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Justifications of Repression in Autocracies: An Empirical Analysis of the Maghreb, 2000–2010

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Abstract

Previous studies on the justification of repression have analysed large-scale protests, about which autocratic officials communicate to avoid backlash effects. However, we know much less about how everyday repression against dissidents and ordinary citizens is communicated and justified under authoritarianism. This paper is the first to systematically investigate how officials in autocracies justify, conceal, or deny different forms of repression employed by different state institutions. It studies the communication of repression in two North African autocracies, drawing on the novel Justifications of Repressive Incidents in Morocco and Tunisia Dataset. The dataset contains 439 events between 2000–2010 and disaggregates the various dimensions of repression and its communication. The empirical analysis shows that the chosen forms of repression influence patterns of communication and justification. Studying the communication of repression helps us better understand the nexus of authoritarian legitimation and political violence in the Middle East and North Africa region and beyond.

Keywords: North Africa, Maghreb, repression, legitimation, communication, justification, dataset

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Article Outline

1   Introduction

Authoritarian leaders do not safeguard their rule by using repression alone. Instead, they employ sophisticated techniques of legitimation and are concerned with their image, both domestically and abroad (Dukalskis 2021). When autocrats use force to repress mass protests, indiscriminate violence perceived as unjust may backfire, leading to public outrage, the mobilization of dissent, as well as increased support for the opposition (Mason and Krane 1989: 192; Hess and Martin 2006). Therefore, state officials often publicly communicate why such acts of violence are "necessary" and right (Dukalskis 2015; Edel and Josua 2018).

Discursive justifications are often used in the context of highly visible acts of large-scale repression that have many witnesses, as existing research has shown.

Going beyond this established link, the paper adds to the literature by not only focusing on extraordinary acts of repression but studying how autocratic officials communicate about everyday repressive incidents outside times of crisis. This contribution studies the justifications for repression in Morocco and Tunisia in the decade leading up to the Arab uprisings. Back then, repression was a main reason for citizens' discontent with authoritarian rulers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); at the same time, it was and remains a strategy to maintain autocratic power. The early years of the new century were marked by fluctuations in repression and diverging narratives accompanying state coercion. In contrast to the extraordinary period of the Arab uprisings, the decade before was not marked by existential regime crises. This study sheds light on how and to what degree state officials in authoritarian regimes "normally" communicate and justify repression. More particularly, it asks to what extent repressive incidents were communicated, justified, and how exactly so in Morocco and Tunisia from 2000 to 2010.

To answer this question, the paper analyses the novel Justifications of Repressive Incidents in Morocco and Tunisia Dataset (Josua 2022). The event dataset is the first to disaggregate data on repressive incidents in two separate countries over the course of a decade. The data was collected from publicly available reports by human rights organizations and news outlets that covered repressive events and their respective justifications. This systematic collection enables us to assess the extent of justification, as opposed to denial or cover-up, and also to dig into the substantial arguments that were brought forward here. The dataset allows for a more fine-grained, holistic understanding of repression than established quantitative indices, while revealing more general patterns regarding the forms, targets, agents, and communication of repression than case studies focusing on one particular aspect allow. This article is unique in investigating to what extent state officials in autocracies communicate and justify repression over a protracted period of time.

Studying this topic is particularly insightful in the MENA given the dominance of autocracies in the region and the significant level of repression seen there over the years (Josua and Edel 2021). The article maps and analyzes how repression was justified, denied, or ignored in Morocco and Tunisia from 2000 to 2010 – that is, before the Arab uprisings. I focus on a monarchy and a republic in North Africa, representing two different subtypes of autocracies with different regime constellations and ensuing patterns of repression. Tunisia under Ben Ali was characterized by a high degree of state repression. Although in Morocco during the first decade of the new millennium the new king installed a Truth Commission dealing with previous human rights violations, dissenters and especially Western Sahara activists still faced repression.

As a liberalized monarchical autocracy, Morocco was coded as partly free, while the Republic of Tunisia was considered not free by Freedom House reports during these years. There was thus some variation among similar-sized countries in the same geopolitical context,

with comparable linkages to Western countries typical of the MENA autocracies. The findings show that Tunisia used more repression than Morocco while communicating less about it and justifying it also to a more modest extent. In general, the types of justifications vary dependent on the actors that use them and against whom diverse forms of repression are employed: more severe and covert types hereof are less communicated, while judicial repression is mostly justified. Each autocracy has their own particular patterns of repression, leading to different styles of communication or conversely silence.

When we analyze how repression is communicated, we learn what incumbents want their citizens and the outside world to know – and, indeed, to believe. This aspect of political communication offers insights into state–society relations in autocracies. The findings are also relevant for political and societal actors trying to make sense of autocrats. Being able to decode common justifications is crucial for understanding the meaning of autocratic state discourse. The results obtained may help decipher the messages autocratic elites send when dealing with internal oppositions, adding a dynamic perspective on under-researched causes for their endurance.

The article proceeds as follows: it presents a conceptual framework of communication and justifications of repression. It then introduces the dataset on which the analysis is based and sketches the empirical background to the first decade of the new century in Morocco and Tunisia. I then analyse the data and present main findings regarding the extent and types of justification, the agents of the latter, as well as regarding the targets of repression. This gives us systematic insight into which justifications follow different forms of repression. Based on these findings, I formulate desiderata for future research.

2   Conceptual Framework: Communicating Repression

This section lays out the conceptual framework regarding the communication and justification of repression.[1] Political communication in authoritarian regimes – and beyond – has the obvious function to create support (Geddes and Zaller 1989). Autocratic officials "entrench their power by influencing the ways that their citizens think and talk about politics" (Dukalskis 2017: 2). Official framing in propaganda and persuasion serve to create legitimacy (Bondes and Heep 2013) and "reduce the need to rely on sheer repression as a mechanism of control" (Wedeen 1999: 26). When autocrats engage in repression and talk about it this might have different effects for different audiences, such as signaling deterrence or alternatively garnering applause for the unequal treatment of their citizens from their supporters. Officials may also avoid admitting repression and use diversionary strategies such as blame-shifting, denial, or downplaying repression. These obfuscation strategies likewise alleviate the negative consequences resulting from state violence (Edel 2019).

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1   Parts of this section are adapted from my article published in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, entitled "The Legitimation of Repression in Autocracies" (Josua 2021).

One important communication strategy is justification, which can be defined as "explaining or defending state policies against potential or actual criticism" (Josua 2021). When devising justifications, state officials draw on the norms prevalent in a given society. In addition, those salient on the global level shape which exact justifications can be used and are expected to resonate (Edel and Josua 2018). The varieties of norm constellations allow for a wide range of even contradictory justificatory arguments. According to Heller and Kahl: "By using justifications, actors principally accept their responsibility for action that is usually assumed to be 'wrong,' but deny the validity of the behavioural norm in the case at stake" (2013: 419). In the context of this work, the actual beliefs of state officials are irrelevant; the focus is rather on what they choose to say.

Official framing occurs in two main ways: negative framing delegitimizes the opposition while positive framing turns policies that are undesirable for certain parts of the population into a legitimation story (Li 2021). The concept of justification is thus related to legitimation, but they are not identical. Presenting justifications is always part of a legitimation strategy, but not all legitimation is justification. Legitimation involves more than mere rhetoric and requires certain laws and policies being enacted to put official discourse into action.

As rulers seek approval from the ruled, all communication and justification is situated in a relational context. This understanding puts the intended audience(s) center stage, which may consist of heterogeneous groups both domestically and internationally.[2] When we acknowledge diverse audiences exist, it might lead to counterintuitive findings under certain circumstances: "[R]epression can legitimize a regime by signaling to supporters a commitment to hold a hard line against their political rivals" (Lachapelle 2021: 2). Exemplary of this mechanism is the persecution of ethnic or religious minorities like the Uyghurs in China. Studying justifications of repression thus bridges the conventional divide between legitimation and repression under authoritarianism (Gerschewski 2013) and illuminates the complex entanglements of these strategies.

Following the classical definition, repression "consists of government action which grossly discriminates against persons or organizations viewed as presenting a fundamental challenge to existing power relationships or key governmental policies" (Goldstein 1978: xxviii). Just as Tolstoy suggested that each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, each authoritarian regime uses repression as it sees fit – with a particular mix of forms, agents, and targets hereof. Despite this variance, all autocracies restrict their citizens' civil liberties and political rights to some extent on an everyday basis. In the context of this article, the units of analysis are "repressive incidents" against individuals or organizations. I define such an incident as a repressive act targeting individuals or organizations, often involving numerous actors and forms of repression at the same time – for example, from arresting somebody, to mistreating

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2   While most justifications are directed towards domestic addressees, officials devise justifications of repression also with a view to foreign governments, international (non-)governmental organizations, or transnational publics (Edel 2019). Actors in the international community may condemn repression when they perceive it as unjustified, excessive, or when its targets are well-known (Tansey 2016: 71).

them in custody, to bringing them to court. I aggregate various similar acts that occur for the same reason as one repressive incident when they are repetitive in nature. Targets of repression are usually political activists or journalists, but also citizens who become victims of state violence; also affected are those who engage in criminal activity and suffer excessively harsh treatment at the hands of state actors.

