

# The Power of Words: State Reactions to Protest Announcements

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/cps](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/cps)**Johannes Vüllers<sup>1</sup> and Elisa Schwarz<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

Organizations often announce their protest activities prior to their implementation to mobilize awareness, recruit supporters, and receive media attention. We are interested in the effectiveness of protest announcements—that is, under what conditions governments make concessions to avoid having an announced protest take place. Governments assess the costs and benefits of providing concessions by taking into account the level of credible threat of the announced protest and the costs related to concessions. We test these assumptions with a unique data set on protest announcements and concessions in Nepal (2007-2010). Using cross-sectional regressions, we demonstrate that protest announcements by unions, announcements with highly threatening tactics and announcements with minimal demands will bring about concessions from the government. We contribute to the growing literature on different protest tactics by providing systematic empirical evidence, for the first time, on the effectiveness of mere protest announcements.

## Keywords

social movements, contentious politics, protest tactics

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## Introduction

Organizations often announce their protests before they put them into action, as a look at the newspapers in a particular context demonstrates. Protest announcements provide information about the planned protest, which can then be used by the government to prevent the protest from happening. However, many organizations do take this risk into account and announce their protest. There are two potential reasons for this behavior: First, the organization behind the announcement can mobilize its membership and the broader audience by demonstrating general activism. Second, the organization obtains information about the likely support for the protest from the public reactions.

We are interested in why and when governments make concessions to avoid an announced protest from taking place. The government will make its decision regarding whether or not to make concessions by taking into account the costs of the planned protest, which are related to the likelihood that the organization behind the announcement will be able to implement the protest and to the potential impacts of the protest on its electorate. The government will also include the costs of potential concessions intended to prevent the protest in its decision-making process.

To our knowledge, our study is the first systematic analysis of protest announcement as a tactic in its own right. We have found one case study that looks at the use of protest announcements, but it focuses only on the use of protest announcements and not on their effectiveness. According to this study, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) announced 16,030 protests against austerity policies in the year 1982 alone. The CTM called for a strike 109,845 times from 1982 to 1992 (Rojas Hernandez, 1995). The economic literature is more helpful for our purposes because it shows that protest announcements do have a substantial effect. Threats of strikes, which are the focus of these economic studies, are taken into account by financial markets because they put pressure on the stock market valuations of the affected companies (Dinardo & Hallock, 2002; Persons, 1995). Because it focuses on announcements in the economic field, however, this literature does not help us understand the impact of protest announcements on the government.

We make use of a unique data set on protest announcements and concessions from Nepal between 2007 and 2010. The codings are based on Nepalese daily newspapers, which provide the necessary information to test our theoretical model empirically. The data set is coded at the announcement level and covers 814 protest announcements from 299 different organizations. Our statistical analyses provide strong support for our hypothesis. The government makes concessions to the mere announcement if it views the announced

protest as a credible threat. We find that unions and announced tactics with potentially devastating consequences for the daily lives of large parts of the electorate result in government concessions. In addition, we demonstrate that the government makes concessions to announcements with demands that can be easily met. These findings are robust to alternative model specifications and the inclusion of a list of confounding variables, such as controls for prior announcements, their realization, and their success.

Our argument is not that protest announcements are effective and the best option in every situation. For example, organizations cannot announce protests on a daily basis without losing credibility. The supporters will get tired and less supportive if announcements fail to result in actions or concessions, while the government will view the organization as a loudmouth that is not willing to employ the protests. We show that protest announcement is a tactic that can be rational and effective under specific conditions.

This study contributes to the research on social movements and contentious politics in two ways. First, by focusing on protest announcement as a distinct strategy, we add a new perspective to the indefinite number of protest tactics (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). We show that protest announcements are part of many organizations' repertoire of contention and thus need more attention in the study of the dynamics of political protest (Cunningham, Dahl, & Frugé, 2017; McAdam, 1983). Second, research on nonviolent resistance and protest highlights the relevance of mass mobilization to the effectiveness of such strategies (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; DeNardo, 1985). By demonstrating that governments make concessions even without the protest actually being carried out, our study hints at the possible underestimation of the effectiveness of protests in existing studies that solely focus on protests that have actually occurred.

The article proceeds as follows: The "Studies on Protest Announcements" section provides an overview of previous research on protest announcements. In the "Government Reactions to Protest Announcements" section, we develop our theoretical model. The "Empirical Strategy" section presents the empirical data and is followed by the "Results" section. The "Conclusion" section summarizes our findings and discusses the implications for future research.

## **Studies on Protest Announcements**

Prior research has identified a number of factors influencing social movements' strategic decisions to protest and to select a particular tactic (Tarrow, 2011, pp. 39-41). Most of the research focuses on the particular protest tactic employed, such as nonviolent resistance campaigns (Chenoweth & Stephan,

2011; Gleditsch & Rivera, 2017) or street protests (Andrews & Biggs, 2006). Recently, studies have focused on internal organizational structures and competition between various organizations to explain the organizations' decisions to protest in a particular way (Cunningham et al., 2017; Pearlman, 2011). These studies provide comprehensive explanations of organizations' employment of a particular protest tactic, but not for the mere announcement of a protest.

The literature on social movements provides explanations of the rationale behind protest announcements. Using a rational approach, organizations select their strategies intentionally based on the costs that the tactics will incur and their anticipated success (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). The use of protest announcements as a tactic might be useful for various reasons. First, protest announcements are necessary to inform the supporters of the organizations about the planned activity. Second, the organization is able to mobilize its members and the broader audience by demonstrating general activism. According to the value-expectancy theory, people estimate their contribution to success and the cost of their participation when it comes to protest activism (Oberschall, 1994). If the prospective benefits gained through a collective good exceed the cost and risks of protesting, joining the group is rational and hence likely. Following Lipsky (1968), protest announcements are less cost intensive than the actual protest and thus a low-cost tactic to demonstrate commitment and activism.<sup>1</sup> As personal resources such as time and campaign expenditures are low, people can be mobilized more easily and at the same time bolster their commitment for the actual protest if necessary.

Second, the organization can use the announcement to test how many resources are required to obtain concessions from the government, because all organizations have limited resources, which they will try to invest in the most effective way (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Actors substitute their strategies according to their benefit–cost calculation (Lichbach, 1987). To ascertain their goals, protest groups heighten costs and efforts if necessary. Starting with a protest announcement as a minimum-cost tactic, organizations can increase costs and efforts gradually as a linear function of continuous pressure. Regardless of actual resources, protest announcements can be used by every organization.

The government can react in different ways, including repressive means or providing concessions. It will use repressive means when it feels threatened by a social movement (Davenport, 2007; Pierskalla, 2010). The findings regarding government repression in general are ambivalent because repression can increase or decrease the support for the protest (Davenport, 2007; Moore, 1998). A general finding, however, is that democracies use repressive

means less frequently than autocracies because they are bound by the laws and norms of the society (Carey, 2006; Muller & Weede, 1990).

Less has been written on the protest-concession nexus. Goldstone and Tilly (2001) argue that in line with the rationalist decision calculus, authorities accommodate if concessions are perceived more beneficial, that is, less costly than repressive means. Concessions are connected to short-term costs such as the resources needed for accommodation and the sacrifice of policy options and long-term costs such as potential bandwagon effects among protest groups (Rasler, 1996; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001). If those costs are perceived to be low, accommodation in the sake of power reestablishment is likely. However, providing concessions might be a risky strategy for the government as concessions may motivate people to protest due to the signal that collective action increases the chance to reach collective goods (Rasler, 1996, pp. 145-146).

