Student Demobilization in Electoral Autocracies:

A Cross-Case Analysis

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Ayşenaz Toptaş**, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis titled "**Student Demobilization in Electoral Autocracies: A Cross-Case Analysis"** is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the conditions that lead to the demobilization of student protest campaigns in electoral authoritarian (EA) regimes. While much of the existing literature focuses on the emergence and escalation of protest, this study shifts attention to the less explored phenomenon of demobilization. Drawing on an original protest episode dataset constructed from ACLED event-level data (2020–2024), the thesis develops a demobilization index based on episode frequency, average length, and intensity. Using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the study examines 27 EA regimes to identify causal pathways associated with demobilization. The analysis reveals that no single condition is necessary for demobilization, challenging assumptions about the centrality of repression. Instead, the parsimonious solution identifies two sufficient paths to demobilization: heavy repression combined with unified opposition (HR*~FO), and fragmented opposition combined with low higher education autonomy and absence of pro-government countermobilization (~FO*HEO*~CM). These results suggest that protest demobilization is not always coerced, but can stem from institutional and structural vulnerabilities. The findings contribute to scholarship on authoritarian resilience, student activism, and protest outcomes, and underscore the value of analyzing demobilization through disaggregated, episodic data and set-theoretic methods.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What factors contribute to the demobilization of protests in electoral authoritarian (EA) regimes? For the success of social movements and protest mobilizations, stamina, and long-term engagement are often key factors. However, many movements experience demobilization of members and activists before their struggles can lead to achieving their goals. This research scrutinizes the mechanisms behind protest demobilization in EA regimes.

EA regimes beget conflicting dynamics for contentious politics. Multiparty elections are regularly held nationally as "institutional façades of representative democracy." At the same time, the governments systematically violate liberal democratic "minimum standards," according to Schedler's seminal work on the subtype (Schedler, 1). These minimum standards include peaceful contentious activity. While the right to protest is often constitutionally recognized, protesters and more broadly civil society actors suffer from overt as well as covert attempts at dampening contention. Furthermore, crucial factors that influence protest mobilization, such as (c)overt repression, elite support, political opportunities, or media coverage, do not follow conventional patterns as they do in democracies and closed autocracies. State response can involve a mix of coercion, co-optation, concession (Leuschmer and Hellmeier, 2023), and "selective tolerance" (Chen and Moss, 2018). Sometimes, opposition elites take advantage of political leverage successfully; at other times, they fail to mobilize in the face of the most apparent transgressions (Kahvecioğlu and Patan, 2021). If the state exerts control over mass or social media channels, movements face challenges in gathering support. In simpler words, a protest movement's lifecycle is shaped by inconsistent and thus unexpected factors in EA regimes. Although much has been said about the state of protest movements in EA settings, no work has centered "demobilization" as a standalone process with its separate dynamics.

Student protesters occupy a place in collective memory as major mobilizing forces in democracies and EAs alike. The group benefits from multiple advantages when it comes to mobilization and is often at the forefront of protests. Research has focused on features specific to the university and the student to explain concentrated contentious activity. That being said, the inconsistencies mentioned above are applicable to student protesters in EA regimes. While anti-government protests led by Serbian university students have so far led to multiple high-level government officials' resignations, the 1968 student protests in Mexico were brutally squashed. With such abundant contradictory examples across history, this research seeks to answer the puzzle: why do *some* student movements in electoral authorities demobilize without success, while others do not? What explains the different trajectories of movement lifecycles in these regimes?

I employ qualitative comparative analysis of EA regimes to explain the conditions that lead to demobilized protest activity. The approach captures the "causal complexity" that is often overlooked when it comes to demobilization while allowing for both breadth and depth in theory building (Oana, Schneider, Thomann, 2021, p. 6). I focus on the recent five-year period between 2020-2024 and extract each demonstration by student protestors using the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED).