Repression is a costly political strategy, risking a loss of legitimacy with certain audiences who disapprove of using coercion. State officials use justifications to alleviate this cost, flanking repression with legitimating messages (Edel 2019). Some overt forms of repression, such as crackdowns on public protests or legal changes, are so extraordinary and visible that they usually require justification. Other forms of repression are covert, such as forced disappearances or torture (Aguilar and Kovras 2018). They take place without any legal basis, so they are more likely to be denied than justified (Earl 2003). In some cases, denial is advantageous because "if successful, cover-up reduces or even eliminates the need to demonstrate legitimacy" (Hess and Martin 2006: 252). When the public knows of repression, state officials might still leave it unmentioned or deny it. Justifications only make up one part of communication, while the bulk of repressive incidents may either be denied or ignored.

In many instances, government representatives justify repressive events as necessary and even legal – for example, under a state of emergency. We can expect that in general some repression will be acknowledged, while other acts are concealed. Given the diversity of actors and interests within autocratic regimes, it may be possible that different state officials pursue divergent strategies of justification or denial, even at the same time.

Existing research on the political communication of repression in the MENA region has mostly dealt with severe forms of the latter, such as the massacre of Muslim Brothers by Syrian regime forces in Hama in 1982 (Wedeen 1999) and by Egypt's new military regime in 2013 as two examples (Warren 2017; Pratt and Rezk 2019; Lachapelle 2021; Edel and Josua 2018; Grimm 2022). Regarding the Syrian civil war, Scartozzi (2015) revealed how the changing strategic narrative influenced popular support for the regime. Selvik (2018) traced how a regime discourse differentiating between "insiders" and "outsiders" enabled the repression of the Green Movement protesters in Iran. Finally, Edel (2019) investigated the strategies that altered the perception of repression in Ben Ali's Tunisia, including obfuscation as well as rhetorical and procedural justification. Except for the latter study, existing works on the region deal with how the repression of mass protests was communicated, often by looking at speeches in single case studies.

I contend here that justifications are also used outside of the very visible setting of popular protests, where the many witnesses present observe and document high-scale repression. In these other cases, justifications are important for the image a state wants to convey both domestically and internationally. Communication also depends on the prevalent style of state–society relations and patterns of repression. To explore to what extent repression is communicated I have chosen the years 2000–2010 in North Africa, as a period prior to the crisis mode of the Arab uprisings. During that phase, some protests occurred that were smaller and

locally confined, and most repression targeted individual activists, political and human rights organizations, and independent media. This offers a glimpse into the spectrum of justifications available in autocracies for everyday repression and provides us with useful background information when studying more contentious times. The main finding of this analysis is that the variation in justifications offered is to a large extent mediated by the different forms of repression that autocrats choose to use. Depending on those forms of repression, divergent patterns of communication ensue regarding the volume and content of the shared justifications.

3   Case Selection and Empirical Background

The Arab world is home to many typical cases of authoritarian rule, from which findings can be generalized to other world regions too (Flyvbjerg 2006: 232–233). Comparing two countries elucidates the specific patterns of repression and ensuing communication across a monarchy and a republic. Until 2010, Morocco and Tunisia exhibited some notable similarities besides their significant differences. Both the Moroccan king and the former Tunisian president were neopatrimonial rulers in resource-poor countries, concentrating decision-making power in their own hands. Both countries also experienced similar levels of repression during the studied time period, with their Political Terror Scale values (ranking from 1 to 5) mostly settling at 3 with occasional fluctuations to 2. Both Morocco and Tunisia belonged to those autocracies where the police but not the military were involved in domestic repression (Berman 2021). Comparable geographical and other structural factors offer the chance to examine the effect of particular patterns of repression on its subsequent communication. The distinct regime types of Morocco (monarchy) and Tunisia (republic) led to different dynamics regarding contestation in the political system, the perceived legitimacy of the incumbent, and the role of political parties.

   To outside observers, Ben Ali presented Tunisia as a secular, neoliberal posterchild flanked by a "rhetorical commitment to democratic procedures and human rights" (Cavatorta and Haugbølle 2012: 187). However, this secularism led to an exclusionary regime that repressed Islamist movements of all shades. The economic modernization process came with crony capitalism and corruption at the top, neglecting and alienating the hinterland (especially the country's southern provinces). The smaller social base existing in exclusive regimes reduces available alternatives to repression (Rørbæk and Knudsen 2017). The Tunisian police were very close to Ben Ali and his preferred instrument of coercion, unlike the military. While cohesion is an important feature of security apparatuses, even in states with a fragmented security sector repression by institutions that are close to the ruler is more likely to occur (Greitens 2016). Ben Ali also used the judiciary as a political tool to get rid of opponents, outlawing the entirety of the opposition. A specific feature of repression in Tunisia was that it was more widespread and broadly targeted against different groups than in other autocracies (Nugent 2020).

Morocco was a more inclusive society that relied on the king's legitimacy, although significant parts of the population in some Berber regions and the Western Sahara were disenfranchised. While state violence is path-dependent, the royal succession from King Hassan II to King Muhammad VI in 1999 offered a window of opportunity for change. It initially decreased the overall level of repression and even led, as noted, to the establishment of a Truth Commission investigating previous human rights violations in the "years of lead" as a measure of authoritarian upgrading (Vairel 2004). However, following terror attacks in Casablanca in 2003 heavy-handed repression returned.[3] Overall, repression in Tunisia was more frequent during these years than it was in Morocco. For the analysis, we thus expect some variation in their respective patterns of communication and justification.

At the beginning of the chosen time period, the terror attacks taking place on 11 September 2001 posed an exogenous challenge. They shaped the discursive opportunities available to incumbents in dealing with opponents, especially Islamists. The analysis stops before the beginning of the Arab uprisings in Tunisia in December 2010, as ending the authoritarian "normalcy" hitherto.

4   Methodology and Data

The article establishes novel data and, on this basis, contributes to theory-building of an understudied topic. While the sensitive issue of repression is notoriously secretive, justifications can be considered public statements. For mapping the justifications of repression against different challengers in Morocco and Tunisia from 2000 until 2010, I resorted to analyzing publicly available documents and created a dataset on such repressive incidents. Together with my research assistants, I systematically screened qualitative data on repressive incidents as obtained from pertinent annual reports on human rights by Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the U.S. Department of State (USDS).

We entered these incidents in the Justifications of Repressive Incidents in Morocco and Tunisia Dataset hosted on our institution's server (GIGASet). We disaggregated and coded many dimensions of the repressive incidents upon entry, such as the forms and actors. The codebook with definitions of categories and codes can be found in the Appendix, a methods report and the full dataset are available with GESIS' online repository (Josua 2022). The data include a short description of the incident, geographical data, the supposed reason(s) for repression (which might deviate from official statements), the name and affiliation of the target of repression, the forms thereof used, the agents of repression, the justification, and justifying actors.

Data from the international NGOs' annual reports were supplemented by more specific reports from local organizations, NGOs working on behalf of journalists, as well as from media reports by newspapers and blogs covering the offered justifications (should they contain

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3   Abouzzohour (2021) has analyzed in detail under what conditions the Moroccan regime resorts to repression.

additional relevant information). For coding the justifications, we followed a dual approach: proceeding deductively based on the justificatory arguments found in the literature and inductively by using in-vivo coding via the software MaxQDA. Over various iterations we aggregated recurrent justifications to 10 different codes. Furthermore, we consulted scholarly works on repression in the two countries to support the interpretation of the data. I cleaned all the data and coded the justifications myself, as here consistent interpretation is paramount.[4] Depending on the primary language of the human rights or news reports, most sources we used were in English, French, and Arabic – with the latter mainly drawn on to complement the information that was obtained from the English-language reports.

The primary interest behind collecting this data was not quantitative, as the incidents underlie certain limitations to it (see below). However, the descriptive data give some hints regarding the extent of justified repression as compared to non-justified instances thereof. The dataset contains in total 439 repressive incidents: namely, 280 for Tunisia and 159 for Morocco over the 11 years under investigation.[5] The reports upon which the dataset is based recount repressive incidents against activists and organizations, but also excessive violence against and punishment of citizens by state actors.

Some activists, journalists, and politicians were targets of repressive measures in multiple years. These incidents were recorded separately. When a repressive incident spanned more than one year, for example someone was arrested in a certain year while a court trial or appeal verdict occurred in a later one, the earliest recorded repressive act counts. Given the fact that our focus is on the justifications and not merely the quantification of repressive incidents, the dataset condenses such cases and takes together repetitions of similar acts against the same person over the span of a year that might otherwise be counted multiple times. That is the case, for example, when a journalist reports being placed under surveillance, followed, or otherwise harassed. In some instances, the dataset aggregates lawsuits against various defendants who are tried together or who are accused of similar offenses in mass trials.