When it comes to protest announcements, the primary goal of the government is to mitigate the costs *before* they are imposed avoiding short- and long-term costs by paying off the protesters. If groups announce their protest, the government evaluates the expected rather than the actual costs and chooses whether accommodating is more beneficial than taking the risk of protest realization. Protest announcements are, therefore, not only a strategic tool for protest groups but also a crucial factor in the decision calculus of the government. The literature highlights different factors explaining the success of protests. Governments appear to make concessions to protests with limited demands that can be easily met by the government authorities (Franklin, 2009). Gamson (1975, p. 46) finds that protest groups raising single-issue demands are more likely to be successful toward the government than groups with multiple-issue demands. He argues that influencing the antagonist rather than displacing it by full-fledged reforms is more likely to succeed. In line with this argument, more fundamental demands, which would require a general change in the political system or a policy field that affects large parts of the population, will be rejected by the government (Kriesi, 1996; Schumaker, 1975). However, research on nonviolent campaigns provides evidence of successful protests with the goal of regime change. The mobilization of masses on the street in support of the campaign is one of the most powerful indicators explaining campaign success (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Gleditsch & Rivera, 2017).

In sum, the literature on social movements and on government reactions to protests has neglected protest announcements. The most likely explanation for this is that protests that are actually carried out have a direct effect on the social movement and the government because they produce costs for both actors (Lipsky, 1968; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). A further practical issue might

be that actual protests are easier to detect in newspapers than protest announcements. One has to scan all subsequent newspapers to link protests that have taken place to their announcements or to identify the cancelation of the announced protests. Using our data set, we can for the first time address the question of why some protest announcements result in concessions from the government.

We contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, we introduce the announcement of a protest as a tactic in its own right, thus, expanding the repertoire of contention that has been theoretically and empirically limited to employed protest tactics. Research on protest announcements may improve our understanding of protest dynamics as it contributes to the puzzle of how organizations mobilize against contentious governments (McAdam, 1983; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). If the threat of protest itself proves to be sufficient to yield concessions, it is a cost-efficient substitute for risky and costly realizations and needs to be considered in the literature as a crucial tactic to challenge governments.

Second, the mere focus on protest realizations might lead to spurious results of the effect sizes due to omitted variable bias. The success of resistance movements is generally explained as resulting from large turnouts at protest activities, among other factors (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Our study questions this focus because these movements may obtain concessions even without the effective mobilization of their supporters if they are seen as a credible threat by the government.

Finally, most of the research so far concentrated on cross-national comparative studies, using aggregated data on a quarterly or yearly time base (e.g., Carey, 2006; Franklin, 2009). The total aggregate of government reactions and dissident's activity leads to contradictory results within the state-dissident nexus (Lichbach, 1987). To gain a better understanding of how strategic interactions between the state and challengers evolve, it is important to disaggregate information below the national level. This study relies on data collected on the district level in Nepal and accounts thus for the variety of contentious politics that leads to frequent protest activity.

## **Government Reactions to Protest Announcements**

In this section, we discuss our theoretical model, outlining the conditions under which the government will make concessions in response to the mere announcement of a protest to avoid the protest. If it is in the interest of the government to minimize the related costs then it should be a primary goal to mitigate the costs *before* the protests are imposed.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if groups announce their protest, the government evaluates the assumed rather than the actual

costs and chooses whether accommodating is more beneficial than taking the risk of protest realization.

By doing this, the government can choose from different options. The government evaluates the costs and benefits associated with the protest announcement based on the level of credible threat it poses and the costs of possible concessions to decide how to react. The level of credible threat of the announcement is related to the potential consequences once the protest is implemented. The most relevant factors will be the capability of the organization behind the announcement to implement the protest and the potential costs of the employed protest for the electorate. The costs related to government concessions are based on the amount of resources the government might have to invest to avoid having the announced protest take place. We discuss and propose indicators to measure both aspects empirically below.

Facing a protest announcement, the government has three different options: (a) ignoring the announcement, (b) taking preventive measures to ensure the protest will not be implemented, or (c) providing concessions to prevent the protest from taking place. Ignoring the announcement is the best option for the government if it does not perceive the announcement as a credible threat. For example, a local group of people who are unsatisfied with a particular government policy will most likely be ignored by the government because of their limited influence on the public discourse or directly on the government. A recent example is an environmental group's announcement of a protest in front of the White House to demonstrate against Trump's environmental policy.<sup>3</sup> This announcement had no effect on the president's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate deal.

The government will become active if the implemented protest would be more costly for the government than providing concessions. The decision to use repression, such as preventive arrests of possible activists (Davenport, 2014), depends on the government system. Although a democratic system limits the possible repertoire of preventive repressive measures (Carey, 2006; Muller & Weede, 1990), autocratic governments can, in contrast, make use of the full repertoire of repression if the announced protest is perceived as a credible challenge to the government. For example, in mid-June 2017, the Egyptian security forces raided houses and arrested dozens of lawyers in reaction to a call by lawyers to protest the transfer of control over two islands to Saudi Arabia at Tharir Square.<sup>4</sup>

Such preventive measures, however, are risky from the perspective of the government. In general, government repression can spark protests against the government and might thus initiate a broad-based antiregime movement. The literature on nonviolent resistance shows that this is most likely to be the case if members of the security forces have to repress their own relatives or view the repression as a very extreme reaction to nonviolence (Nepstad, 2013).

Finally, the government can make concessions if it deems fulfilling the demands to be less costly than the likely consequences of the protest. In the following, we elaborate on different measurements of the level of credible threat—the features of the organization behind the announcement, the announced tactics—and the costs related to fulfilling the demands. This results in the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** The government will make concessions in response to a protest announcement if it perceives the announcement as a credible threat and the costs of fulfilling the demands as low.

Other groups can be motivated by concessions to announce their own protests to likewise receive concessions from the government (Rasler, 1996). However, the government will only provide concessions for any organization if the announcement is a *credible* threat. Moreover, the government will try to prevent that announcements automatically lead to concessions and vice versa. It, therefore, takes into account the risk of undermining the stability of the political system in its decision on concessions. Finally, the government has an interest in testing the mobilization capability of the organization from time to time by declining concessions. Thus, a self-sustaining spiral of announcements-concessions is highly unlikely. Considering these conditions, it is highly unlikely that groups successfully can emulate protest tactics by other organizations if they do not have the necessary resources and because the government will do everything to avoid a knock-on effect.

### *Organization Behind the Announcement*

The perceived level of threat emanating from a protest announcement depends on the respective organization's ability to actually carry out the protest. The organization's institutional strength, resources, and ability to campaign are relevant indicators for the government. The presence of all of these factors increases the likelihood that the protest could be implemented as announced. The literature demonstrates that especially unions, political parties, and ethnic organizations have the organizational strength and dense networks required to become credible challengers of the government (Butcher & Svensson, 2016; Goldstone, 2001; McAdam, 1986).

Unions possess great institutional strength due to their homogeneous membership, interlinked through various companies, which is often viewed as a prerequisite for successful protest activities (Butcher & Svensson, 2016; Collier, 1999). Unions can fall back on their membership contributions to cover expenses during protest activities. They are, therefore, independent

from government subsidies or third-party donations (Ahlquist & Levi, 2013). They have experience with protest activities due to their interactions with employers, which range from negotiations to strikes. Moreover, they are experienced in protesting for political goals that are not directly related to their own membership but rather to broader policy demands (Ahlquist & Levi, 2013; Butcher & Svensson, 2016). Unions, therefore, demonstrate solid, experience-based campaigning ability (Collier, 1999). We thus conclude that the government will most likely view announcements by unions as a credible threat.

