the introduction, almost 20% of all social movements eventually resort to violence. The literature provides numerous reasons why a social movement would change their strategy from nonviolent to violent which will be discussed in the following segments.

### *2.1. Regime type*

First of all, various scholars have argued the importance of a nation's regime type for a movement to turn violent (Karakaya, 2018, p. 317; Martin & Perliger, 2012, pp. 28-30). Strong regimes may reduce incentives for violent strategies as strong democracies facilitate peaceful political arenas and strict authoritarian states tightly control political activity, reducing the opportunities for social movement in general (Martin & Perliger, 2012, p. 28). Weaker states on the other hand, such as mixed regimes that contain elements of both democratic and authoritarian states, are often less capable than fully functioning democracies or authoritarian states (p. 29). These states often have less developed institutions and less control over the population, contributing to a higher risk for violent behaviour among the population when faced with repression (p. 30).

This theory faced some critique from various scholars. First of all, Chenoweth (2023, p. 60) states that regime type is a very unreliable prediction for strategic shifts, as regimes are slow changing and therefore do not offer a clear explanation for rapid tactical adjustments. Razaee (2021, p. 3) agrees with Chenoweth by suggesting that tactical innovation might happen in the short-term, while regime changes often only change in the long term. Therefore, structural factors such as regime type can only be used to explain why movements are dissatisfied with the state and not how that affects their strategy (p. 3).

### *2.2. Progress*

Another widely accepted argument focuses on the progress a social movement has made. When a movement experiences little or no progress using nonviolence alone while aiming to end repression, the probability for radical tactical innovation increases (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 60; Nuraniyah & Solahudin, 2024, p. 2; Ryckman, 2020, pp. 319-329). This lack of progress could lead to violent strategies as it may convince participants and supporters of the movement that nonviolent measures lack efficiency (Ryckman, 2020, p. 319). This shift becomes particularly likely when the group includes individuals who have the capabilities and willingness to utilise violence (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 60; Ryckman, 2020, p. 321). Additionally, when little progress has been made, moderate supporters drop out first, leaving the core, who are often more committed to combating state repression (Ryckman, 2020, p. 324). These remaining individuals may lead to a radical shift in strategy.

### *2.3. Organisation of the movement*

Finally, the organisational structure of a social movement also plays a significant role in determining whether movements will transition to violence when faced with state repression (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 60). First of all, when a movement is well organised with clear leadership and cohesion, it decreases the possibility for the use of violence as the organisation has the power to constrain its members and enforce strategic discipline (Pearlman, 2012, p. 24). On the contrary, when a protest is a spontaneous event, the risk for violence increases, especially when the participants encounter state repression because participants are not prepared for such events (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 60).

Furthermore, when a movement experiences a rapid increase in participants, this may also increase the possibility of violent behaviour (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 60; Razaee, 2021, p. 6).

This may be when the organisation is not robust enough to sufficiently monitor and educate new recruits on nonviolent principles (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 61; Razaee, 2021, p. 6).

To sum up, various reasons may lead a movement to shift its strategy from nonviolent to violent, despite scholarly research consistently stating that nonviolent strategies are often the most effective. Even though the aforementioned arguments explain the transition in tactics, they overlook the importance of emotions, even though these may also play a significant role in the shift toward violence (Nassauer, 2016, p. 520). In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how I incorporate emotions into my theory to eventually find an answer to my research question.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

To understand how state repression influences the transition from nonviolent to violent tactics, several steps need to be explained. First of all, the variables used for this research will be conceptualised, followed by an outline of the theories.

#### *3.1. Conceptualisation*

This research contains some variables that need further conceptualisation. First of all, state repression has prior been conceptualised in various ways. While some authors rely on a narrow definition to avoid overlap with other conventional concepts, Davenport and Inman (2012, p. 620) prefer a broader definition as it includes more repressive activities. Repression is defined as the threat or implementation of physical sanctions against an organisation or individuals within a defined territory (p. 620). As I have not specified my research to a single form of repression, I will stick to Davenport and Inman's definition.

Secondly, nonviolent and violent tactics need to be defined. Medel et al. (2022, p. 1062) explain nonviolent methods as peaceful tactics with a low possibility of harming people or property through either non-disruptive or disruptive manners. This description is related to the conceptualisation done by Stephan and Chenoweth (2008, p. 9), who have described civil strategies as a widespread, civilian-based method to create conflict through multiple means, including political, economic, or social, without the use of violence. Since these descriptions are quite broad, I believe that they will be beneficial for my research. Violent behaviour can be understood as actions where force is used that put individuals or property in danger or



cause damage (Medel et al. 2022, p. 1063). Scholz (2007, p. 46) further emphasises that the intention to harm is an important part of violent resistance, as harm could also occur accidentally during nonviolent resistance, which should therefore not be labelled as violent. Both definitions will be used for this research.