The following chapter offers a survey of the literature on movement decline and presents four theoretical expectations. Chapter 3 outlines the case selection, scope conditions, data collection, and calibration decisions for the QCA. I then present the empirical findings, including truth tables and solution formulas. In Chapter 5, I discuss the results and explore potential causal mechanisms that explain demobilization in electoral authoritarian regimes. I conclude the thesis with reflections on the study's contributions, limitations, and avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The social movements literature has concentrated on movement emergence and maintenance. Scholars were mainly interested in the factors that sparked contention. The central theories within the field were thus efforts to explain how movements, or protest campaigns, began and developed in response to each other. Early accounts that sought to explain protest participation saw it as a disruptive act done by deviant members of society. With a strictly psychological approach, researchers purported that people protested to voice grievances about material conditions (Gurr, 1970; Morrison, 1973; Geschwender, 1964). Resource mobilization theory similarly looked at structural factors conducive to the emergence of a social movement; namely, the availability of material, organizational, cultural, and human resources. (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978; Jenkins, 1983). The political opportunity perspective held that the political context within which a movement emerges would affect its development and impact; thus, the presence or absence of various structural elements would determine the "emergence, development and influence of protest movements" (Meyer, 2004; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004: 1457). Sociologists supplanted the gaps left from these structural explanations with collective identity, a "perception of a shared status or relation" individuals hold within their broader society (Poletta and Jasper, 2001). This concept emphasized the role of identities in mobilization and strategizing, and was often used in connection with "new social movement theories" that prioritized recognition rather than material claims. The recent "affective turn" in social movement studies brought in people's emotional states and rejected the dichotomy between emotion and rationality (Jasper, 1998). Finally, the social psychological approach to protest mobilization reconciles many aspects of agent-centric explanations. For example, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) identify grievances, efficacy, identity, emotions, and social embeddedness as the main explanators of social movement participation,

and Aytaç and Stokes (2019) introduce social pressures into the rational-choice model to explain protest participation.

Having broadly discussed the libraries of work done on protest mobilization, this chapter will focus on the far less developed literature on movement demobilization. I will present an overview of how different theories of social movements define and explain demobilization, organized to reflect the macro, meso, and micro explanations of demobilization. Then, I will tighten my focus on demobilization in electoral authoritarian regimes and highlight state response, opposition structure, and counter movements as potential explanations. Four related hypotheses follow, setting out the expectations of the research.

2.1) Demobilization in the Literature

Having briefly covered the vast literature on the emergence of a protest movement, it becomes apparent that not all lifecycle stages receive equal attention. Often taken for granted as the "flip side" (Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, 2014) or "mirror image" (Feldman, 2021) of the process of emergence, the unique dynamics of demobilization or movement decline have not yet been subject to rigorous research. Lapegna (2016) calls for studying demobilization in its "active production" (p. 14), and researchers such as McAdam (1986), Oegema and Klandermans (1994), Lewin (2019), and Pilati et al. (2021) have criticized the omission of studies about nonparticipation or decline. A dual approach wherein non-participation is studied alongside participation, where non-participants are included in the sample of studies, does prove important to display the mechanisms and features unique to demobilization.

The existing work on social movement decline discusses the phenomenon under many names. Social movement decline, demobilization, and non-participation all refer to the various levels at which activity dissipates. Therefore, this review employs a descending order of scale to organize the present work on various scopes of declining protest activity. The macro analyses

of movement decline correspond to large-scale theories of political opportunity structures, where researchers focus on shifts in political conditions to explain why some movements demobilize. The meso level of analysis focuses on the organizational aspects of movements and therefore finds the source of demobilization in the interactions between micro and macro factors. Finally, the micro analysis centers around the individuals' decision-making processes, and therefore is often within the realm of social psychology. What ignites a person into action, that is, the action of protesting that involves risks.

Staggenborg (2002) presented an overview of the multiple scales present in social movement studies while advocating for more emphasis on meso-level analyses. I draw upon her classification as I refine the levels of analysis in more specific works on demobilization. These macro, meso, and micro levels of social movements facilitate a thorough analysis of the state of the field while highlighting the shortcomings when it comes to demobilization. I draw upon my earlier review (Toptaş, 2024), which surveys the literature on protest mobilization in a structure that parallels the one adopted in this thesis.

	Scope of Demobilization	Conditions of Demobilization
Macro level	Political Opportunity Structures	Concessions (Leuschner and Hellmeier 2023) Opposition structure (Vladisavljević 2016; Kahvecioğlu and Patan 2021)
Meso level	Social Movement Organizations Resource Mobilization	Critical events (Demirel-Pegg 2017) Countermobilization (Zeller 2021, 2022; Lapegna 2013) Radicalization/Polarization (Tarrow 1998) Cooptation (Piven-Cloward 1995) Repression (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler 2021, Girod et al. 2017, Aytaç et al. 2017, Arslanalp and Erkmen 2021)
Micro level	Individual Disengagement Rational Choice Theory	Emotions (Karmel and Kuburik, Jasper 1998, Grimm 2025) Cost-Benefit Calculation (Opp 2022, Aytaç and Stokes 2019)