Political parties have comparable organizational strengths based on their institutional structures, which ensure that their heterogeneous membership will gather around a common political goal. They require resources from their members to implement their activities, which is a constant challenge due to the high number of political activities conducted. However, their regular activities result in a very strong ability to organize political campaigns (Lust-Okar, 2004).

In contrast to unions, opposition parties are direct competitors of the government—more specifically, of the political parties constituting the government. The incentives for the government to make concessions to a direct political competitor are very low. It would be rational for the government to wait until the opposing party demonstrates its willingness to bear the costs related to the announced protest by carrying out the first stage of the protest. This wait-and-see attitude has two advantages for the government. First, the direct competitor cannot obtain concessions and cannot frame itself as a successful challenger of the government. Second, the competitor has to bear costs by initiating the protest. In sum, protest announcements by opposition parties are a credible threat, but the costs for the government of providing concessions will outweigh their possible benefits. We thus assume that the government will perceive concessions to opposition parties as more costly than the possible implementation of the announced protest.

Finally, ethnic organizations are pivotal actors in many societies, as the successful lobbying for the inclusion for indigenous representatives in executive positions in Latin America (Vogt, 2016) or the diverse activities of ethnic groups and self-determination movements around the world demonstrate (Cederman, Weidmann, & Gleditsch, 2011; Cunningham et al., 2017). However, ethnic organizations lack the resources that the abovementioned organizations possess in many cases. First, they often do not have the institutional strength to be a valid competitor of the government because various organizations from the same ethnic constituency compete for the resources and the representation of the ethnic group. This competition within the same constituency undermines the political power of each individual ethnic

organization (Cunningham, Bakke, & Seymour, 2012; Vogt, 2016). Second, the government relies on the support of the major ethnic groups only, because they constitute large parts of the electorate. However, the ethnic groups with the most reasons to protest against the government tend to be rather small and are discriminated against by the government (Cederman et al., 2011; Gurr, 1993). In sum, the government will not view the announcement of protests by ethnic minority organizations as a credible threat and will, therefore, not make concessions.

### *Announced Protest Tactic*

In addition to who announced the protest, the announced tactic itself is relevant for the level of perceived threat. The government's power is based on its support within the electorate, and this support will crumble if many people become unsatisfied with government policy. The government thus analyzes the announced protest tactic in terms of possible costs for its supporters once implemented. The costs for the government will be high if large parts of the electorate would suffer under the announced disruptive nonviolent tactics (Franklin, 2009), for which the geographical scope of the protest is a good proxy.

The government will ignore protest tactics with a very limited geographical reach because of their limited impact on the electorate. For example, a hunger strike is a symbolic tactic that does not affect people other than the protester. Surely, it sends a signal about grievances in the population and it might be the start of a larger protest movement, as was the case in Tunisia, which was a trigger for the Arab Spring (Pearlman, 2013, p. 394). However, symbolic tactics often did not lead to a massive mobilization against the government. For example, the hunger strike by members of the German Red Army Faction ended on June 29, 1973, "[. . .] largely due to fading public and media interest." (Passmore, 2009, p. 35) A further example of a failed symbolic protest is the hunger strike by members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland, who could not change the public perception of them as "terrorists" (Mulcahy, 1995). In most cases, the government, therefore, will not perceive such tactics as credible threats because they are very limited geographically and do not have any effect most of the time.

By contrast, disruptive tactics that affect more than one region of the country will be perceived as credible threats by the government because many people from the electorate will be directly affected by the protest (Tarrow, 2011, p. 103). For example, calls for national protests, revolution, or general strikes imply costs for large parts of a country and, therefore, cannot be easily ignored by the government. Large parts of the electorate will have to bear the costs of such strategies, due to not being able to work or a lack of

basic supplies in their cities. Most likely, they will make the government responsible for their problems because in their eyes the government is responsible to maintain security. In the long run, parts of the electorate could support other political parties in the next election due to their disapproval of the government's policy or due to the government's inability to mediate conflicts. We assume that the government will make concessions in the case of protest announcements where the announced disruptive tactics would have devastating consequences for a large part of the electorate.

### *Announced Protest Demands*

Aside from who and how, the "what" of the protest announcement is another relevant category for the government. The research differentiates between maximalist and minimalist demands based on their systemic relevance for government policies.

Maximalist demands address high-profile policies (e.g., immigration, energy, national defense and regime change) with consequences for numerous other groups than the protest organization. In contrast, minimalist demands address low-profile policies with a limited scope of change. Their implementation does not interfere with the lives of other groups in a fundamental way and can be accommodated through a one-time payoff such as an invitation for mediation talks (Franklin, 2009; Kriesi, 1996; Schumaker, 1975). Taking its electorate into account, the government cannot make concessions to maximalist demands as these demands call for a fundamental change in parts of the government policy. Based on the cost-benefit calculation, it is no surprise that protests with limited demands are more likely to result in concessions from the government (Franklin, 2009; Gamson, 1975).

This mechanism also explains the government reactions to protest announcements. The government is more likely to accommodate minimalist demands than maximalist demands due to the restricted costs of the former. For example, it is relatively inexpensive for the government to react to a protest announcement with the establishment of a commission to inquire into the demands. It becomes more difficult for the government if the demands refer to more radical and substantial policy goals such as a change in the political system. The costs of making concessions in response to such claims are very high and are often not affordable or even feasible.

### **Empirical Strategy**

In the following subsections, we examine the effects of announcements on government concessions, making use of our new data set on announced

protests in Nepal between 2007 and 2010. The data set covers 814 protest announcements, which were directed at the government, as our unit of analysis. We first discuss the scope conditions resulting from the use of Nepal as our case study. Next, we discuss the coding of protest announcements and possible biases in our data sources. Finally, we discuss our data structure and variables.

### *The Case of Nepal*

Data restrictions and the requirement for information regarding the announcements make a single-case study a fruitful first step in the study of protest announcements because it can ensure a high degree of internal validity. Nepal has been in a state of transition from an autocratic to democratic political system after the end of the civil war in 2006. The Nepalese state had been weakened by the decade-long civil war. In the transition period, various societal groups and political actors challenged the government as the peace agreement included the provision to discuss a new political structure and constitution during our investigation period (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013; Upreti, Poudel, & Ghimire, 2013).

The state capacity is low due to the civil war and the transition of the political system, which should decrease the likelihood of concessions after protest announcements. In particular, the Nepalese government had a hard time to make concessions due to its unstable power position that did not allow making credible commitments. The state capacity was also lacking on a more disaggregated administrative level. According to a representative survey of the effectiveness of the Village Development Committees (VDC) in Nepal, the second lowest administrative unit, 70% of all VDCs did not have a representative on a regular basis (Inlogos, 2009). This makes Nepal a “least-likely case” for the effect of protest announcements on concessions.

The detection of the proposed effect would imply that our theoretical mechanism is also applicable to other cases in similar political contexts (Gerring & Seawright, 2007, p. 115). As the case of Nepal resembles a post-conflict transition to democracy, we draw our conclusions primarily for polities in transition. The literature shows that contentious politics play a particularly important role in these contexts (e.g., Beissinger, 2007; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Various examples moreover support the claim that also threatening tactics can result in reliable concessions from the government. In Pakistan, the opposition politician Nawaz Sharif called off a mass protest and sit-in in the capital after the government agreed to reinstate the former chief justice of the Supreme Court.<sup>5</sup> The opposition in Yemen canceled a planned “Day of Rage” after president Ali Abdullah Saleh publicly announced that he

would not pass the power to his son and that he would not extend his term limits in early February 2011.<sup>6</sup> In February 2008, Kenya's opposition leader Odinga called off announced mass protests after president Kibaki acknowledged some of his political demands for the first time.<sup>7</sup> These examples provide evidences in line with our theoretical argument from countries in transition periods, but future research is needed to look systematically at the effectiveness of protest announcements in cases beyond Nepal.