Using theories and scholarly research, the next four sections will outline how repression leads to a transition from nonviolent to violent tactics, with the use of multiple causal mechanisms:

### *3.2.State repression is perceived as illegitimate*

Repression may be perceived as illegitimate for multiple reasons such as when people believe the state is overreacting to challengers, discriminating against civilians, or feelings of injustice among the population (Della Porta, 2018, p. 464; van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). Furthermore, especially when activists perform legal protest actions, repression against them is seen as highly illegitimate (Opp & Roehl, 1990, p. 526). Evidence indicates that public opinion frequently shifts following police violence against citizens by the state, leading to a decline in support for the regime (Della Porta, 2018, p. 464; Medel et al, 2022, p. 1079; Schneider, 2011, p. 481; Shadmehr & Boleslavsky, 2022, p. 162; Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1677). Moreover, public opinion also shifts when groups feel like they are treated unequally or experience exclusion (Della Porta, 2018, p. 467; van den Bos, 2020, p. 574).

### *3.3.Feeling of illegitimacy leads to anger*

Scholars have argued that state repression that is perceived as illegitimate may lead to the feeling of anger among the population due to the constant violation of rights and the feeling of injustice (Chenoweth et al., 2017, p. 1959; van den Bos, 2020, p. 574; van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). Emotion theorists have argued that illegitimacy and the perception of unfairness are important intensives for anger (Cronin et al., 2012, 325). When police action is perceived as disproportional, Nassauer (2016, p. 520) discovered that this is an important trigger for anger, pushing protestors beyond the psychological barrier that prevents them from engaging in certain behaviour. In other words, police interaction in a repressive state lowers the threshold for the point of no control, leading to aggressive emotions (p. 520). This is further supported by Chenoweth (2023, p. 62) who argues that state violence against peaceful protestors may cause outrage.

### *3.4. Anger increases the support for violence*

Emotions play a key role in the pathway to becoming violent (Medel et al., 2022, p. 1066; van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). Especially when individuals are angry about the perceived illegitimacy of the regime, support for the use of violence increases (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 62; Earl, 2011, p. 268; Medel et al., 2022, p. 1066; Van Stekeleburg, 2017, p. 937). Anger may be seen as the effect that motivates people to mobilise and protect themselves from perceived threats and prepare them for violence (Masango, 2004, p. 999). Furthermore, individuals who are angry towards the regime are more likely to lower the threshold for justifying the use of violent methods (Opp & Roehl, 1990, p. 5240). Moreover, people who are fuelled by anger may also lead to the splintering of organisations, whereby more radical members split from a social movement to create radical flanks (Della Porta, 2018, p. 463 Earl, 2011, p. 268). Lastly, research has shown that individuals who are full of anger often seek an outlet for this emotion, which frequently manifests in support for violence (Gardner & Moore, 2008, p. 899).

### *3.5. Support for violence leads to a transition from nonviolent to violent tactics*

The support for violent tactics among citizens impacts mobilisation outcomes. As mentioned, anger towards an unjust regime hardens commitment, which leads to the mobilisation of recruits and radical flanks (Earl, 2011, p. 268; van den Bos, 2020, p. 574). Furthermore, when people are more inclined towards the use of violence it may lead to a micro-mobilising effect, leading to more individuals joining already existing radical flanks or making previously non-violent movements adopt violent manners (Bell & Murdie, 2018, p. 339; Opp & Roehl, 1990, p. 526). These radical flanks, comprising individuals fuelled by anger and deeply committed to overthrowing the repressive regime, are more inclined to take risks, including the use of violence, to reach their goals (Earl, 2011, p. 268; van den Bos, 2020, p. 574; Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1680). If violence is believed to be the only way to achieve their goals, radical flanks will resort to this method (Jämte et al. 2023, p. 4).