Table 1. Three levels of demobilization in the literature

2.1.1) Macro Demobilization: Closing Political Opportunity Windows

Macro-level approaches to social movements consider decline as a gradual, long-term process, emphasizing the social, structural, and cultural factors that underlie it. Scholars working within this framework often focus on political environments that inhibit movement emergence or continuation. Tarrow (1998) introduces the concept of "cycles of contention" to underscore the temporal rhythm of movements—how waves of contention rise, crest at a tipping point, and eventually decline. He also notes the relative lack of research on the decline phase of movements, speculating that the topic may be underexplored because it tends to be, in his words, “depressive reading” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 143). However, his analysis stops short of offering a fully developed macro-level theory of demobilization, instead identifying three broad causal processes that contribute to it: exhaustion and internal divisions, institutional absorption and violent escalation, or a mix of repression and facilitation (Tarrow, 1998, p. 147).

Kahvecioğlu and Patan (2022) examine the Turkish case, attributing the scarcity of anti-government protest to three mechanisms of “protest-averse behavior”: high regime repression, electoral moderation strategies by the opposition, and continued faith in the ballot box. Rooted in the political opportunity model, their analysis stresses the critical role of elite endorsement in enabling protest. Yet under Turkey’s electoral autocracy, the opposition’s mobilization capacity is weakened, and elite support becomes harder to secure. This study thus exemplifies a macro-level explanation of demobilization by linking protest aversion to regime-specific political dynamics.

Pilati et al. (2021), meanwhile, focus on the outcomes of demobilization following revolutionary episodes. Through a comparative analysis of Egypt and Tunisia, they argue that the challengers' ability to build alliances shaped whether post-revolutionary paths led to democratic transition or authoritarian restoration. Their findings reinforce the importance of understanding demobilization, given its potential to lead to vastly divergent regime trajectories.

2.1.2) Meso Demobilization: Depleting Organizational Resources

The meso-level scope of social movement studies refers to the organizational bases and culture of social movements that serve as an intermediary between the micro level of individual decision-making and the macro level of long-term change. Due to its intermediary position, research on the meso level is in constant dialogue with both micro and macro levels. Staggenborg (2002) advocates for the benefits of starting social movement analysis from the meso level, as these interactions among micro and macro levels provide a more comprehensive account of the movement in question. These organizations regulate individual participation through frame creation, resource allocation, and community formation. They also determine the larger scope of social movement outcomes through the collective identity they foster. Certain decisions made by these organizations and their interactions with the political context might lead to a decrease in mobilization and overall movement decline.

Meso-level work on movement decline can focus on movement organizations' interactions with a variety of factors. Demobilization can occur as the unexpected outcomes of critical events (Demirel-Pegg, 2017), due to "dual pressure" faced by movement organizers in the context of patronage politics (Lapegna, 2013), "cooptation" of leaders via formal organizations (Piven and Cloward, 1995), radicalization and polarization (Lasnier, 2017; Heaney and Rojas, 2011), or brutal repression (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler, 2021; Girod et al., 2016), and so forth. These works employ a great variety of cases, such as the 1979 anti-foreigner protest campaign in Assam, India (Demirel-Pegg, 2017) and the 2003 protests against corporate herbicide use in

Argentina (Lapegna, 2013). What brings this wide range of cases and causal mechanisms is that their initial point of contact in the causal chain is the organizational units of social movements.

Davenport (2014) has thus far made the most concise attempt to address this question. Based on fine-grained archival research, he highlights four different aspects on the meso level that characterized the end of the Republic of New Africa, an initially successful Black nationalist movement: inter-organizational rifts and internal structural breakdowns; a decline of movement membership; a decrease of contentious activities; as well as ideological transformation and programmatic shifts.

2.1.3) Micro Demobilization: Individual Choice

The micro-level study of movement decline is often the realm of social psychology, as it concerns individual decisions and motivations *not to* participate. Most political psychological accounts of social movements have been interested in participation and focused on what moves a person to action. Taking part in a protest, as a form of contentious political activity, has drawn researchers' attention as it seemed to defy rational cost and benefit analysis. As Stokes and Aytaç (2019) state, protesting is associated with unique risks, and each person's participation offers negligible gains to the overall group. In other words, the decision-making process that leads to protest participation is puzzling, and thus far has been the topic of interest in the micro-level of social movement studies.