### *Data Sources and Validity of Analysis*

We have used local newspapers as data sources to ensure that we capture as many announcements as possible. The incentives to report on protest announcements should be higher for local newspapers than for international ones due to the low news value of announcements for the latter (Herkenrath & Knoll, 2011). The codings are based on two of the leading English daily newspapers in Nepal, the *Himalayan Times* and the *Kathmandu Post*. Although the headquarters of both newspapers are located in Kathmandu, both have editorial offices throughout the country. Editors and journalists from both newspapers and several other Nepalese newspapers assured us in interviews that they cover stories from all regions in Nepal.<sup>8</sup> However, we cannot rule out the possibility that a geographical bias exists because we only know about the reported protest announcements and not their real number.<sup>9</sup>

The validity of our analysis rests on the assumption that protest announcements and concessions are reported in the newspapers. Editors need to decide selectively on the relevance of certain events because print media provides only limited space. The most relevant factor is the news value of an event, which is high if it directly affects the personal lives of the readers (Schulz, 1982). This is the case for protest announcements because they allow the readers to prepare for a possible shutdown of traffic or of public institutions in the following days.<sup>10</sup> Reports on concessions have a similarly high news value because the readers will be informed that an announced protest will not take place. The journalists will receive the information about the concessions from the government and/or the organization behind the announcement. The government aims to show that it cares about civilian demands, while the organization behind the announcement wants to celebrate its success to mobilize additional resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

To avoid bandwagon effects and instability (Rasler, 1996), authorities could force the media to neglect such announcements and events to maintain control. According to the Freedom House Index, Nepal's press status improved consistently and ultimately reached a value of 578 during the period under investigation. This means that the law guarantees freedom of the press, legally

prohibiting the censorship and harassment of journalists. Moreover, our interviews with Nepalese journalists did not reveal any sign of government involvement in editorial decisions during the study period.

### Data

The unit of observation is the announcement district of a protest against the Nepalese government from 2007 to 2010. An announcement is defined as the explicit threat or proclamation of protest activity based on a political issue in opposition to (a) the central, regional, or local government or (b) the general social, economic, or political development in the country for which the government is made responsible.<sup>11</sup> We coded each of the announcements at the district level, based on the information in the newspapers about the location where the planned protest was to be carried out. The 526 protest announcements occurred in 53 districts, out of a total of 75 districts in Nepal. As some of the announcements called for protests in several districts, the number of observations increased to 814. Most protests (38%) had been announced in the capital district Kathmandu.

Our dependent variable, *government concessions*, is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the government offered concessions that led to the withdrawal of the announced protest. Concessions are defined as official statements, agreements, promises, or compromises taken by the government that are congruent with the protesters' demands that had resulted in the cancellation of the protest (Franklin, 2009). The time period for valid concession lies between the protest announcement and the date of the proclaimed protest realization. Thus, we do not code concessions that were provided by the government after the protest was carried out.

Two types of concessive reaction can lead to protest cancellation: First, direct action induced by the government within the time frame of protest announcement and proclaimed protest realization. The canonization of war victims, for example, can be implemented shortly and is a direct form of concession. Second, as not all demands can be met directly within this given time frame of announcement and protest, the government needs to react by making credible promises to the protesters. For example, the demand of an increase of salary as an extensive legal act cannot be met within days. As the government needs to strengthen its legitimacy and avoid reemerging protest or backlashes, it will offer credible and binding promises. However, we are not able to control if the promises by the government are kept after the protest is called off.

Although announced protests are also canceled due to holy festivals, weather conditions, or other factors, we make sure that government concession was the

reason for the withdrawal of the announced protest. Concessions are only coded with “1” if the reason for the protest withdrawal was explicitly linked to concessions made by the government.

The government offered concessions in 51 cases (6%). In 763 cases, no concessions were offered or the concessions were not successful. By comparison, a global study of violent campaigns finds that such campaigns have a 12% to 15% chance of being successful, depending on the measurement of success and their demands (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 9). A study on politically active ethnic organizations in Latin America shows that their constituencies were politically included at the subnational or national level in approximately 17% of all group years (Vogt, 2016, p. 793). Surely, protest announcements are less successful on average than other tactics of contentious politics. This can be explained by their low cost, which means they are a tactic used frequently by many organizations. However, a success rate of 6% is surprisingly high for a low-cost protest tactic. Especially, if one takes into account that our data set includes all protest announcements covered in the newspapers and not just those campaigns with generally strong mobilization (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011).

According to our theory, three different factors—the organization behind the announcement, the announced tactic, and the announced demands—affect the government’s cost–benefit calculation. In the following, we discuss the operationalization and the data for each of the three independent variables. First, we differentiate between unions, political parties, ethnic organizations, and others as announcers of the protest. Each organization has been coded in only one of the categories. The newspaper articles include the names of the organizations that announced the protest. Based on the names, we searched for a description of the organization in various data sources—primarily in the newspapers themselves.

We coded organizations as *unions* if they represented a specific economic group. For example, the All Nepal Trade Union, the All Nepal Petroleum Workers Association, and the Civil Servants’ Organisation are representatives of petroleum-industry workers and civil servants. We coded organizations as *political parties* if they were recognized officially by the Nepalese government as a political party. The data were obtained from the Nepalese electoral commission. *Ethnic organizations* are nongovernmental organizations that are mainly composed of members of a specific ethnic group and whose explicit and main purpose is to promote the political interests of the group (Vogt, 2016, p. 793). All other organizations—including ad hoc groups, religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations—were coded as *other groups*. We did not disaggregate the information further due to the low number of potential subgroups.

**Table 1.** Protest Announcements by Organizations.

	Number of organizations	Number of announcements
Unions	100 (33%)	273 (33%)
Political parties	13 (4%)	91 (11%)
Ethnic organizations	53 (18%)	214 (26%)
Other groups	133 (44%)	236 (29%)
Total	299	814

Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of the organizations between the four categories. The unions used protest announcements most frequently (273 cases), which might be explained by the high number of active unions. Their announcements were mostly linked to specific policy demands addressed at the central government rather than objections to general developments. For example, the Teachers Union of Nepal repeatedly called for permanent employment, pay raises, and gender equality by threatening to halt teaching activities. Political parties, by contrast, used protest announcements in more general terms to reject competing agendas. For example, the CPN-Maoist party announced several protests throughout the period of investigation, pushing for civilian supremacy as a primary tenet in the constitution. However, only 13 political parties announced protests in 91 cases. The 53 ethnic organizations announced protests in 214 cases in our data set. Their goals were related to the federal government structure, with the goal of ending discrimination against ethnic identity groups. The other groups category is too diverse to be discussed in more detail.

We use as an alternative measure the capacity of the organizations to mobilize supporters from the subset of the population that each organization claims to represent in additional analyses. We used as a proxy for the mobilization potential of unions the percentage of people employed in the sector that each union claimed to represent at the district level (census 2011). For example, a teacher union is able to mobilize only teachers and not workers in general. The results from the national election in 2008 are used as a proxy for the mobilization capacity of the political parties.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we used the percentage of each ethnic group in a district to proxy the mobilization capacity of the different ethnic organizations (census 2011). We used the information on the district level because the protest announcements are restricted to a particular area. The central government thus will evaluate if the group is able to mobilize the necessary support in the respective area.