These theories show that state repression may backfire when the repressed perceive the regime as illegitimate. The transition towards violent behaviour is not a sudden phenomenon but rather a gradual process that includes causal mechanisms. The mechanisms included in this research are illegitimacy, anger, and support for violence. The combination of these theories and causalities has to the following hypothesis: *When state repression is perceived as*

*illegitimate, it fuels people's anger; thereby increasing support for violence, and leading to a transition from nonviolent to violent strategies.*



*Figure 1: explanation of the causal mechanisms*

## **4. Methods**

### *4.1. Research design*

In order to conduct my research, a qualitative research strategy will be used. Process tracing is the most appropriate strategy as it allows one study the causal mechanisms explained in the previous chapter while doing a single-case in-depth analysis (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 1). Process tracing can be used for multiple purposes, and for this research, it will be used as a theory-testing approach (p. 9). In this case, I will be testing how my independent variable (IV), including state repression, influences my dependent variable (DV), including the choice to transition from nonviolent to violent tactics. The hypothesised causal mechanisms are outlined based on the existing literature and this theory will be tested by applying it to a specific case.

### *4.2. Case selection*

The case I will be studying is the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa during apartheid. During apartheid, different race groups were separated by repressive and discriminatory legislation (Feit, 1972, p. 181). The ANC, formed in 1912, stood out as the most prominent group resisting the regime (“ANC history”, n.d.; Feit, 1972, p. 181). The goal of the organisation was to “bring all Africans together as one people to defend their rights and freedoms” (“ANC history”, n.d.). During the resistance against apartheid, the ANC eventually shifted its strategy from nonviolent to violent.

I have selected this case for multiple reasons. First of all, the study of social movements has been criticised for its main focus on Western regimes (Schneider, 2011, p. 481). By selecting an African country as my case, I am countering this gap.

Secondly, I have selected my case based on the criteria that this case can be described as a typical case, meaning that the case aligns positively with the set of causal outcomes (Breach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 6). A typical case study allows me to better explore the causal mechanisms proposed in the previous chapter within a real-world scenario (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 11). As will be presented in the analysis, both the independent and the dependent variables are present in my case. apartheid was a repressive system and the ANC eventually transitioned from nonviolent to violent tactics.

This research will focus on the period from 1948, when apartheid became institutionalised, until 1994 when the first non-racial elections were held. Even though some scholars prefer to research periods before 1948, as black citizens already experienced repression before this event, I have selected these dates because expanding the scope of my research beyond these years would make my research too extensive.

#### *4.3. Operationalisation and data collection*

As my hypothesis states, I want to understand the causal mechanisms that influence a social movement's decision to transition from nonviolent to violent strategies in response to repression. To achieve this, I must clarify how my variables and causal mechanisms will be measured. These include repression, the perception of illegitimacy, anger, an increase in support for violence, and the transition from nonviolent to violent tactics.

First of all, Davenport and Inman (2012, p. 620) have described state repression as the violation of basic human rights such as the freedom of speech, the right to vote, and the right to a free trial. Moreover, repression may include illegal detention, killings, and torture (p. 620). By analysing if these events occurred, I would understand if repression was present in my selected case. The variable will be examined by the examination of laws, mentions in the media, and historical records.

The first causal mechanism, the perception of legitimacy, can be measured in multiple ways. First of all, since people who feel like injustice has been done to them are more likely to resist the status quo, I will analysis how much people resisted the regime (Power, 2018, p. 765). Furthermore, the feeling of illegitimacy is subjective and therefore should be analysed through personal statements. Personal statements may be found in speeches, news articles, and interviews. This includes statements indicating the repression was unjust, unfair, or an overreaction by the state. Lastly, van Stekelenburg (2017, p. 937) states that state repression may be seen as illegitimate when the state discriminates against an ethnic group. By analysing

laws and historical records it can be determined whether the South African regime acted based on discrimination.

The second causal mechanism, anger, is also subjective and will be assessed in a similar manner. This entails analysing personal statements and mentions of words such as “anger”, “resentment” and “frustration”. Moreover, the number of participants in a protest may also be an indicator of anger so these will be examined as well. This may be found in historical records.

The last causal mechanism is the support for violence. My hypothesis indicated that people who are angry are more likely to support the use of violence. This will be analysed in various ways. First of all, support for the analysis will be drawn from personal statements, which includes interviews, speeches, and individual reports in the media. Moreover, the emergence and participants of radical flanks will be analysed. Radical flanks emerge when members splinter from the original social movement to establish a more radical movement with different strategies and ideologies (Ellefsen, 2018, p. 2). When radical flanks are growing in participants, one can assume that there is an increase in support for violence. Whether radical flanks emerged will be studied through historical records and personal statements.