In other words, the causes of movement decline were assumed to be the negation of the emergence conditions. For example, Ketelaars et al. (2014) studied frame alignment among movement organizers and participants and found a correlation between higher levels of frame alignment and participation. In their discussion, they speculated that if their sample had included non-participants, they would have found that higher levels of frame alignment increased the chances of participation, revealing the researchers' underlying assumption that

individuals who do not participate in a movement act within the same decision-making mechanism as participants (p. 13). The likes of such an assumption were also what Klandermans and van Stekelenburg (2014) defined as the tendency to consider non-participation as the "flip side" of participation. In reality, however, non-participation has its own dynamics and complex reasoning (p. 341). Therefore, de-mobilization on the micro, personal level is also an abundant area of research to question what seems intuitive.

The decline of the anti-Vietnam War movement in the US drew the interest of social scientists to the dynamics specific to movement decline. Orcutt and Fendrich (1980) advocate for a "potentially valuable source of insight" that had not yet been fully explored by social movement scholars, which was "students' own views of their demobilization (203). In a university-wide survey of undergraduate students, the researchers test explanations of demobilization proposed by resource mobilization theorists (Gamson and Zald, Oberschall) and find that the students' political orientation and past protest participation significantly factor in the explanations they provide for demobilizing student protests. For instance, leftist students who highly participated in protests were more likely to agree that the movement declined due to a shift in movement values, whereas the overall responses pointed to "internal weaknesses" and "ineffective leadership" as explanations of the decline of the 60s student movement in the US. Work that is directly concerned with individual non-participation can also be found, although it is less frequent.

After this overview, an operational definition for this research is in order. The project adopts the meso scope and is interested in both regime-specific and organizational determinants of demobilization. In the same vein, cases in question are instances of campaign demobilization, instead of those of individuals. The following section will begin with an operational definition of electoral authoritarian regimes and present hypotheses about demobilization in EA regimes.

2.2) Demobilization in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes

Schedler (2015) defines EA regimes as systems that maintain the institutional "appearance" of representative democracy while practicing authoritarianism: "They hold regular multiparty elections at the national level, yet violate liberal-democratic minimum standards in systematic and profound ways" (p. 1). Among the liberal-democratic minimum standards violated are often the right to peaceful assembly and protest. What distinguishes EA regimes from their closed authoritarian counterparts is the constitutional recognition of these rights. While the right to protest is often constitutionally recognized, protesters and, more broadly, civil society actors suffer from overt as well as covert attempts at dampening contention. That being said, some protest campaigns take place despite their overtly anti-government agenda, and some even lead to concrete victories for the movements. In other words, EA regimes defy the simple assumptions about movement survival with a variety of factors that influence demobilization, such as repression, elite support, political opportunities, or media coverage. The section is organized to reflect the most common themes of demobilization in the literature: state response, opposition strength, and pro-regime counter movements.

2.2.1) State Response

State response to contentious activity can involve a mix of coercion, co-optation, concession (Leuschner and Hellmeier, 2023), and "selective tolerance" (Chen and Moss, 2018). However, scholarship has not converged upon the impact of these responses. For overt protest repression, literature suggests that it can hamper immediate/future protest activity (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler, 2021) or catalyze stronger or longer activity, called "backlash" protests (Aytaç et al., 2018). Francisco (1995) provides an overview of the competing theories of coercion and protest dynamics, expanding on the simpler binary with hypotheses such as "inverted-U" or "predator-prey". Given the complex nature of direct repression, it is difficult to estimate its standalone

effect in demobilization. Backlash mobilizations are often strong emotional responses to what bystanders define as "extreme" repression by the state, and they do not promote long-term mobilization by themselves. In turn, consistent police intervention can increase the costs of participation for individuals, thus resulting in demobilization in the long term. Therefore, our first hypothesis focuses on the long-term effects of consistent protest repression in EA regimes. I expect to see campaign demobilization if a majority of their events were repressed by the police.

Hypothesis 1: Student campaigns demobilize under heavy repression.

2.2.2) Organizational Strength

The longevity of student protest movements is closely linked to the organizational capacity of student actors, which is often shaped by the structural environment of the university. As semi-autonomous spaces with concentrated populations of politically conscious youth, universities have historically served as "hotbeds of activism" (van Dyke, 1998). They help overcome collective action problems by fostering dense social networks, routine interaction, and shared physical space that enables organizing. However, the ability of student movements to leverage these organizational advantages depends heavily on the degree of autonomy of their higher education institutions. When universities retain administrative and political independence from a repressive government, they provide students with a relatively protected arena to engage in protest and form strong activist organizations.