An obvious limitation to the data is reporting bias, as human rights organizations can only address instances of repression they actually learn about. Thus, repressive incidents that target well-connected activists are more likely to be documented. This is especially true for incidents entailing low-level harassment, regarding which the "average" or even marginalized citizen would hardly ever turn to international organizations. Local or diaspora organizations may be connected to certain groups and therefore emphasize some targets of repression more than

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4   While current developments see us head towards machine learning, for identifying fine-grained disaggregation and the nuances of justification a hand-coded approach proved to be useful.

5   To put those numbers into perspective, Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance Vérité et Dignité, IVD) received 62,720 complaints covering the period between 1955 and 2013 (IVD 2019: 47). Local organizations also documented human rights violations and published their metadata prior to the establishment of the IVD (Avocats Sans Frontières 2012). The Tunisian Human Rights League recorded 1,028 complaints concerning human rights violations during the first decade of the new millennium, although it also included economic and social grievances.

others. Another bias stems from the availability of reports themselves. While the three main reports (AI, HRW, USDS) are published on an annual basis, those from certain local or more specialized organizations are not available for every year. We thus first coded incidents from the main reports and then used the local ones primarily to complement the other data, especially when the justifications were mentioned only in the additional reports. As a result of these limitations, the data are not easily comparable over the years; I have refrained from analyzing chronological developments for the most part, too.

While I indicate the identifiable trends regarding how repressive incidents are distributed, these numbers should not be considered exact figures. In the analysis, I adopt an outcome-centered understanding in the sense of configurational methods and study where the dependent variable justification is present so as to explore under what conditions it takes on different values. What is relevant here is that the relationships between different forms of repression and ensuing justifications illustrate patterns and broader tendencies following the logic of configurations. Working in our favor is the fact that the under-reporting of such events affects unjustified repression more than justified repression. Nonetheless, the benefit of focusing on justifications is that they are by nature publicized. This fact also alleviates potential ethical pitfalls when researching repression. The following section will document the descriptive analysis.

5 Empirical Analysis

The following sections present results from the dataset containing 280 repressive incidents in Tunisia and 159 in Morocco from 2000 to 2010. I analyzed to what extent repression was communicated, which forms of repression were justified, and by which particular actors. Not all aspects are disaggregated for the two countries, as sometimes this would lead to very small absolute numbers where results are driven by single incidents. Instead, the focus is on select aspects.

5.1 Regime type and volume of communication

Variation in the forms of repression used is first shaped by regime characteristics. This includes the incumbent's basis of legitimacy and the image they would like to convey, which is important for countries looking to be seen as liberal. In the Arab world, monarchies have been shown to use less repression than republics (Yom 2014). Republics in the region tend to use more severe forms of repression: monarchies restrict freedom of assembly and speech but violate physical integrity less (Møller and Skaaning 2013). As severe forms of repression are less likely to be justified, in turn autocratic officials in monarchies use justifications more than those in republics do.

This becomes clear when looking at the question of to what extent officials communicate about repression, and, if they do, whether they offer justifications or denial and diversion.

Denial refers to public statements admitting something happened to the target of repression but rejecting the intentionality and the state's role in hurting the victim. Diversionary communication may involve blaming the victim or weaponizing private law to harass dissidents with trumped-up charges. Although denial or diversion mean different things practically, they are treated in the same category of non-justification.

Figure 1.   Extent of Communication
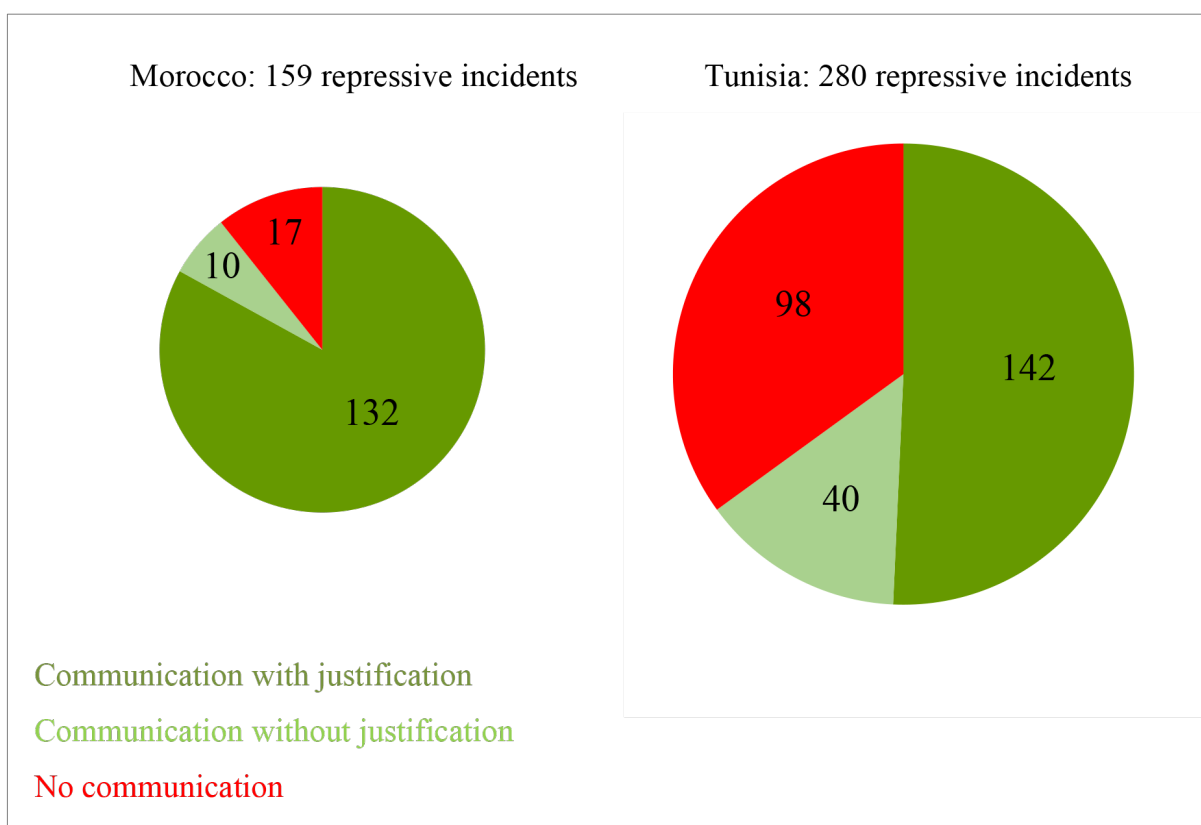
For the 439 repressive incidents in total, in 324 cases we found information about communication. No communication at all was reported in 17 cases in Morocco and 98 in Tunisia. In 50 cases of communication, a closer look reveals that these were not instances of an actual justification but rather of diversion or denial (10 in Morocco, 40 in Tunisia). The dataset thus records some cases of denial or diversion and many of silence. The relatively small share of non-justifications implies that it is advantageous not to mention repression at all when there is no justification at hand. Tunisia used relatively fewer justifications than Morocco. This confirms the assumption that officials in monarchies use justifications more than those in republics do.
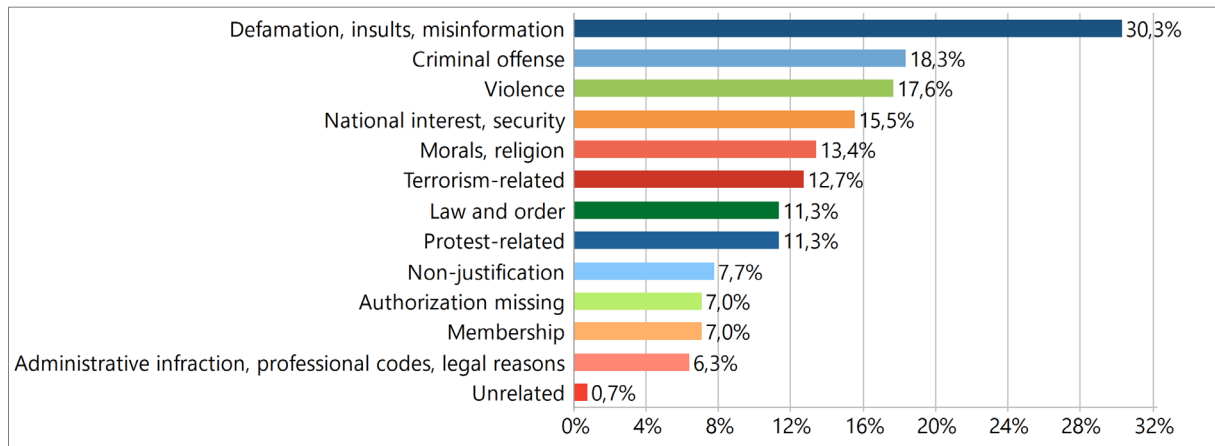
5.2 *Communication and justifications*

For the different types of justifications offered in Morocco and Tunisia, I first present the direct comparison of findings for the two countries before then showing the respective results separately.