Lastly, my dependent variable includes the transition from nonviolent to violent tactics, which will be measured by assessing the frequency of nonviolent and violent strategies employed by the ANC. This analysis involves examining reports, news articles, historical records, and academic literature to determine if there has been an increase in violent strategies.

I will use a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, including speeches, manifestations, and news articles offer direct insights into the time period I will be analysing. As my scope of analysis involves some subjectivity, it may also risk the chance for bias. To avoid biases that may occur when solely analysing data from the repressed, I will include secondary sources as well. Secondary sources include academic articles and historical records, providing me with a broader perspective on various events that happened during apartheid. Furthermore, to avoid biases the strategy of triangulation will be utilised, meaning that data will only be incorporated if the knowledge can be found in two or more sources (Thurmond, 2001, p. 253)

## 5. Analysis

### *5.1. Historical background*

Racial segregation has its roots in colonial era with the arrival of the Dutch in 1652 and later the British at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the arrival of the colonialists, indigenous tribes were forcibly displaced from their lands and compelled to work on European farms (“Introduction before”, 2018; Cock & Wells, 2020). Both European groups saw themselves as superior to the original black population, who were considered uncivilised and unproductive, thereby justifying the increasing oppression of the African population (“Introduction before”, 2018). After gaining independence from the British Empire with the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, legislative measures further segregated black people from society (“History”, n.d.; Manning, 1964, p. 140). Even though they were excluded from various aspects of daily life, indigenous Africans were heavily relied upon for their labour by the white settlers (“Introduction before”, 2018; “A history”, 2016). Many African people were forced to live in areas known as reserves and only allowed in industrial urban areas to work (“A history”, 2016). After winning the election in 1948, these racial rules became institutionalised, marking the beginning of apartheid. Section 5.2, state repression will further elaborate on the details of what the apartheid system entailed.

Everyone who tried to resist the system risked heavy penalties. Despite the severe risks associated with resistance, collective action still occurred in various ways. Various resistance groups occurred, and each organisation utilised its own ideologies and strategies and thereby contributing to the broader resistance against the regime (“Pan Africanist”, n.d). The African National Congress (ANC), originally established in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress, emerged as the most prominent organisation with its primary objective to “bring all Africans together as one people to defend their rights and freedoms” (“History”, n.d.).

Initially, the ANC was committed to nonviolent resistance in the struggle against apartheid. The ANC was inspired by Ghandi’s principles of nonviolence and passive resistance, which the Indian utilised during his time in South Africa while he was confronted by racial rules (Padhi, 2014, p. 26). The ANC employed numerous tactics of civil disobedience, including strikes, boycotts or other acts of nonviolent resistance (Gatnarek, 2005, p. 8). In 1952, the ANC launched the Defiance Campaign, aimed to challenge and resist apartheid laws through widespread civil disobedience (p. 8). Thousands of participants united while maintaining a nonviolent ideology, leading to a significant increase in ANC membership from 7000 to 100,000. This campaign will be discussed more thoroughly in the upcoming parts.

Nelson Mandela was one of the key players in the battle against apartheid. In 1961, following the killing of many peaceful protestors at the Sharpeville Massacre, the ANC, and other organisations were banned and forced to go underground (Zunes, 1999, p. 139). After this significant event, the ANC abandoned its previous ideology that solely rested on nonviolence when it began to adopt violent methods (Padhi, 2014, p. 26).

Mass resistance from both within and outside the country eventually led to the abolition of apartheid laws. Following the release from imprisoned social movement leaders, negotiations to end apartheid began. These negotiations persisted until the historic first fair elections in 1994, where Mandela was elected president.

To get an understanding of how repression affects strategic choices made by social movements, multiple steps require an explanation. In order to provide a clear overview of the findings, this section will be structured according to the variables and causal mechanisms utilised for the analysis.