The information has been merged into one variable using the log-transformation to deal with the skewed data. The variable *mobilization (log)* includes

the percentage of the population in the respective district (unions and ethnic organizations) or at the national level (political parties) that the organization might be able to mobilize in its protest. Around 75% of all organizations had a mobilization capacity of less than 10% of the district population. Only 4% of the organizations addressed more than 30% of the population.

Second, the variable *high-threat tactic* is coded with “1” if the announced tactic is intended to unfold at the national or regional level and would lead to significant structural and physical damages. For example, *bandhs* are popular and highly effective shutdowns that are regularly enforced nationally and regionally. Public and private transportation comes to a halt, and shops, cafes, and hotels are forced to close. In addition, shutdowns of emergency services and petroleum supply routes, as well as the announcement of armed struggle, are also considered to pose maximum risk, and the pressure to react immediately is evident. 20% of all announcements included a protest tactic with a high level of threat.

Third, the demands of the announcements might affect the likelihood of government concessions. The variable *minimalist demands* is, therefore, coded with “1” based on two indicators. First, issues that involve material and immaterial compensations, such as the canonization of war victims, the payment of compensation fees, or the release of cadres, impose low costs on the government. These demands are symbolic and do not involve substantial amendments to existing laws. Second, general accusations, demands, and claims intended to draw attention to a certain grievance are coded as minimalist demands. As no specific call for action is proposed, the government can respond with general and thus less costly concessions. In contrast, calls for a complete change to the political system—for example, the introduction of an ethno-federal system—are coded as maximalist demands because it is not easy to make related concessions in a short period of time. In sum, 413 protest announcements (51%) made minimalist demands and 401 (49%) made maximalist demands.

We control for several factors that might affect the decision to announce a protest and, at the same time, the government’s decision to make concessions. First, the previously announced and then enacted protests are a strong indicator for the government that the organization is willing and able to carry out the protest. We have, therefore, constructed the variable *percentage prior realization*, which captures the percentage announced and subsequently implemented protests by each organization.

Organizations do form struggle committees to announce and implement a protest. The goal is to better coordinate their activities, which should result in a higher threat level for the government due to greater support. We thus control for the number of organizations involved in the protest announcement

(*organizations involved*). A single organization was behind the protest announcement in 95% of all observations; the maximum number of organizations supporting one protest announcement was seven.

Prior concessions due to protest announcements should increase the likelihood of new protest announcements and of concessions. Organizations can be motivated by prior successful announcements, and the government might not be able to make a reasonable distinction between concessions to one group but not another. We control for this with the variable *number of concessions (week)*, which is based on the concession variable in our data set over the last 7 days for each protest announcement. No concessions had been made by the government to a protest announcement in the prior week in 42%. The maximum was four concessions in the prior week (in 1% of all observations). We include a dummy variable indicating if the protest had been announced for more than one district (*several districts*), which happened in 39% of all cases. Finally, we control for time dependency by including polynomial days without announced protests for each organization in its untransformed, squared, and cubed transformation (Carter & Signorino, 2010).

Our main estimation strategy takes into account many district-specific factors that might affect the likelihood of protest announcements and concessions. The political and socioeconomic conditions at the district where the announced protest is to take place affect the organization's decision-making process and the government's reaction. Instead of controlling for a selection of such factors, we include fixed effects at the district level in all our models to control for these unobserved factors. On the downside, the fixed effects approach discards all observations from districts that do not experience any concession at all. We thus also report the findings of a multilevel random-intercept model with observations nested at the district level and pooled logit models to keep most observations of our sample. The multilevel structure of the random-intercepts models allows the intercept to vary across districts capturing the differences across districts (Gelman & Hill, 2007).

## Results

Table 2 presents the estimated coefficients and standard errors for the different models, using concessions by the government as our dependent variable. The standard errors are clustered at the organizational level in all models. We find general support for our theoretical argument that governments will make concessions to protest announcements if the announcement is perceived by the government as a credible threat and the costs associated with the concessions are low.<sup>13</sup>

Models 1 to 3 in Table 2 show the results for our main model using fixed effect, pooled, and multilevel random-intercept approaches. In line with our expectations, unions, tactics with a high degree of threat, and minimalist demands make concessions by the government more likely. The reference category is protest announcements by other groups (Models 1-3, Table 2).

Next, we run a conservative model by taking into account the fact that the government needs time to respond to protest announcements. The government will not be able to make concessions and distribute a press release about doing so when the announced protest is scheduled to take place the next day. We, therefore, include only those protest announcements published at least 2 days prior to the planned implementation in Models 4 to 6 (Table 2) to ensure that the government was given the opportunity to make concessions. The results remain robust, thereby, increasing our confidence in the findings.

Our theory predicts that it is primarily unions that will be perceived as a credible threat by the government. We change the reference category in Model 7 in Table 2. This model uses the conservative measurement of at least 2 days between the announcement and the planned implementation. The statistical effect of unions remains similar (0.01 level) if we compare unions' and political parties' likelihood of obtaining concessions (Model 7, Table 2). The variable *other groups* is not statistically significant in the model, which is in line with our theoretical argument that the government will assess the level of threat based on the resources and the campaign experience of the organization behind the announcement.

The effects are quite strong according to the marginal effects based on Model 4 in Table 2 (Figure 1). The likelihood of receiving concessions from the government is 8% higher for a union than for *other organization*. The perceived costs associated with the announced tactic have the greatest impact on the government's calculations regarding whether to make concessions, according to all models. The likelihood of obtaining concessions is 10% higher if the announced tactic has a high degree of threat. In line with our theory, low costs associated with possible concessions (minimalist demands) increase the likelihood of obtaining concessions by approximately 6%.

In fact, unions are the only organizations statistically positively related to a higher likelihood of obtaining concessions from the government (Figure 1). This finding highlights the important role of unions in politics beyond the representation of their direct membership (Ahlquist & Levi, 2013; Collier, 1999). Examples from other countries, such as China or Kenya, indicate that students can have a great impact on protests (Cooper, 2014; Hirsch, 1990).

In the case of Nepal, students form "unions" with strong linkages to the different political parties (Snellinger, 2007). We thus expect that student unions will be seen as a highly credible threat by the government. In a

Table 2. Effectiveness of Protest Announcements.