Conversely, a lack of institutional autonomy under EA regimes directly undermines this capacity. In many contexts, the state exerts control over higher education by legal and administrative reforms to centralize authority. Governments may alter university governance structures to allow for direct appointments of loyal administrators, limit student unions, restrict political activities on campus, or subject university spaces to increased surveillance and police

access. These legal changes have many consequences for academic freedom, quality of education, and collective action. They raise the cost of mobilization and disrupt the organizational features that sustain protest, such as student clubs, assemblies, and informal activist hubs. Without institutional autonomy, students lose one of their most critical sites for sustained mobilization.

So, the level of institutional autonomy can serve as a proxy for the organizational strength of student movements. Where autonomy is preserved, students are better able to maintain communication channels, coordinate actions, and shield their organizing from direct repression. Where autonomy is eroded, student protest activity becomes more vulnerable, and difficult to sustain. This relationship is particularly important in EA regimes, where universities often are one of the first targets for regime control and dissent suppression. Therefore, I expect low institutional autonomy to contribute to student demobilization.

Hypothesis 2: Student protests demobilize without institutional autonomy in higher education.

2.2.3) Opposition Structure

In addition to state response, the opposition plays an important role in EA regimes for contention. These regimes, unlike their closed authoritarian counterparts, can boast strong opposition parties that challenge the incumbent in elections. These challenger parties often become the institutional pillars around which contentious activity unite. Their relative strength against the incumbent can thus inform the mobilizational strategies of contentious activity. Opposition parties can support mobilization in various ways, they can supply material and human resources for movements, or they can help create political opportunities for contentious activity by challenging the incumbent. If the opposition front is divided against the incumbent, these support systems will be less available to movements seeking to challenge the regimes. Vladisavljević (2016) argues that Serbia's competitive authoritarian regime under Milošević

provided the opposition with institutional resources to organize and confront regime elites, facilitating popular protest. Sjögren (2024) also finds that strong opposition parties make civic activism "more possible and meaningful" (p. 21). In Uganda since 2001, the opposition front suffered from fragmentation and could not engage with civil society around various pressing issues, such as electoral security and cost of living. While huge crowds initially mobilized, they quickly demobilized in the face of repression without due organizational support from the opposition. In this vein, I expect negative demobilization to occur in countries where anti-regime opposition is fragmented and weak.

Hypothesis 3: Protests demobilize in regimes with fragmented opposition structures.

2.2.4) Pro-Regime Counter Movements

Finally, an important issue to address is the existence of pro-government movements and campaigns in EA regimes. It is possible to classify pro-government protests as a strategic response by the regime itself, mobilizing supporters to signal strength (Hellmeier and Weidmann, 2020; Kahvecioğlu et al., 2023). Aside from this regime-centric approach, we can also expect pro-regime, or at least regime-adjacent, mobilizations in EAs, especially when the population is polarized over party support. These can be considered naturally occurring counter movements that often receive preferential treatment by the government. And we can expect these counter movements, organic or strategic, to create pressure upon any anti-regime protest campaign. These can take the form of actual stand-offs on the street (Zeller, 2022), or intimidation that increases the cost of protesting for dissenters (Hellmeier and Weidmann, 2020: 73). Earl develops the notion of "social control," which involves private actors as agents of repression (2004, 2006). Zeller (2021) adapts the concept for the study of right-wing movement demobilization in democracies. Counter movements are but one aspect of the pro-government civil forces in EA regimes, but they are by far the most visible and consequential

when it comes to protest campaigns. Therefore, the final hypothesis centers around the presence of counter movements, formulated here to include both strategic and organic inceptions, to explain demobilization.

Hypothesis 4: The presence of a pro-government countermovement demobilizes protest in EA regimes.

Having outlined the four hypotheses of the research, I will reformulate an overarching hypothesis of protest demobilization under EA regimes in set relational terms. While all these factors are individually relevant for demobilization, the phenomenon is a product of conjunctural causation. None of the conditions outlined above can be individually sufficient by itself to bring about demobilization. Indeed, there exist movements that have not demobilized despite the harshest of repression, countermovement activity, or a highly fragmented opposition support. I only expect heavy repression to feature significantly as a necessary condition of demobilization, especially in the context of EA regimes. I expect the remaining three to feature as INUS conditions, which are individually insufficient but necessary parts of configurations that are unnecessary yet sufficient for the outcome. The reformulation of hypotheses follows as such:

H1: Heavy repression is a necessary condition for the demobilization of student campaigns in EA regimes.