## *5.2. State repression*

In order to support the hypothesis, the independent variable must be present in the case. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one can assume state repression occurred in South Africa during 1948 and 1994 when events took place that are in violation of basic human rights (Davenport & Inman, 2012, p. 620). It has been estimated that the National Party committed over 37000 human rights abuses in order to uphold their nationalist ideology and economic exploitation of black labourers (Anisin, 2022, p. 309). These human rights abuses were legitimised by law and some of these legislations will be discussed below:

First of all, the Bantu Authorities Act made it possible to establish reserves in South Africa, called homelands, where black citizens were forced to live. They were stripped of all political rights outside of these homelands, including their right to vote while, the National Party still kept full hegemony over these homelands (Hahn, 1990; Bantu Authorities Act, 1951). Secondly, the Public Safety Act enabled the government to declare a severe state of emergency with increased penalties for resisting the law (“The history”, n.d.; Public Safety Act, 1953). After amending the law, it was even possible to declare “unrest areas” where state of emergency power was forced without actually having to declare state of emergency (“The many”, 2017; Public Safety Amendment Act, 1986, p. 3). Lastly, the Internal Security Act gave the government broad powers to imprison or ban people without a trial, and restrict

organisations, gatherings, and publications (“The many”, 2017; Internal Security Act, 1982). The United Nations Human Rights Council has estimated that over 75000 got detained without a trial and over 3000 individuals got banned since 1960 (“The many”; 2017; Gready, 1997, p. 1).

Moreover, the bureaucracy was backed by the military and the police which were often utilised to quell any resistance (Anisin, 2022, p. 315; Dowdall, 1991, p. 51). Police forces inflicted enormous violence on black citizens and assault, death threats and torture were not uncommon in South Africa (Blakemore, 2023; Dowdall, 1991, p. 51).

When we link these examples to Davenport and Inman’s (2012) definition of repression, it becomes evident that repression did take place under the apartheid regime. Black citizens could have their citizenship revoked, including the right to vote. Furthermore, individuals could be imprisoned without a trial and face severe police enforcement. These events align with examples of human rights violations outlined by Davenport and Inman (2012), such as the right to vote or the right for a free trial. It is for that reason that I presume that my independent variable, state repression, was present in this case.

*5.3.Perception of illegitimacy*

The first method to determine whether the apartheid regime was perceived as illegitimate is to analyse if people protested against the regime. Research has shown that discriminatory legislation against an ethnic group may lead to protests in order to reform the state (van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). The previous chapter has shown that the apartheid regime was very discriminatory, as black citizens were excluded from many parts from society. Figure two visualises how disproportionately black citizens were treated under apartheid legislation.

Apartheid and the People of South Africa		
	Blacks	Whites
Population	19 million	4.5 million
Land Allocation	13 percent	87 percent
Share of National Income	< 20 percent	75 percent
Ratio of average earnings	1	14
Minimum taxable income	360 rands	750 rands
Doctors/population	1/44,000	1/400
Infant mortality rate	20% (urban) 40% (rural)	2.7%
Annual expenditure on education per pupil	\$45	\$696
Teacher/pupil ratio	1/60	1/22

Figure two,

retrieved from: <http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>



Since the start of apartheid, the opposition against the repressive regime occurred frequently and took many forms. As mentioned in the historical background, many organisations arose to resist the regime. To give an example, the ANC launched a major protest campaign named the Defiance Campaign to “campaign against unjust laws” in a nonviolent manner (“Defiance Campaign”, 2011). The campaign led to a mass mobilisation that resisted curfews, passbooks, and boycotted segregated places such as buses and stores (Blakemore, 2023; Defiance Campaign”, 2011).

The second method to understand if repression was illegitimate is to understand how the state reacted to protests. If state action is believed to be disproportionate by the population, it can be assumed that the state repression was perceived as illegitimate (Della Porta, 2018, p. 464). This will be assessed by analysing the Sharpeville Massacre that took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1960, since this event was very significant for apartheid resistance. On this day, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a faction that previously split with the ANC, motivated citizens from this township to protest against pass laws, that required every Black African to carry a pass with personal information (Lodge, 2011, p. 6; “Sharpeville Massacre”, 2011). Citizens were told to leave their passbooks at home and present themselves at the station for arrest, hoping that such a large number of people would overwhelm the prisons and bring the economy to a standstill (“Sharpeville Massacre”, 2011). Over 5000 people participated in this peaceful gathering, which quickly escalated when the police suddenly started shooting at the crowd, leaving 69 people dead and 180 seriously wounded (Lodge, 2011, p. 2: “Sharpeville Massacre”, 2011).

Multiple eyewitnesses have reflected on this tragedy. While the police justified the situation by saying that the protestors were throwing rocks, other sources emphasised that the protestors did not carry any weapons and refrained from the use of violence, thereby underscoring the state’s overreaction to the peaceful protestors (“Eyewitness accounts”, 2011; “From the”, 2010; Lodge, 2020, p. 6; “Sharpeville Massacre, 2011”).