**Table 1.   Comparing the Shares of Disaggregated Justifications**

	Morocco (%)	Tunisia (%)
All communication	**89.3**	**65.0**
Violence	15.1	5.0
Authorization missing	6.3	6.1
Law & order	10.1	10.7
Criminal offense	16.4	10.0
Administrative infraction, professional codes, legal reasons	5.7	9.3
Membership	6.3	6.8
Defamation, insults, misinformation	27.0	10.7
National interest, security	13.8	4.6
Protest-related	10.1	0.7
Morals, religion	11.9	6.4
Terrorism-related	11.3	13.9
Non-justification	**6.9**	**14.3**

As already mentioned, there is a stark contrast between how much communication is reported for repressive incidents in Morocco and Tunisia, with a much larger share of unjustified repression occurring in the latter. In consequence, Table 1 above shows Tunisia to offer lower levels of justification. In Morocco, the defamation–insults nexus tops the list of justifications; in Tunisia, the most frequent form of communication is non-justification – that is, denial or diversion, followed by terrorism-related arguments. Noteworthy discrepancies are the more frequent use of blaming targets of repression for using violence and protest-related justifications in Morocco. Tunisia stands out regarding administrative control measures and other legalistic reasons. Morocco uses slightly more moral and religious arguments, and many more national interest or security justifications, where the image of the monarchy comes into play. Figures 2 and 3 below make the domestic rankings of such justifications even clearer, with 100 per cent corresponding to repressive instances with communication only.

Figure 2.   Justifications in Morocco as a Share of All Communicated Repressive Instances

Figure 3.   Justifications in Tunisia as a Share of All Communicated Repressive Instances
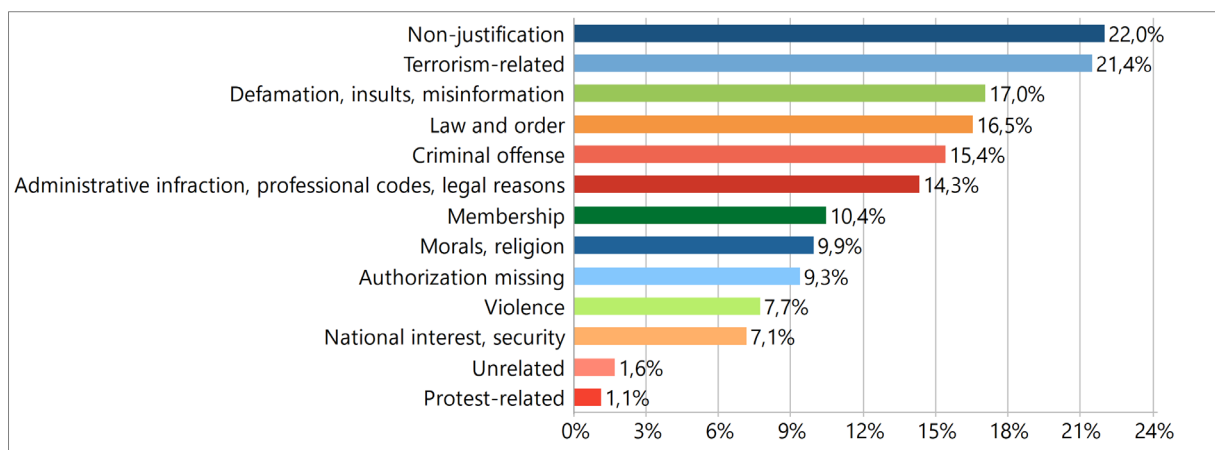
5.3 Forms of repression

To approach the question of what forms of repression are accompanied by justifications, which are denied, and when there is silence, we first look at the relative share of different forms hereof in the "mix" that is employed in the two countries. Table 2 below lists the absolute numbers of repressive incidents these forms were reported for, their share in all incidents, and percentages as relating to Morocco and Tunisia respectively.

One first observation is the importance of arrests and detention, which is related to the human rights reports informing the dataset often calling for action to be taken in these situations. Different versions of harassment as well as judicial forms of repression – evident in court trials and convictions – were also common in many incidents. Physical violence is reported for a third of incidents, followed by intimidation and torture. Under "other illegal activities" I subsume manifold tactics such as forced confessions, forced disappearances, sexual assault, arson, evictions, and confiscation/theft. Movement restrictions pertain to travel bans as well as administrative control measures in Tunisia, where former prisoners must report to police stations daily or even multiple times a day, making normal life impossible. Financial restrictions are mostly fines that are imposed as a result of court trials. This is almost

exclusively a Moroccan phenomenon for elegantly bankrupting journalists, human rights activists, and other dissidents. Authorization regarding media outlets, political parties, and organizations was often denied in Tunisia. Killings – often resulting from medical negligence in prisons, less often during protests – were reported in 25 instances. Work- or education-related punishment refers to job loss, disbarment of advocates, the forced transfer of judges to remote areas, and bans from attending university. Censorship was imposed on newspapers, magazines, and radio stations in both countries. Finally, denial of medical care was mostly reported for prisons in Tunisia, similarly to measures of degradation/*Zersetzung* such as slander during the period under investigation.

Table 2. Forms of Repression

	# of incidents	Total share (%)	Morocco (%)	Tunisia (%)
Arrest/detention	254	57.9	66.7	52.9
Harassment	216	49.2	35.8	56.8
Court trial	193	44.0	60.4	34.6
Conviction	190	43.3	61.0	33.2
Physical violence	138	31.4	26.4	34.3
Intimidation	131	29.8	29.6	30.0
Torture	93	21.2	23.3	20.0
Illegal activities	74	16.9	13.2	18.9
Movement restriction	61	13.9	11.3	15.4
Financial restriction	40	9.1	22.6	1.4
Denial of authorization	30	6.8	3.1	8.9
Killing	26	5.9	6.3	5.7
Work-/education-related punishment	25	5.7	3.8	6.8
Censorship	20	4.6	7.5	2.9
Denial of medical care	14	3.2	0.0	5.0
Degradation/*Zersetzung*	6	1.4	0.6	1.8
Total	439	100	100	100

5.4 *Justifications of different forms of repression*

The core argument of this paper is that communication and justifications are mediated by the forms of repression that autocrats choose to employ. The protest literature suggests that overt and covert forms of repression can be characterized in terms of visibility and legality, leading to different patterns of communication. In general, my findings confirm that officials justify visible repression such as court trials, while denying or concealing obviously illegal repression like harassment, physical violence, forced disappearance, the denial of medical care, and

killings. Restrictions of personal and civil rights (freedom of movement, of association) are imposed in an arbitrary manner with few justifications.

Figure 4. The Share of Communication and Denial/Diversion for Different Forms of Repression
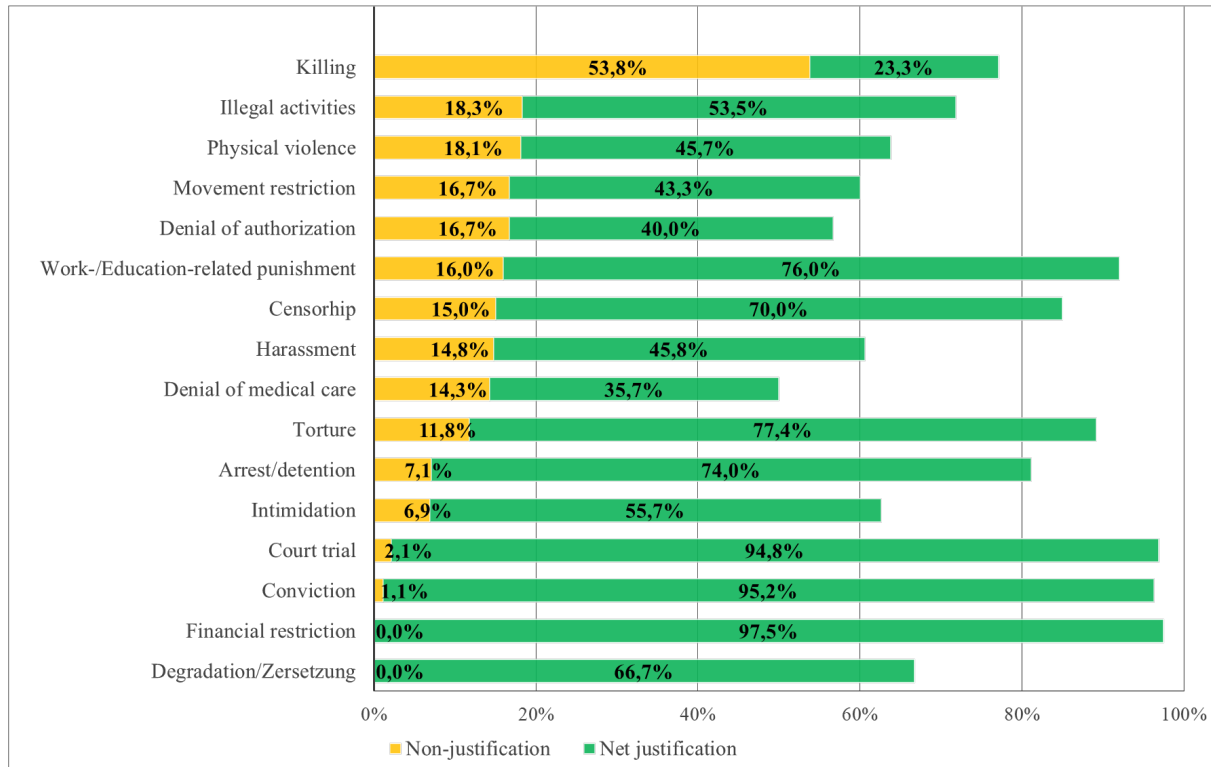