	Fixed effects		Pooled		Multilevel		Fixed effects		Pooled		Multilevel		Fixed effects	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession
Unions	1.398** (0.495)	1.610** (0.505)	1.610*** (0.304)	1.364* (0.538)	1.592** (0.554)	1.592*** (0.355)	1.319*** (0.375)							
Political parties	-0.017 (0.489)	0.210 (0.544)	0.210 (0.551)	0.045 (0.538)	0.132 (0.602)	0.132 (0.518)								
Ethnic organizations	0.489 (0.705)	0.695 (0.720)	0.695 (0.655)	0.254 (0.808)	0.552 (0.835)	0.552 (0.707)	0.208 (0.608)							
High-threat tactics	1.779*** (0.379)	1.730*** (0.375)	1.730*** (0.378)	1.843*** (0.459)	1.794*** (0.442)	1.794*** (0.430)	1.843*** (0.459)							
Minimalist demands	1.043* (0.474)	1.002* (0.454)	1.002*** (0.199)	1.008† (0.546)	1.007† (0.527)	1.007*** (0.216)	1.008† (0.546)							
Percentage prior realization	0.320 (0.365)	0.285 (0.349)	0.285† (0.157)	0.496 (0.427)	0.491 (0.411)	0.491* (0.201)	0.496 (0.427)							
Organizations involved	-0.084 (0.259)	-0.101 (0.254)	-0.101 (0.110)	0.028 (0.272)	0.009 (0.261)	0.009 (0.142)	0.028 (0.272)							
Number concessions (week)	0.846*** (0.185)	0.769*** (0.153)	0.769*** (0.079)	0.890*** (0.213)	0.787*** (0.177)	0.787*** (0.096)	0.890*** (0.213)							

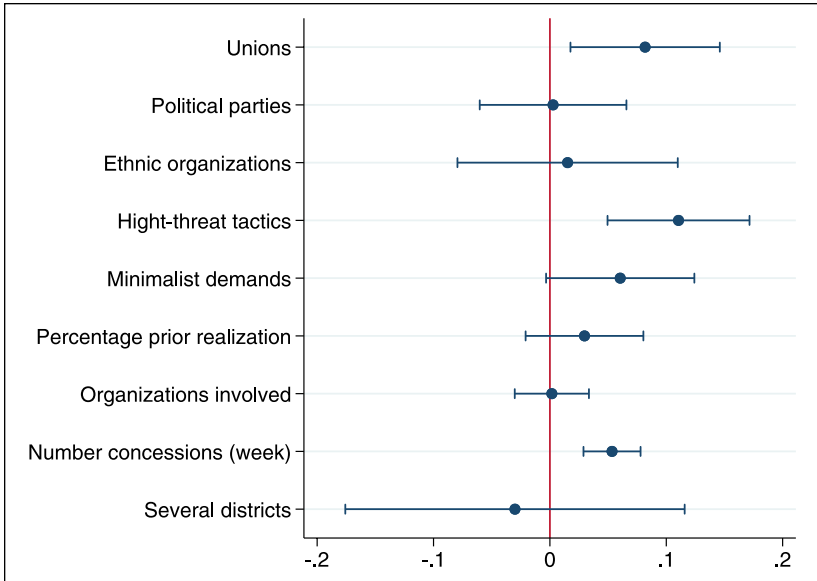
(continued)

**Table 2. (continued)**

	Fixed effects		Pooled		Multilevel		Fixed effects		Pooled		Multilevel		Fixed effects	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession
Several districts	-0.611 (1.125)	-1.330 (1.028)	-1.330† (0.700)	-0.500 (1.257)	-1.144 (1.092)	-1.143 (0.779)	-0.500 (1.257)	-0.500 (1.257)	-1.144 (1.092)	-1.143 (0.779)	-0.500 (1.257)	-0.500 (1.257)	-0.500 (1.257)	-0.500 (1.257)
Other groups														
District controls		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes			
Constant	-4.370** (1.372)	-3.835 (7.952)	-3.835 (6.025)	-4.662** (1.449)	-6.900 (9.263)	-6.899 (7.063)	-4.662** (1.449)	-4.662** (1.449)	-6.900 (9.263)	-6.899 (7.063)	-4.662** (1.449)	-4.662** (1.464)	-4.617** (1.464)	-4.617** (1.464)
Variance (district)			0.000 (0.000)				0.000 (0.000)				0.000 (0.000)			
r <sup>2</sup> p	.280	.307		.290	.308		.290	.290	.308		.290		.290	.290
n	498	814	814	482	804	804	482	482	804	804	482	482	482	482

Temporal controls not shown. Standard errors in parentheses.

†p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.



**Figure 1.** Average predicted probabilities.  
Effect based on Table 2, Model 4.

robustness check, we included student groups in the variable *unions* (incl. *student unions*) and excluded them from our *other groups* variable. The results remain robust, which can be explained with the low number of protest announcements by student unions in Nepal (only 43 announcements). In fact, the government provided only in six cases concessions after a protest announcement by a student union.

In line with our expectations, we do not find any positive and statistically significant effect for protest announcements by political parties. It might be the case that government parties will obtain concessions more easily than opposition parties because members of the government coalition might be viewed as being less threatening than opposition members. 80% of the political parties in our sample are government parties, which can be explained by the power-sharing coalition government after the end of the civil war. In fact, most of the announcements were made by the CPN-Maoists, the former rebel group (Ishiyama & Marshall, 2015). The Maoists used protest announcements as a power tool in the postconflict period, as they tried to highlight their independence from the other established parties in Nepal. In fact, the CPN-Maoists was the only party to receive concessions by the government in

four cases. However, their protest announcements had been successful only after leaving the government. In all of these cases, the government and the CPN-Maoist reached an agreement over the next steps resulting in the cancellation of the announced protest. As the CPN-Maoist is a special case due to its history as rebel group, our findings regarding protest announcements by political parties should be interpreted with caution.

Being an ethnic organization does not have any effect on the likelihood of receiving concessions from the government. In line with the literature on ethnic deprivation, it could be the case that organizations representing ethnic groups that are politically excluded will obtain fewer concessions than organizations from politically included ethnic groups (Cederman et al., 2011). Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to test this because all the ethnic organizations in our sample are from excluded ethnic groups.

In line with our argument, the government seems to assess the costs associated with an announcement based on the potential threat of the proposed tactic. This behavior is highly significant in all models. A further distinct type of potential threats is tactics that hold the potential for physical or structural damage on a lower scale (*low-threat tactics*). Unlike sit-ins or other protest tactics restricted to a particular locality, such tactics exceed the scope of actual efficiency because padlocks on educational institutions, the disruption of traffic, or picketing of buildings might lead to knock-on effects. For example, blocked traffic routes hinder delivery services and might culminate in delivery failures and subsequent production delays within the corresponding economic systems. If we include such low-threat tactics as a distinct category in our models, the effect of high-threat tactics remains robust, as do all the other findings. Low-threat tactics, however, do not have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of obtaining concessions. This finding supports our argument that the government will perceive only those announced tactics that will directly affect large parts of its electorate as a significant threat.

Looking at the controls in Table 2, we find no robust statistically effect for the percentage of protests previously carried out by the particular organization.<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, having a greater number of organizations involved in the protest announcement has no statistical effect on the chance that the government will offer concessions. One explanation might be that the institutional coordination increases with the number of organizations involved. The different organizations might not have the same opinion regarding a potential offer of concessions by the government, and at least some of them might, therefore, opt for carrying out the protest. We cannot test this assumption due to data limitations. Granting of concessions in the prior week increases the likelihood to get concessions, which can be explained by the difficulty of the government to justify concessions only to particular groups. Finally, the

announcement of protests in several districts at the same time does not increase the likelihood to get concessions. The government will not perceive those announcements credible due to the large resources necessary to coordinate protests in more than one region.

For our robustness checks, we control for possible time effects that might drive our results. We first include year fixed effects in our models to control for unobserved developments over time. Second, we include polynomials at the district level instead of the organizational level, because the government might look at potential threats to specific areas in the country to avoid constant problems in a district. Third, protest announcements need to be feasible to be credible in the eyes of the government. Aside from assessing the geographical feasibility, for which we control with the district fixed effects, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the protest announcement took place during the monsoon period in Nepal (June to September). The results remain robust in all of these different tests for unobserved time effects.

In sum, our statistical analyses provide strong support for our argument that the government will react to a protest announcement with concessions if it thinks that the costs of the actual protest would be very high (credible threat) and the costs of the concessions are relatively low (demands).