Based on these findings, it is plausible to assume that state repression under apartheid was perceived to be illegitimate. Even though I did not find abundant records of citizens explicitly labelling the apartheid regime as illegitimate, other factors were present. First of all, people who perceive injustice may resort to protest (Power, 2018, p. 765). During apartheid, various forms of resistance persisted leading to the assumption that the regime was indeed perceived as illegitimate. Furthermore, the regime was highly discriminatory, which is an incentive for illegitimacy (van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). Lastly, the example of the Sharpeville

Massacre demonstrated that the population believed that the state overreacted to civil resistance, serving as an indicator of perceived illegitimacy (Della Porta, 2018, p. 464).

#### *5.4. Anger*

When people perceive state repression as illegitimate due to injustices that have been done to them, it may lead to anger (Chenoweth et al, 2017, p. 1959). To uncover if there is a link between illegitimacy and anger, many interviews, historical records, and personal statements were analysed. In this section, I will initially offer some general examples to understand if this illegitimate system fuelled people's anger. Subsequently, I will delve into an example of one significant protest that clearly illustrated people's dissatisfaction with the regime to explore its potential connection with anger.

First of all, interviews conducted ten years after apartheid was officially implemented reveal the anger that African citizens had towards both the regime and ordinary, white people. Student Mkhabela reflected on her emotions under apartheid as “anger, the kind of anger that almost blinds you. Frustration, absolute frustration” (Johnston, 2010). Furthermore, David Goldblatt, a South African photographer described his work to be fuelled by anger due to the injustices experienced by the black community (O’Hagan, 2018). During apartheid, the relationship between Afrikaners and Africans had become very difficult (The best film archives, 2010). Two interviewees, both leaders of resistance groups express their hatred towards all white men due to the unfair treatment of ethnic groups (The best film archives, 2010). Lastly, Mark Mathabane, who grew up in a township, explained that he saw every white individual as a terrible person since he can remember (Rather, 1989).

To better understand how events that showed significant repression, perceived as illegitimate incites anger, I will delve deeper into one example: the Soweto Uprising that started on June 16, 1976. Unlike white children, black children did not have access to good education, healthcare, or housing which multiple people described as unfair (“Apartheid was”, n.d.; “The June”, 2013). When the Department of Bantu Education instructed schools to implement Afrikaans as the primary language in schools, this was met with strong opposition from teachers, parents, and principals (Anisin, 2022, p. 321). The new law, coupled with the overall lack of education for black citizens while white students enjoyed a good educational system led to widespread complaints and dissatisfaction around the country (“The June”, 2013). Students decided that they could no longer stand “the injustices of the South African

educational system” and gathered to protest against this amendment in a nonviolent manner (Anasin, 2022, p. 322; Willis, 2019).

However, the situation escalated as police dogs were sent into the crowd and the police opened fire on the unarmed students, resulting in hundreds of deaths (Anasin, 2022, p. 322). Eyewitnesses emphasised that the students refrained from violence before the police started shooting (Johnston, 2019; Willis, 2019). This event of extreme violent repression by the police triggered widespread frustration among the population. First of all, Masango (2004, p. 996), a citizen of Soweto, stated that the event left many outraged, as it presented yet another example of violence that had already claimed the lives of so many innocent people. Moreover, one student explained that this moment marked her realisation of the system’s profound cruelty, further intensifying her resentment towards the regime (Johnston, 2019). The killings did not only cause rage in Soweto but spread through the entire country. Within months, hundreds of black communities were involved in the resistance (Willis, 2019).

This section has shed light on the sentiments of individuals regarding the injustices inflicted on them. Through the analysis of numerous interviews and historical records, it can be presumed that the repressive system, perceived as illegitimate, indeed fostered widespread anger among the African population.

### *5.5.Support for violence*

The theoretical framework showed that people who feel angry are more likely to support violent behaviour (Earl, 2011, p. 268). In order to research if this causality was evident during the apartheid era, personal statements, academic literature, and historical records were examined. I will first present some of these statements and then examine the emergence of radical flanks as this emergence implies an increase in support for violence (Della Porta, 2018, p. 463 Earl, 2011, p. 268).