Figure 4 lists the share of different forms of repression that were flanked by communication, and whether these were justifications. This leads to a "net" share of justifications for various forms of repression. It is important to remember that most incidents included more than one form of repression, whereas justifications rarely refer to every form of repression that was used.[6]

Looking at the "net justification," where substantive arguments were brought forward, for court trials and convictions around 95 per cent of all cases were accompanied by justifications. Also, nearly all financial restrictions were flanked by justifications. However, the net rate of justifications for arrests or detention dropped to 74 per cent. This could be because this category comprises both well-reported prison sentences and short-term detention and arrests that serve the aim of interrogating and generally harassing activists. Many forms of repression range in the middle zone of 40–70 per cent of net justifications. This is also true for forced disappearances, which are subsumed under illegal activities and have a comparatively high share of non-justifications, meaning denial or diversion, as is the case for physical violence.

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6   This means that, for example, torture as such was hardly ever justified, but the dataset recorded the justification in the legal charges that victims of torture faced.

Killings take the extreme position, with most denials and a distinctly low share of justifications.

Non-justifications were most salient in two larger clusters of the various forms of repression. As expected, one large cluster pertained to the use of violence, such as killings, physical repression, various illegal acts including sexual violence, as well as the withholding of medical care mostly of prisoners. The other cluster speaks to harassment, intimidation, censorship, the arbitrary denial of authorizations, and work- or education-related punishment. In such cases, there is often no paper trail and no hard proof of wrongdoing by agents of the state, and sometimes no clarity as to whether higher state officials ordered these acts or not. These forms of repression are characterized by (im)plausible deniability – especially when the perpetrators are unknown.

When we dig deeper into the various forms of repression, Table A2 in the Appendix shows that when people were killed in Morocco, in 7 out of 10 cases preceding violence on their part was invoked as a justification or diversion. The argument that the victims were violent is also the most prevalent justification offered for their physical violence, followed by diversions and denials. The most important justification in harassment cases in Morocco was arguments about morals/religion. Many cases of harassment and physical violence occurred without any public statement being made. Court trials and convictions mostly used charges of defamation, insults, or spreading false information in Morocco. We saw tactics of intimidation in connection with missing authorization and membership of illegal organizations, meaning where repressed journalists and activists defied the bans and restrictions on their work. Finally, torture was mostly used in cases where defendants were accused of terrorism or other criminal offenses.

In Tunisia, the picture is more extreme. Table A3 in the Appendix demonstrates even fewer justifications in cases of harassment, intimidation, physical violence, and killings, and a substantial number of arrests without communication. In one-third of all arrests in Tunisia there was no substantive justification offered. Most were terrorism-related, and these were often connected to torture. Frequent justifications included law and order narratives, charges of criminal offenses, as well as defamation, insults, or spreading false information in connection with court trials and convictions. The forms of repression that were communicated about the least are denial of medical care, which often occurred in prison. In addition, movement restrictions in terms of administrative-control measures were only rarely brought up publicly. Finally, denials of authorization were often left without communication.

5.5 Target-related differences

The question who the targets of repression are influences the forms thereof used, and thus also related justifications. Given that legitimation and repression strategies target different societal groups, people who are defined as outsiders and who do not enjoy equality in the eyes of the majority population experience more severe forms of repression. Another finding pertaining to the volume of justifications is thus that the repression of regime outsiders is less often given explanation for.

While it is often hard to disentangle the attitudes of citizens towards certain groups in autocracies, an illustration of this pattern is Morocco's conflict with Western Sahara. The territorial dispute between Morocco and the Polisario organization was not evaluated systematically in the dataset since before the recognition of Western Sahara as part of Morocco, human rights violations there were recorded separately by the USDS. However, incidents mentioned in the AI and HRW reports were added to the dataset, and Sahrawis were also the target of repression on Moroccan territory.

To investigate these differences, we analyzed the data for Moroccan and Sahrawi targets of repression separately. In the dataset, we identified 39 Sahrawi and 120 non-Sahrawi targets, with Sahrawi individuals and activists making up 24.5 per cent of all targets of repression across all its different forms. However, the share of Sahrawis among all victims of torture and physical violence in Morocco amounted to 38 per cent; they represented 30 per cent of all those killed meanwhile. They were thus over-represented as victims of severe repression in the dataset, but also in terms of denials of authorization and movement restrictions.

Figure 5.   Justifications of Repression against Sahrawis and Non-Sahrawis in Morocco
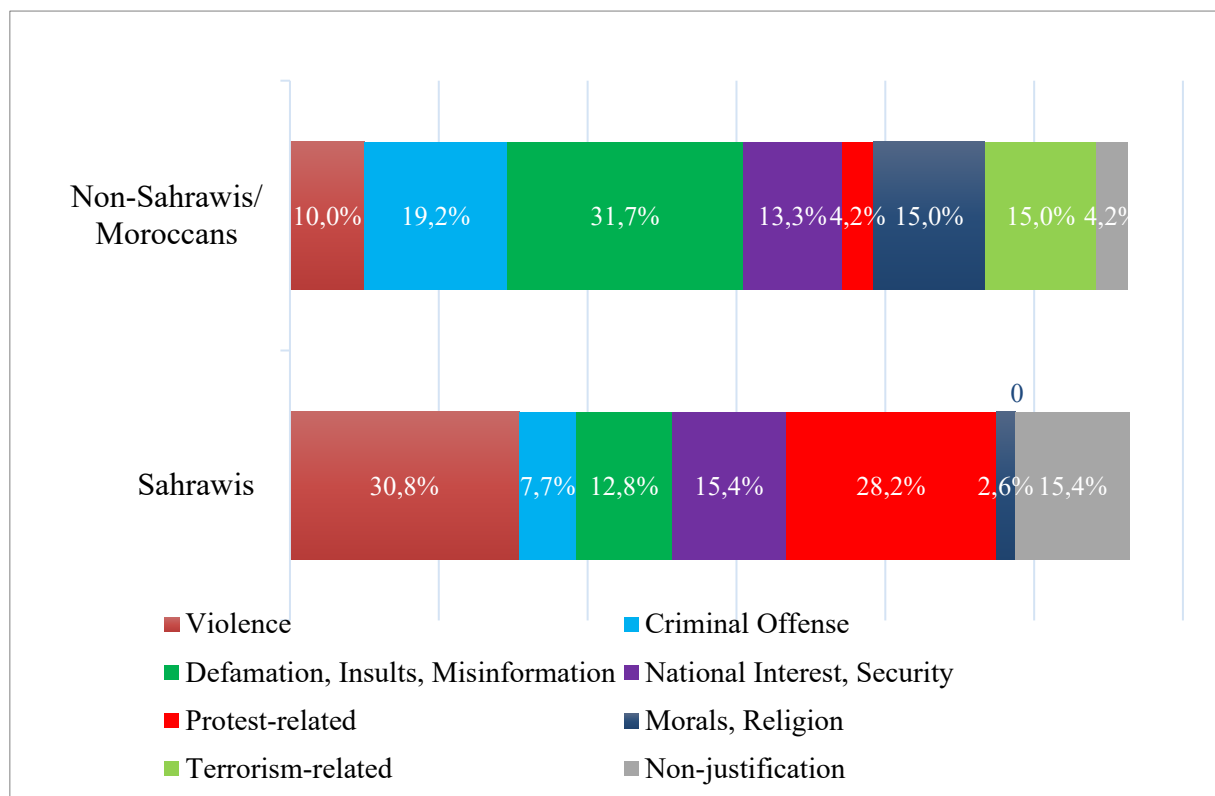
When we investigate the justifications that were used against Sahrawi and non-Sahrawi targets, some distinct differences become apparent. While the total numbers are not huge, it is striking that even in absolute terms there was more denial and diversion with regards to Sahrawi victims than there was vis-à-vis Moroccans. Combined with the reduced communication shares, this means that substantial justifications were only given for 69.2 per cent of repressive incidents against Sahrawi targets. The respective figure for Moroccan targets

is 86.6 per cent. A comparison of these justifications shows that Sahrawis were disproportionately more often accused of violence. The charge of "inciting violent protests" was often used in connection with pro-independence activism. Protests in Western Sahara were more frequent than on Moroccan territory. The defamation–insults nexus and criminal charges that characterize a great deal of judicial repression in Morocco were less present in Western Sahara. In addition, narratives on morals or religion were almost absent, as were terrorism-related charges.