### *Alternative Measurements*

In a next step, we take a closer look at the different explanatory variables and their effects on the likelihood that the government provides concessions. One concern of our measurement so far might be that the organizational type is not a reliable proxy for a *credible threat* because it does not capture the different mobilization capacities of each organization. Table 3 provides an overview of the models using *mobilization capacity (log)* (Model 1) as explanatory variable, including dummies for the different organizational types (Model 2) and the interaction of *mobilization capacity (log)* with the different organizational types (Models 3-5) using Model 4 (Table 2) as reference model.

Model 1 (Table 3) indicates that the mobilization capacity of the organization alone has no statistical effect. Model 2 is in line with our theoretical assumption and findings showing only a statistical significant effect for unions (Table 3). To interpret the interaction effects, we plot the average simulated effects of the mobilization capacity for each organizational type (Ai & Norton, 2003). We exclude a discussion of the effect of the mobilization capacity of political parties as the effect is only driven by the former rebel group, the CPN-M, as the only party receiving concessions from the government due to protest announcements (see discussion above).

**Table 3.** Mobilization Capacity of Protest Organizations.

	Fixed effects		Fixed effects		Fixed effects		Fixed effects		Fixed effects		Fixed effects	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)				
	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	Concession	
Mobilization(log)	-0.414 (1.864)	-0.339 (2.184)	-1.773 (2.268)	0.555 (2.387)	1.306 (2.184)							
Unions		1.387* (0.571)	0.956† (0.518)			1.378** (0.510)	1.321* (0.539)	1.239* (0.487)				
Unions x Mobilization(log)			3.953 (2.902)									
Political parties		0.128 (0.650)		-53.291*** (2.821)		0.021 (0.527)	0.082 (0.583)					
Political parties x Mobilization(log)				200.847*** (11.421)	0.068 (0.636)							
Ethnic organizations		0.286 (0.794)				0.399 (0.690)	0.156 (0.789)	0.074 (0.644)				
Ethnic organizations x Mobilization(log)	1.830*** (0.437)	1.834*** (0.446)	1.930*** (0.451)	1.842*** (0.435)	-10.144 (7.387)	1.746*** (0.384)	1.808*** (0.468)	1.808*** (0.468)				
High-threat tactics	1.182* (0.543)	1.006† (0.544)	1.003† (0.534)	1.175* (0.550)	1.056† (0.543)							
Minimalist demands												

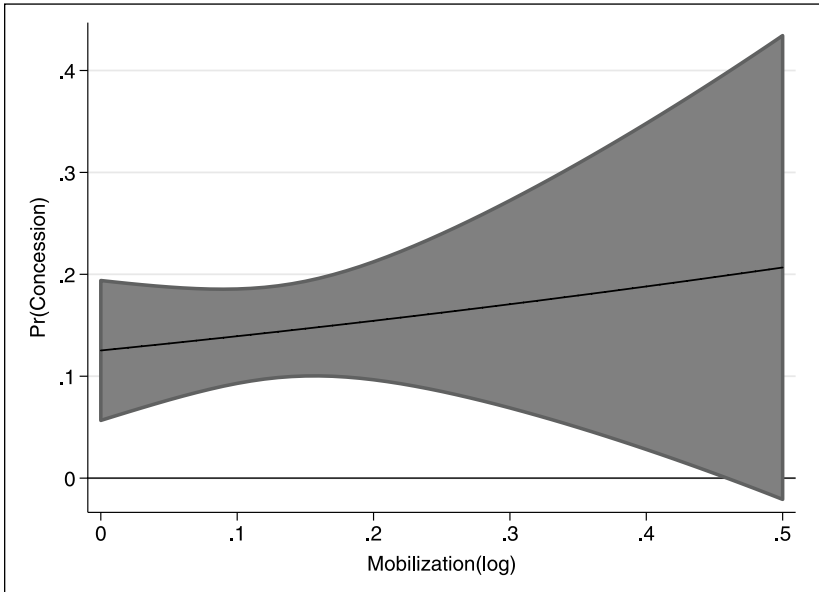
(continued)

**Table 3. (continued)**

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)		(7)		(8)		
	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	Concession	Fixed effects	
Political demands																	
Social demands																	
Economic demands																	
Security demands																	
Percentage prior realization	0.523 (0.453)		0.488 (0.445)		0.547 (0.442)		0.532 (0.465)		0.564 (0.415)		0.334 (0.353)		0.334 (0.353)		0.527 (0.415)		0.527 (0.415)
Organizations involved	0.113 (0.226)		0.029 (0.270)		0.031 (0.265)		0.081 (0.226)		0.124 (0.227)		-0.079 (0.242)		-0.079 (0.242)		0.037 (0.255)		0.037 (0.255)
Number concessions (week)	0.853*** (0.212)		0.893*** (0.219)		0.877*** (0.215)		0.872*** (0.208)		0.876*** (0.215)		0.852*** (0.166)		0.852*** (0.166)		0.878*** (0.189)		0.878*** (0.189)
Several districts	-0.480 (1.228)		-0.498 (1.256)		-0.459 (1.251)		-0.530 (1.238)		-0.295 (1.244)		-0.752 (1.068)		-0.752 (1.068)		-0.624 (1.194)		-0.624 (1.194)
Other groups																	
Constant	-4.310** (1.394)		-4.677** (1.455)		-4.432** (1.465)		-4.220** (1.391)		-4.360** (1.364)		-4.140** (1.284)		-4.140** (1.284)		-4.392** (1.333)		-4.310** (1.390)
$r^2$	.252		.289		.292		.260		.268		.274		.274		.279		.279
$n$	481		481		481		481		481		498		498		482		482

Temporal controls not shown. Standard errors in parentheses.

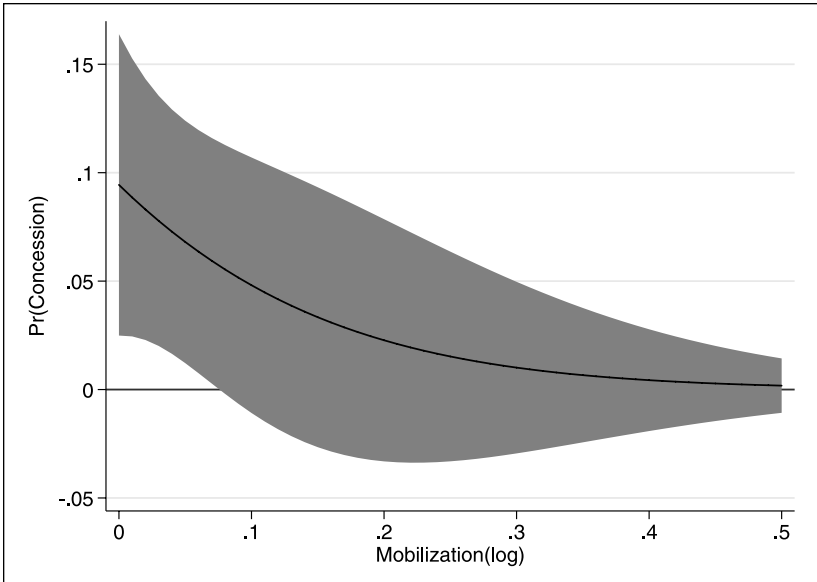
\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 2.** Marginal predicted mean for unions. Effect based on Table 3, Model 3.

Figure 2 plots the average simulated effect of the mobilization capacity of unions (Model 3, Table 3). The plot runs contrary to our expectation that unions with a great mobilization capacity should have a higher probability to get concessions. The plot indicates that the threat of protest announcements by unions is not credible if the union’s mobilization capacity is above 40% of the district population. It will be harder for a union to convince the government that it is feasible to mobilize so many people for its goals. The government might rather investigate not the diffuse mobilization capacity of the union that we measure with our proxy, but rather the organizational capacity by using information of the union’s membership. Based on the limitations of our measurement and the available data, this finding should be investigated in future studies.