The previous sections have shown that people were left angry after years of facing extreme repression. Many South Africans have expressed that their support for violence intensified as their anger towards the apartheid regime grew (Braithwaite, 2014; Masango, 2004, p. 996). The anger fuelled by systemic oppression, racial discrimination, and violent repression often translated into increased support for militant actions. First of all, a citizen of Soweto revealed that although he initially opposed the use of violence, the structural violence inflicted by the government left him outraged, eventually making him more supportive of violent resistance (p. 966). Moreover, an African social movement leader stated that Africans should eventually

turn to violence out of anger toward the discriminating system (The best film archives, 2010). Zuma, the former president of South Africa, once reflected on the apartheid era, expressing that the repression left him with so much anger, that he was willing to use extreme violence towards all whites (Braithwaite, 2013, p. 13). An eyewitness reacting to the Sharpeville Massacre, a moment that caused much anger, once stated, “It was a peaceful action and people were killed, we said never to protest peacefully again” (Watts, 2021).

While the ANC previously rejected the idea of violent resistance, the tragedies of the Sharpeville Massacre may be seen as a turning point as it gave rise to the emergence of a radical flank (Anisin, 2022, p. 317; Braithwaite, 2013, p. 6; “uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). In 1961, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) was launched as an armed, independent wing of the ANC, led by Nelson Mandela (“uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). While Mandela highlighted the necessity of this armed wing as nonviolent forms of struggle only led to more repression, different sources reveal that anger towards the regime was also an important motivator (Bishop, 2019; Dickey, 2017; Mandela, 1964). Throughout MK’s existence from its formation in 1961 until the end of apartheid, the radical flank had thousands of members.

To conclude this section, it is evident that anger was an important incentive for the rise of support for violent strategies. Not only did personal statements reveal people’s sentiments about violent tactics after experiencing unjust actions that caused anger, but the emergence of a radical flank with many members also serves as an important indicator for a rise in support for violence.

### *5.6. The transition from nonviolence to violence*

The historical background provided in this thesis demonstrates that, during the first decades of the struggle against apartheid, the ANC exclusively utilised nonviolent strategies. Through peaceful protests, boycotts, strikes, and marches, the movement aimed to end the regime rooted in repression and racial exploitation (Blakemore, 2023; Lodge, 2011, pp. 31-33). One example is the Defiance Campaign, organised through cooperation between resistance groups, including the ANC, when thousands of volunteers disobeyed laws by actions such as entering cities without their passes or using “Europeans only” entrances at railway stations (Lodge, 2011, pp. 31-33). Even though the campaign did not achieve the desired outcome of overthrowing the regime, it did lead to a significant increase in ANC membership, rising from 7000 to 100,000 people (“Defiance Campaign”, 2011).

But when peaceful protests repeatedly faced extreme violence and failed to achieve the desired outcome, support for violence resistance grew. This shift in sentiment eventually led the ANC to establish a radical wing, MK, in 1961 (Anisin, 2022, p. 317; Braithwaite, 2013, p. 6; “uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). Mandela explained that they wanted to “achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash” (Mandela, 1964). This is why MK initially started with sabotage actions targeting infrastructure, governmental buildings, and power stations (“uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). Military training camps were established in neighbouring countries, from which MK coordinated and operated the struggle for liberalisation against apartheid (Anisin, 2022, p. 317; “uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). These camps provided training for recruits, enabling them to carry out sabotage operations and eventually guerrilla warfare. Mk fighters were also educated on MK’s and Mandela’s ideology, which emphasised minimising violence and bloodshed (Braithwaite, 2013; Mandela, 1964). Between 1961 and 1990, MK carried out numerous attacks. While the exact number is difficult to pinpoint, records indicate that MK executed hundreds of attacks over the years (“List of”, 2014).

While the ANC emphasised the importance of nonviolent resistance at first, ongoing repression and frustration eventually led to an increase in support for violence. This shift resulted in the creation of MK, which organised hundreds of violent attacks against the apartheid regime, including sabotage and guerrilla warfare.

### *5.7. Discussion*

To summarise, the analysis has shown that all variables were present in the case study of apartheid in South Africa. Firstly, the apartheid regime showed clear signs of repression, as the laws implemented, such as the Groups Areas Act or the Bantu Act, violated basic human rights. Africans were forcibly removed from their homes, imprisoned without a fair, and lost their right to vote. Repression becomes illegitimate in the eyes of citizens when it is perceived as unjust and discriminatory, or when the state’s response is disproportionate (Della Porta, 2018, p. 464; van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). This can be measured by analysing personal statements and whether people are protesting against the regime. During apartheid, the regime was heavily protested. Additionally, the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre revealed that the population regarded the state’s response as highly disproportionate. Furthermore, the illegitimacy of the regime fuelled people’s anger due to constant violations of rights, which is an important incentive for anger (Chenoweth et al., 2017, p. 1959; van den Bos, 2020, p. 574; van Stekelenburg, 2017, p. 937). The Soweto Uprising exemplified how people were outraged