The different types of justification are related to the fact that the Moroccan security forces employed more severe forms of repression in the occupied Western Sahara. The repressive acts were less often justified and probably less easily justifiable, but the authorities also seemed to be less concerned with justifying them. This is due to the fact that they affected the separatists who are victims of "othering" and largely remain under the radar of national and international audiences.
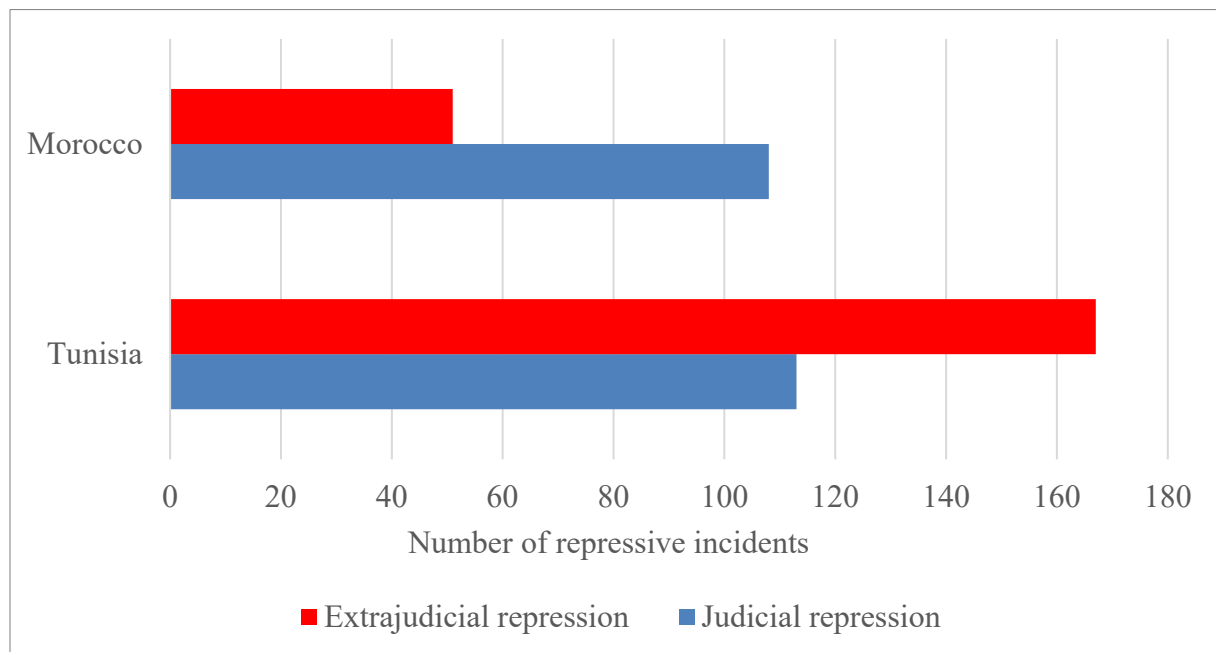
5.6 Justifications for judicial repression

As civilian courts were involved in most reported cases, being important actors here, I have considered those incidents that involved judicial repression separately to illustrate this particular form thereof.[7] Judicial repression occurs when the criminal justice system takes action: namely, summons somebody to court, a prosecutor initiates proceedings, or a full court trial ensues (regardless of whether it ends in conviction). While prison sentences are often the form of repression that endures for the longest time, a court trial under authoritarian conditions does not follow the rules of due process but often serves to humiliate the defendant and is in itself a form of repression. The findings above showed that, unsurprisingly, justifications were very frequently offered in court trials. The judicial branch bases its proceedings on legal charges that count as justifications, or procedural justifications in Edel's (2019) terms. The following analysis demonstrates the high share of justifications in judicial repression. In contrast, non-judicial repression is most likely to be denied. When there are no grounds for judicial action, justifications often point to morals, religion, or the national interest.

Judicial repression covers nearly half of all reported incidents. However, the cases hereof are distributed highly unequally across the two countries. As Figure 6 below shows, the absolute numbers were almost identical in Tunisia and Morocco, with slightly over 100 cases each. However, in relative terms, in Morocco these made up two-thirds of all incidents, whereas in Tunisia almost 60 per cent of all repression took place extrajudicially. So, while the overwhelming share of incidents in Morocco entailed juridical processes, in Tunisia extrajudicial repression played a much larger role.

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7   Civilian courts made up the majority hereof; only in 11 repressive instances were military courts explicitly mentioned.

Figure 6.   Judicial Repression in Morocco and Tunisia

A justification was reported for every incident with judicial involvement in Morocco. However, the dataset did not contain a justification for almost 10 per cent of judicial-repression cases in Tunisia. Combined, this results in justification being given in 93.3 per cent of all cases. Table 3 below gives an overview of the content of these justifications and contrasts them with the share among cases of non-judicial repression.

Table 3.   Communication on Judicial versus Non-Judicial Repression

Communication/justification	Judicial repression (%)	Non-judicial repression (%)
Defamation, insults, misinformation	28.8	10.7
Criminal offense	23.6	3.6
Law and order	17.9	7.1
Membership	12.3	2.7
Administrative infraction, professional codes, legal reasons	10.4	11.6
Morals, religion	9.4	15.2
National interest, security	9.0	14.3
Non-justification	2.4	39.9

A comparison of justifications used in judicial versus non-judicial repression shows that diversion and denial make up around 40 per cent of all non-judicial communication. This means that there are justifications for only 60 per cent of all non-judicial repression as opposed to for 97.6 per cent of judicial repression. The only justifications that are used more in

extrajudicial than in judicial repression are moral and religious arguments, as well as ones of national interest or security. With relation to the criminal offenses that the defendants in judicial repression were accused of, the most prevalent justification was defamation/ insults/misinformation, approximating 30 per cent of all charges. This was followed by terrorism-related charges and various other crimes. A marked difference between judicial and non-judicial repression clearly exists.

5.7 Justifying actors

The contents of justification are influenced by which actors are involved in communication. State officials on different hierarchical levels may engage in justification. Depending on the chosen form of repression, different "justifying actors" communicate about it. They may include members of the legislative branch but mostly are officials in the executive, such as ministers, heads of state, and security officials from various branches of government. Finally, the judiciary assumes an important role in the prosecution of dissenters. Based on their specific roles, such as being state security officials, judges, or politicians, autocratic officials use different frames. I found that security sector officials justify repression by referring to national interests/security as well as administrative or other legal infractions. Government officials often deny repression; when they do justify it, they most often refer to morals or religion. Judges often use justifications centered on law and order or criminal offenses, and raise charges related to defamation, insults, spreading misinformation, or terrorism.

We identified 329 justifying actors for the 324 incidents where the dataset reported communication, as in some instances different persons or institutions were involved in the same incident. As justifications were often used in the context of judicial repression, the bulk of identified actors were judicial officials. More than 55 per cent of all incidents with communication included courts or judges, in addition to 11 per cent where a prosecutor was mentioned. This demonstrates the important role of the judiciary in retrospectively justifying and thus enabling repression (Shen-Bayh 2018). Police and law-enforcement personnel engaged in communication in 13 per cent of these incidents.[8] Government officials and parliamentarians were active in 21.5 per cent of communication. Cabinet members rarely figured as justifying actors except for cases involving prominent journalists or the like. In only two cases in Tunisia was the president directly cited with offering communication about certain incidents, while this was not reported for the Moroccan king during the same time period. As the focus was on justifications by state officials, we only recorded pro-regime media and other actors close to but outside the government in 2.5 per cent of justifications.

Table A4 in the Appendix shows what forms of repression were communicated by which justifying actors. Strikingly, governmental officials communicated most about incidents of killing and censorship. In addition, denials of authorization and work- or educated-related

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8 The police and other security forces were named as the perpetrators of repression in half of the reported incidents.

punishments were largely communicated by them too. Judicial actors justified the fines they imposed, initiated court trials, and convicted defendants – also in many cases where the accused were tortured. Pro-regime media and other actors close to the government were engaged in degradation/*Zersetzung* measures damaging the moral reputation of dissidents. Finally, police and law-enforcement personnel communicated in very few incidents relating to harassment, physical violence, killings, and movement restrictions entailing administrative-control measures.

When we look at which actor ranked first in using a certain justification, due to the predominance of judicial repression the results reveal little in the way of variation – with courts or judges being the leading actor for all offered justifications. For non-justifications, government- or parliamentary officials were the dominant actors – with them providing over 70 per cent of all denials and diversions. This pattern was evident in many instances where reports noted that the "authorities denied" state involvement or any negative outcomes for the victims. Given that they communicated about killings, this is hardly surprising. A classic strategy is government officials promising investigations of repressive acts without ever actually following up on them. To approach the actor–justification relationship differently, I analyzed which actors picked what justifications most frequently, also indicating the total number of such instances.

A cursory glance at the results shows that the dominance of judicial actors is restricted to their "natural" domains, such as criminal offenses, law and order, the defamation/insults nexus, and terrorism-related charges (in Table 4). The second clear result is again that government officials overwhelmingly used diversions instead of justifying repressive acts. Police and law enforcement personnel mostly referred to administrative infractions and other legalistic issues, in addition to national interest / security. Arguments pertaining to morals and religion were mostly used by pro-regime media and other actors close to, but not inside the government, although the number of cases is small.