Figure 3 shows the average simulated effect of the mobilization capacity on protest announcements by ethnic organizations. It demonstrates that ethnic organizations with a high mobilization capacity are not more likely to get concessions from the government. As most of these announced protests had been related to self-determination, the government might fear to open Pandora’s box if it agrees on any concessions with those groups. By contrast,



**Figure 3.** Marginal predicted mean for ethnic organizations.  
Effect based on Table 3, Model 5.

seven ethnic organizations that got concessions could only mobilize less than 3% of the population in the respective district and the government only promised to discuss the demands in most of these cases.

Our models so far demonstrate that the costs associated with the concessions will be taken into account by the government. Demands with relatively low costs will be more likely to result in concessions from the government than maximalist demands. However, the content of the demands—that is, which policy field the protest announcement addresses—might also be relevant to the government decision. Theoretically, the government could prioritize certain security issues over social issues, as they might be more challenging for the power of the government. Thus, it could be that the government offers concessions to protesters when they force security issues, even though they might contain maximal demands.

We have, therefore, coded each protest demand in terms of its content with regard to political, economic, social, and security issues. The codings are mutually exclusive. First, *political goals* are related to the political system in Nepal and refer to the structure of the political system, decisions by politicians, or calls for a new policy. Second, announcements with *economic goals*

address working conditions, economic development, or infrastructure projects. Third, *social goals* include all calls related to a better educational system or health system, and calls for an end to discrimination against particular groups. Fourth, *security goals* cover all calls for an improved security situation and the release of prisoners.

We include each of these goals and distinguish between maximalist and minimalist demands in each category, based on the general codings of the variable *minimalist demands*. For example, if the protesters' goal is the increase of female teacher and girl's education, we coded this issue as a social goal. Matched with the information from the variable *minimalist demands*, we can determine whether the policy field itself, that is, social goals, has an effect. Interestingly, we do not find any statistically significant effect for the content of the demands (Models 6-8, Table 3). The only exception is *security demands* in the fixed-effects model (Model 6), but the finding is not robust as the variable is not statistically significant in the alternative model specifications. The government does not care about the goal of the protest, but only about the costs associated with making concessions.

## Conclusion

A look at the daily newspapers demonstrates that organizations often make use of protest announcements as part of their strategies of political contention. However, the literature on social movements has neglected the potential impact of announcements by focusing solely on protests that have been implemented. We have argued in this article that protest announcements constitute a tactic in their own right, and that they can be effective, leading to concessions by the government without actually being implemented. We have proposed a theoretical model explaining the rationale behind the government concessions as the perceived level of credible threat and the costs related to the concessions.

We have argued that the government will base its decision about the level of threat on the features of the organization behind the announcement and the announced protest tactic. In contrast to other organizations, unions have the resources, the networks, and the experience to implement most announced protests. Protest announcements by unions are a credible threat, while the government will tend to avoid making concessions to its political competitors (political parties) and to organizations with limited institutional strength (ethnic organizations). The most threatening tactics for the government are those affecting large part of the electorate, because the government might lose the support of many people once the protest is employed. In the end, the government might be blamed for the devastating consequences of the protest, which

might result in the voting out of the government. To avoid such negative consequences, the government will try to prevent such protests from taking place. Finally, it will be less costly for the government to make concessions to minimalist demands because they do not involve a renegotiation of the foundations of the political system. In sum, the government assesses the costs and benefits of providing concessions in response to protest announcements.

We have tested our theoretical arguments with a unique data set on protest announcements and concessions in Nepal between 2007 and 2010. Using different estimation strategies, we have demonstrated strong statistical support for our theory. Protest announcements by unions, high-threat tactics, and minimalist demands increase the likelihood of obtaining concessions from the government. Our results are robust to alternative measures and the inclusion of various confounding variables. We have, therefore, demonstrated in this study that protest announcements are a contentious tactic in their own right. However, such announcements are not always the best option for an organization, as the low number of successful cases indicates.

Empirical studies of protests should take protest announcements into account if they are interested in the effect of different protest tactics (e.g., Biggs & Andrews, 2015; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Cunningham et al., 2017), but future research is needed to improve our understanding of protest announcement as a unique tactic. Nepal is a least-likely case according to our theoretical model as the government lacked the necessary state capacity to provide credible concessions. Anecdotal evidences from other transition countries, such as Pakistan, Yemen, or Kenya, provide additional support for our case study. However, our analysis is only a first step in a broader research agenda. Future research might look into autocratic regimes to study protest announcements in unjust and oppressive circumstances. We expect that the number of protest announcements and their effectiveness should decrease. Moreover, we have not looked into the dynamics between protest announcements and the following protest cycle. If organizations use protest announcements as an initial test of the resources they need to invest to obtain concessions from the government, we would expect that the protest tactics used subsequently will become more and more costly for the organization and the government. Future research, therefore, should look at the interaction between the government and the protest organization revealing new insights of protest dynamics.

### **Authors' Note**

The data set, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at the *CPS* website.

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## Supplemental Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online at the *CPS* website <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0010414018784059>

## Notes

1. We do not argue that protest announcements are costless, but rather that they come with only limited costs for the organization compared with protests that are actually implemented. Possible costs related to announcements could be coercion by the government authorities (Davenport, 2014) or decreasing support for the organization if the announced protests are never realized. The examination of these points goes beyond the focus of this article.
2. The government stands for the power holders in the country's executive in this article, which will be the political parties in power.
3. <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/335871-pro-paris-agreement-protest-planned-outside-the-white-house>; last accessed June 30, 2017.
4. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/egypt-arrests-dozens-proposed-island-protests-170615214000313.html>; last accessed June 30, 2017.
5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/16/world/asia/16pstan.html?pagewanted=all>; last accessed January 10, 2018.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/yemeni-president-says-he-will-not-run-again-in-effort-to-stave-off-day-of-rage-1.561808>; last accessed January 10, 2018.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/kenyan-opposition-calls-off-protests-1.819223>; last accessed January 10, 2018.
8. Information based on personal interviews conducted in Nepal, April to May 2014.
9. The codings are based on scans of the newspapers by the Nepalese Press Council. Unfortunately, some days and months are missing for both newspapers because they are not part of the Nepalese Press Council data set. The random (according

- to information from the Press Council) absence of newspaper scans should not induce a systematic bias in our data set.
10. Our descriptive information from the variables make us confident that no significant reporting bias toward particular organizations behind the announcements, sensational tactics, or maximalist demands exist (see next section). All of these characteristics might increase the news value of a protest announcement, according to research on reporting bias for protests (Herkenrath & Knoll, 2011).
  11. 72% of all protest announcements addressed the national government. Our results remain stable if we include a control for announcements addressing the national government.
  12. The electoral system in Nepal is based on a mixed-system of a proportionate system (through which the majority of members is elected) and the election of members in 240 constituencies. However, only the three major parties had been able to set up candidates in all constituencies (Ishiyama & Marshall, 2015, p. 596). We used the percentage of the votes according to the proportionate system as our data set includes announcements by many small parties.
  13. All robustness checks referred to in the following are part of the online appendix.
  14. In the robustness checks, we control for the number of previously announced and realized protests of an organization. The government might assess the likelihood that a protest will be implemented by looking at the protest history of the organization behind the announcement. All results remain robust.

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