when the police used illegitimate violence. Further, the literature reveals that people who experience anger are more inclined to lower the threshold for justifying the use of violence, as anger hardens their determination to topple the regime (Earl, 2011, p. 268; Wang & Piazza, 2016, p. 1680). The Sharpeville Massacre, widely regarded as highly illegitimate and sparking widespread outrage, led the ANC to establish a radical flank, indicating a rise in support for violence (“uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011). Moreover, after the Soweto Uprising fuelled people’s anger again, the MK saw a rise in recruits (Anisin, 2022, p. 315). Lastly, all these causal mechanisms ultimately led the ANC to transition its tactics from nonviolent to violent as MK carried out numerous sabotage attacks on government buildings and infrastructure (Anisin, 2022, p. 317; “uMkhonto weSizwe”, 2011).

An alternative explanation for this outcome may be found in research done by Chenoweth (2023) and Razaee (2021). These authors state that the rapid growth of an organisation increases the possibility of violent action as it outpaces the organisation’s ability to properly educate new recruits on nonviolent principles (Chenoweth, 2023, p. 61; Razaee, 2021, p. 6). In the aftermath of the Defiance Campaign in 1951, the ANC experienced a rapid increase in membership, growing from 7000 to 100,000 members. Even though this could be a compelling argument for other cases, it does not fully apply to this specific case. First of all, MK was created in 1961 which was ten years after the rapid growth in membership. Such a long timeframe between the two events suggests that the decision to form MK was not an immediate reaction to the rapid increase in membership. Furthermore, Mandela (1964) explained that MK was formed after careful consideration and not as a spontaneous event. This reinforced the idea that the establishment of MK was a result of strategic thinking, rather than a response to a growth in membership. The argument in this thesis incorporates a wide range of factors and causal mechanisms that eventually led to the transition from nonviolent to violent strategies.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research tried to find an answer to the research question: ‘How does state repression influence a social movement’s choice to transition from nonviolent to violent tactics?’ After delving into the existing literature and theories, the following hypothesis was proposed: ‘When state repression is perceived as illegitimate, it fuels people’s anger, thereby increasing support for violence, leading to a transition from nonviolent to violent strategies.’

After conducting a theory-testing, process tracing analysis of the ANC during apartheid I can conclude this research by stating that the hypothesis is supported. The analysis of personal

statements and historical records has demonstrated that the repressive system was widely perceived as illegitimate, as the system was discriminatory, disproportionate, and heavily resisted. This perception fuelled the population's anger and increased support for violence, indicated by the creation of a radical flank, uMkhonto weSizwe. Consequently, the ANC shifted its ideology from initially nonviolent resistance to violent sabotage and guerilla warfare. Crucial results were found in the lead-up and aftermath of events characterised by extreme state repression, such as the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto Uprising. These were pivotal moments when people were very expressive about their sentiments towards the regime and their emotions.

What surprised me while conducting this research is that not many people explicitly named the regime illegitimate while people did state that they were angry. I expected the situation the other way around. This prompted me to modify my strategy, as I eventually found most data on illegitimacy in historical records while evidence for anger had to be gathered from interviews. Evidence for the last causal mechanism, support for violence, could be found in both statements and historical records. By including a diverse range of data sources, I was able to conduct a nuanced and in-depth examination of the research question, thereby reducing the potential for biases to occur.

This research has contributed to the field of tactical innovation by investigating the factors that drive a social movement to transition from nonviolent to violent strategies. Moreover, while existing literature has explored the impact of state repression on the rise and fall of social movements, research on the connection on state repression and tactical innovation remained limited. By addressing this gap through a single-case study of the ANC under apartheid, this study has contributed by deepening our understanding and creating a bridge between these variables

Even though this research was able to find an answer to the research question, some limitations were faced that should be addressed. Firstly, for this research, only English sources were analysed. Since South Africa has many official languages other than English, important perspectives and data from non-English sources may have been overlooked. For future research, this may be avoided by collaboration with researchers or translators proficient in other languages spoken in South Africa. Additionally, as this research was conducted using a single-case study, it poses challenges in generalising the results to other contexts. Therefore, for future research, I recommend replicating this hypothesis and research design across multiple cases to enhance generalisability.

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