Table 4.   Justifications that the Different Actors Use the Most

Actor / Communication	Head of state (N=2) (%)	Prosecution (N= 35) (%)	Court or judge (N=176) (%)	Pro-regime media, party, or non-governmental actors (N=8) (%)	Police and law-enforcement (N=41) (%)	Govern-ment/par-liamentary official (N=67) (%)
Violence	0	14.3	13.1	0	7.3	11.8
Authorization missing	0	17.1	8.0	0	4.9	10.3
Law and order	0	17.1	19.9	0	7.3	4.4
Criminal offense	0	17.1	25.0	12.5	4.9	2.9
Administrative infraction, professional codes, legal reasons	50	11.4	9.1	37.5	22.0	11.8

Actor Communication	Head of state (N=2) (%)	Prosecution (N= 35) (%)	Court or judge (N=176) (%)	Pro-regime media, party, or non-governmental actors (N=8) (%)	Police and law-enforcement (N=41) (%)	Govern-ment/par-liamentary official (N=67) (%)
Membership	0	14.3	11.9	0	9.8	1.5
Defamation, insults, misinformation	0	20.0	31.3	25	9.8	13.2
National interest, security	50	2.9	9.7	25	19.5	13.2
Protest-related	0	5.7	8.5	0	0	1.5
Morals, religion	0	5.7	9.7	62.5	12.2	17.6
Terrorism-related	0	17.1	26.7	0	9.8	2.9
Non-justification	50	5.7	1.7	25.0	7.3	42.6

6 Conclusion and Areas for Further Research

This study presented a first systematic analysis of how repression is communicated and justified in autocracies. The dataset offered a more disaggregated view on repression and its communication than large-N studies, while unravelling more systematic patterns than a case study could do. The data from Morocco and Tunisia supported various arguments on how the chosen forms of repression influence the related communication. First, monarchies communicate and justify repression more than republics do. Regime outsiders face more severe forms of repression and encounter fewer justifications. Regarding chosen forms, autocratic officials justify visible repression such as court trials, while denying or concealing harassment, physical violence, forced disappearances, the denial of medical care, and killings. Restrictions of personal and civil rights seem to be imposed in an arbitrary manner, with few justifications given.

Regarding the actors involved and contents of justifications, security officials justify repression by referring to national interests/security as well as administrative or other legal infractions. Government officials often deny repression; when they do justify it, they most often refer to morals or religion. Finally, judges often use justifications centered on law and order or criminal offenses and raise charges related to defamation, insults, spreading misinformation, or terrorism. A novel finding highlights the importance of judicial repression, with non-judicial instances more likely to be denied. When there are no grounds for judicial action, justifications often focus on morals, religion, or the national interest. The extensive use of judicial repression and legal justifications demands greater scholarly attention going forwards.

The main differences between the patterns of communication in the two countries were mediated by the distinct forms of repression that were used. The choice of form(s) in turn was

influenced by regime-specific characteristics, with decidedly more and more severe repression in the Republic of Tunisia than in the Kingdom of Morocco. Regarding justifications, some arguments in Morocco were tied to the king's claim to legitimacy. Thus, insulting the king or the monarchy was a big issue, which also reflects on matters pertaining to morals and Islam – although the difference to Tunisia was not massive in this respect. Instead, the style of repression was much more sophisticated in Morocco. Journalists were not (only) bluntly harassed, but independent media outlets were bankrupted with crippling fines imposed in court. Future research could investigate whether this subtler way of repressing and communicating about it contributed to the survival of Moroccan autocracy in the Arab uprisings. The two cases were in line with conceptual considerations and previous findings by the literature, and thus represent typical cases – suggesting that these discoveries can be generalized to other MENA countries or even world regions.

The study faced various limitations in terms of scope. In autocracies, repressive incidents tend to be concealed and the media operate under limited freedom. I found that unless judicial action is taken, government officials are reluctant to even mention repression while reliable sources reporting them are hard to find. Data from independent media sources vis-à-vis narratives on certain instances is limited for the years studied, leading to a possible under-reporting of justifications. This could be alleviated in future studies by taking into consideration social media usage, which took off with the Arab uprisings.

Within the examined time frame of 2000–2010, the War on Terror was an international context-factor that interestingly led to a non-finding. When looking at overlaps between justifications, there was no connection between protest- and terrorism-related narratives. In contrast to more recent developments, with anti-terror legislation now being used against dissidents, in the first decade of the new century counterterrorism laws in these two countries had not yet been weaponized against the political opposition. Nevertheless, they were still widely used – disproportionately so in confrontations with Islamists, young men, and others who fell victim to counterterror excesses.

Going beyond the scope of this research, one promising line of investigation would be to focus on frame resonance, analyzing which kinds of justifications targeted different audiences and whether they varied in content based on who those respective addressees were. Given the nature of the reports that informed this study, this was not feasible here – the analysis was based on event data rather than on discourse. However, audiences are a key element for understanding whether justifications stick, are accepted, and thus further routinized, or which of them may backfire because of their lack of credibility and acceptance. This is a vital element in taking the relational nature of state–society interactions seriously.

This article has added to the literatures on state repression and authoritarianism, which have often been disconnected despite their mutual relevance. While we have learned which actors tend to communicate about certain forms of repression, what remains a black box is how autocratic officials decide on whether and what to communicate. Learning more about the justification of repression and framing strategies more generally could add an important

element to the study of authoritarianism in the future. A takeaway message for repression research is the benefit of a holistic and disaggregated perspective on different forms of repression, the multifaceted actors involved, as well as on the interconnections with legitimation. For both repression and authoritarianism scholarship, the role of the judiciary is an almost untapped field that deserves much greater attention now.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Codebook

Justifications of Repressive Incidents in Morocco and Tunisia Dataset (JustRep)

Concepts and scope

The empirical focus of the dataset is to collect data on repressive incidents in Tunisia and Morocco from 2000 to 2010, especially regarding their official justification.

Repression: "consists of government action which grossly discriminates against persons or organizations viewed as presenting a fundamental challenge to existing power relationships or key governmental policies" (Goldstein 1978: xxviii).

Repressive incidents: occur when agents acting on behalf of the state target individual opponents or organizations with one or various forms of repression at one or more points over the span of a year.

Justification: explaining or defending state policies against potential or actual criticism.

Unit of observation: the repressive incident. We code each incident for the years 2000–2010 listed in the annual reports of AI, HRW, and the USDS on Morocco and Tunisia.

Variables

We coded the features of each repressive incident. Table A1 gives an overview of the relevant variables in the dataset. Each incident is assigned a unique case code in the format (year-month-day) T123 (T for Tunisia, M for Morocco).

Table A1. Dataset Variables

Variable name	Description/constituent sub-variables	Values
Country	Country name	Predefined categories: Tunisia / Morocco
Date	Earliest known day/month/year of repressive incident	Date: DD/MM/YYYY
Repressive episode	Larger context of crackdown or group-specific repression, if applicable	Predefined categories: Crackdown on human rights organizations, journalists, Islamist parties, online activism, lawyers, media freedom, peaceful dissent, Sahrawis, harassment of human rights activists; plus write-in character variable

Variable name	Description/constituent sub-variables	Values
Governorate/province	Location of repressive actor (name during the studied time period applies)	Character variable
Incident	Narrative description of repressive incident	Character variable
Reason for repression	Occasion / true trigger for repressive incident which might diverge from justification	Character variable
Target	Name or description of repression target (person or organization) – sometimes multiple spellings of names are indicated	Character variable
Affiliation of target	Name of target's affiliation, occupation, or type of target group	Character variable
Judicial repression	Indicates whether judicial system (prosecutor, court) was involved in repression	Binary variable (yes/no)
Form of repression	Nature of repressive act	Predefined categories: conviction, arrest/detention, torture, intimidation, physical violence, court trial, harassment, killing; plus write-in option for other forms* (multiple codings possible)
Repressive actor	Type or name of agency applying repression	State/non-state, subdifferentiation of state: army, police, intelligence service, court (specify if military or civilian; if more precise info is available), official media, prison staff, or unknown
Justification	Description of how repression was justified, or denial / diversion of attention with specification	Character variable
Justifying actor	Function or name of justifying actor	Character variable: write-in government spokesperson, police officer, judge…*
Source reporting repression and justification	Name of source reporting repression and justification	Character variable
Sources reporting incident	Indication which organizations reported incident	Predefined categories: AI, HRW, USDS
Report link (URL)	URLs of all sources used	Character variable

*see codes for aggregation below

Coding in MaxQDA

Definitions and Examples

Form of repression

Arrest/Detention: Short- or long-term deprivation of freedom by agents of the state

Torture: extremely degrading and systematic physical violation of arrested or detained persons by state agents

Court trial: legal proceedings opened against target, either full trial or questioning by investigating judge

Conviction: sentence resulting from court trial

Physical violence: beatings, violating bodily integrity below the level of torture

Harassment: interrogation, surveillance, interfering with target's life, insults, hindering everyday activities, body searches

Intimidation: interrogation, affecting family members, threatening surveillance, phone calls, warnings

Movement restrictions: travel ban, banishment, deportation, extradition, limitation of movement, denial of free movement, forcible transfer, forced transportation (abandonment), preventing access, administrative control

Illegal activities: theft/confiscation, hacking, arson, sexual assault, robbery, kidnapping, forced confession, forced disappearance, burglary, restricting communication, destruction, eviction, sealing house

Financial restriction: fines, withholding funding, freezing assets

Denial of authorization: authorization obligation, cancelling events, denial of registration, denial of visiting clients, dissolving the organization, preventing meetings, withholding authorization, closing down an entity, revoking accreditation

Work- or education-related punishment: ban from university, ban on working, disbarment, dismissal, education deprivation, threatening job loss, restricting professional freedom, disciplinary transfer, closing down, shutdown, replacing critical functionaries, revoking accreditation

Denial of medical care: deprivation of healthcare

Censorship: publishing ban

Zersetzung/**degradation:** moral extortion, reputation damage, defamation

Justifying actor

President

Prosecution: judicial prosecutor

Court or judge: military or civilian judge/court

Pro-regime media, party, or non-governmental actors: pro-regime newspaper or TV station, state news agency, loyal political party, loyal professional association

Police and law-enforcement personnel: officers, security officials, prison administration, airport authorities

Government official: minister, government spokesperson, authorities, embassy official, parliamentary commission, official sources, regional administration

Justification codes

Administrative infraction, professional codes, legal reasons: (non-compliance with) administrative control regulations, non-compliance with statutes, violating regulations, minor offenses

Authorization missing: organizing a meeting without a permit, participating in illegal events, belonging to or having links with an unauthorized organization, using a broadcast frequency without a license, distributing illegal journals, membership in El-Nahda, not being covered by a pardon

Criminal offense: theft, robbery, murder, participating in a criminal association, drug trafficking, plotting attacks

Defamation, insults, misinformation: propaganda, spreading rumors, spreading false information, publishing reports, offending the state, its symbols, its agents, lack of respect for the king, insulting officers, defamation, contempt

Law and order: disturbing or undermining public order, destroying or damaging public or personal property, disturbing peace, obstructing freedom of work, breaking the law, causing chaos or disorder, inciting citizens to violate laws

Morals, religion: threatening Islamic unity/identity, proselytism, harming public decency, drink-driving, drugs, assaulting morals, prostitution

National interest, security: undermining the internal security of the state, overthrowing the regime, treason, threatening the territorial integrity, manipulating the state's image, damaging the state's reputation, collusion with foreign powers/groups, undermining the monarchy, failing to respect the king, separatism, harming external state security, criticizing the regime, serving in a foreign army, serving the interests of other governments

Non-justifications: either diversion (gaslighting, promising investigation) or denial (not acknowledging the repressive act)

Protest-related: staging a sit-in, participating in an armed or unarmed gathering, inciting violent protests/riot and rebellion, organizing an unauthorized demonstration

Terrorism-related: charges based on anti-terror laws, participation in or planning of terrorist acts, forming a terrorist group, joining or recruiting for a terrorist organization, financing terrorism, harboring terrorists, refraining from giving authorities information about a terrorist attack

Violence: assault, aggression, inciting violent protest, involvement in violent incidents, using firearms

Table A2. **Morocco – Forms of Repression and Justifications**

Form of repression / Justification	Killing (%)	Censor-ship (%)	Torture (%)	Physical violence (%)	Convic-tion (%)	Arrest/ detention (%)	Harass-ment (%)	Work-/ education-related punish-ment (%)	Denial of authori-zation (%)	Financial restriction (%)	Illegal activities (%)	Movement restriction (%)
Any communication	90	100	97.3	71.4	100	91.5	78.9	100	100	100	95.2	77.8
Violence	70	0	29.7	31	16.5	18.9	14	0	0	5.6	19.0	5.6
Authorization missing	0	8.3	5.4	4.8	9.3	5.7	5.3	0	0	5.6	19.0	0
Law and order	0	0	8.1	2.4	14.4	11.3	7	33.3	40	13.9	4.8	5.6
Criminal offense	10	0	35.1	9.5	23.7	21.7	8.8	16.7	20	8.3	38.1	11.1
Administrative infraction, professional codes, legal reasons	0	0	0	0	9.3	5.7	3.5	33.3	0	5.6	4.8	5.6
Membership	0	0	8.1	4.8	9.3	7.5	7	0	0	0	14.3	5.6
Defamation, insults, misinformation	0	58.3	8.1	7.1	35.1	24.5	19.3	83.3	0	75	0	11.1
National interest, security	0	25	13.5	2.4	12.4	15.1	12.3	0	60	11.1	14.3	27.8
Protest-related	10	0	10.8	9.5	15.5	13.2	5.3	16.7	0	11.1	9.5	0
Morals, religion	10	33.3	8.1	7.1	7.2	7.5	21.1	16.7	40	8.3	4.8	22.2
Terrorism-related	10	8.3	37.8	9.5	15.5	17	0	0	20	0	38.1	5.6
Non-justification	50	0	5.4	16.7	1	5.7	8.8	0	0	0	4.8	16.7

Table A3.   Tunisia – Forms of Repression and Justifications

Justification \ Form of repression	Killing (%)	Censorship (%)	Torture (%)	Intimidation (%)	Physical violence (%)	Conviction (%)	Arrest/detention (%)	Harassment (%)	Denial of medical care (%)	Work-/education-related punishment (%)	Denial of authorization (%)	Illegal activities (%)	Movement restriction (%)
Any communication	68.8	62.5	83.9	46.4	60.4	92.5	73.6	54.1	50.0	89.5	48.0	62.0	52.4
Violence	0	0	3.6	2.4	6.3	10.8	8.1	1.9	7.1	0	0	4.0	2.4
Authorization missing	0	12.5	5.4	3.6	4.2	7.5	6.1	6.3	0	5.3	12.0	8.0	7.1
Law and order	0	0	3.6	11.9	10.4	22.6	16.9	7.5	14.3	21.1	0	8.0	11.9
Criminal offense	0	0	25	9.5	11.5	25.8	18.2	4.4	21.4	21.1	0	10.0	0
Administrative infraction/professional codes/ legal reasons	0	12.5	0	4.8	1.0	9.7	6.8	11.3	0	26.3	12.0	0	11.9
Membership	0	0	8.9	6.0	4.2	16.1	10.8	3.1	7.1	0	0	8.0	7.1
Defamation, insults, misinformation	0	0	7.1	6.0	9.4	20.4	15.5	8.8	14.3	15.8	0	8.0	9.5
National interest, security	0	0	8.9	3.6	7.3	6.5	5.4	3.8	0	10.5	4.0	2.0	2.4
Protest-related	0	0	0	2.4	1.0	2.2	1.4	1.3	0	5.3	0	0	0
Morals, religion	0	0	3.6	7.1	2.1	11.8	8.1	6.9	0	36.8	4.0	4.0	4.8
Terrorism-related	12.5	0	44.6	4.8	14.6	35.5	23.0	1.9	14.3	0	0	20.0	4.8
Non-justification	56.3	37.5	16.1	7.1	18.8	1.1	8.1	17.0	14.3	21.1	20.0	24.0	16.7

Table A4. What Forms of Repression Were Communicated by Which Justifying Actors

Form of repression Justifying actor	Killing (%)	Censor-ship (%)	Tor-ture (%)	Intimi-dation (%)	Physical violence (%)	Convic-tion (%)	Arrest /deten-tion (%)	Court trial (%)	Harass-ment (%)	Degra-dation/ Zerset-zung (%)	Denial of me-dical care (%)	Work-/educa-tion-related punish-ment (%)	Denial of authori-zation (%)	Finan-cial restric-tion (%)	Move-ment restric-tion (%)
Communication	73.1	85.0	88.2	61.1	62.3	96.3	80.3	96.9	57.4	66.7	50.0	88.0	53.3	97.5	55.0
President	0	0	0	0	0.7	0	0	0	0.9	0	0	4.0	0	0	0
Prosecution	11.5	15.0	8.6	9.2	5.8	10.0	7.1	14.0	6.9	0	0	4.0	3.3	10.0	5.0
Court or judge	7.7	35.0	64.5	31.3	27.5	83.7	57.5	79.3	17.1	33.3	35.7	44.0	10.0	82.5	16.7
Pro regime media, party or NGO actors	0	0	0	1.5	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.5	2.3	33.3	0	12.0	6.	2.5	5.0
Police and law enforcement personnel	11.5	5.0	6.5	8.4	10.1	1.6	9.4	1.6	13.0	0	0	0	0	2.5	15.0
Government/parlia-mentary official	50.0	45.0	10.8	12.2	19.6	5.3	8.7	6.7	20.4	16.7	14.3	40.0	40.0	7.5	15.0

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