H2: Low institutional autonomy in higher education is an INUS condition of student demobilization in EA regimes.

H3: Fragmented opposition structure is an INUS condition of student demobilization in EA regimes.

H4: Pro-government countermobilization is an INUS condition of student demobilization in EA regimes.

While conditions for demobilization could be multiplied in theory, this list of hypotheses addresses the most prevalent structural explanations and engages with the major theories of social movement studies, namely state response (*H1*), resource mobilization (*H2*), political opportunity structures (*H3*), and social control (*H4*). This chapter has presented the theory-led hypotheses of the research. In the following chapter, I will introduce the methodology and discuss operationalization decisions, data collection, and processing.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study employs Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as its primary methodological tool. QCA is particularly advantageous for studying protest demobilization in EA regimes because it captures causal complexity by identifying combinations of necessary and sufficient conditions. Conceptually, demobilization results from an "equifinal" and "asymmetrical" process, which again yields itself to a set-theoretic cross-case analysis. This approach allows us to respond to some of the fundamental dead ends of protest studies. For instance, research that has sought to understand the impact of protest repression on mobilization has arrived at contradictory results. Case studies abound with ample evidence for both a hampering Demirel-Pegg and Rasler, 2021) and catalyzing (Aytaç et al., 2018) effect of repression. However, a systematic cross-case study can provide a finer-tuned causal explanation for repression's ambivalent effect: which combinations demobilize and which ones mobilize?

To uncover the demobilizing combinations of factors, this study operationalizes the prevalent explanations of state response and political opportunity structures. This section begins with a description of the case selection and the population of protest events. Then follows the collection and calibration decisions for the outcome and conditions. Results will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

3.1) Case Selection and Scope Conditions

This research investigates the demobilization of student protest movements between 2020 and 2025 in regimes consistently classified as EA by the V-Dem dataset. I choose to focus on this recent five-year period for multiple reasons, the first being empirical practicality. This period allows us to observe short to medium-term protest trajectories and their potential resolution. Extending research into long historical timelines would risk introducing too many exogenous variables. Empirically, this period benefits from relatively rich and standardized protest event

data on ACLED and cross-national regime indicators on V-Dem. Secondly, the period saw a high number of student mobilizations, due to intersecting political, economic, and educational crises, also intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, making higher education a main stage for contention.

The main scope condition is regime type: all cases are constrained to EA regimes as defined by V-Dem. Therefore, the solution formulas are valid for consolidated EA regimes, but are not constrained by a temporal scope. Which means that the same hypotheses and solution formulas should hold for any periods of consolidated EA regimes in the past or the future. It does not aim to explain demobilization in liberal democracies or full autocracies, but an argument can be made about regimes in transition; democratizing or de-democratizing towards an EA classification might be within the theoretical scope. By using a cross-case design of 27 countries that meet both regime and protest criteria, the study seeks to identify causal patterns underlying demobilization.

3.2) Data Collection

The research creates a universe of student protest events in electoral authoritarian regimes before classifying whether the movements have demobilized. To this end, I used the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), which collects "dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world" (Raleigh et al., 2023). The dataset was cleaned to only include the event type "Protests," excluding other violent events like "Battles", "Violence against civilians", or "Remote Violence". The data has varying time coverage for each country, and only events between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2024, were included. Only countries that were consistently classified as "Electoral Authoritarian Regime" by V-Dem's yearly democracy reports since 2021 were included in the dataset. Changes in democracy scores in a way that sways the country

classification would imply fluctuations in regime type that could impact the mobilizational dynamics. By only including consistently EA regimes, the research can omit the effects of (de)democratization processes. The next step was isolating student protests in these countries. ACLED's *assoc_actor_1* variable distinguished between specific protester groups and denoted student events as "Students (Country Name)". The resulting list included 17034 student protest events across 27 EA regimes in five years. This event list informed the demobilization classifications of student protests.

Demobilization presupposes the existence of prior mobilization. In several EA regimes, however, student contention was virtually absent. To ensure analytic relevance, I excluded all countries in which fewer than ten student-led protest events occurred during the study period. Over the five-year span, Azerbaijan recorded only nine events; Benin six; Burundi two; Cambodia eight; the Central African Republic eight; Comoros five; Djibouti one; Singapore one; Tajikistan one; Tanzania one; Togo two; the Republic of Congo five; and both Rwanda and Equatorial Guinea recorded zero events. These countries were therefore excluded from the dataset and omitted from the construction of protest episodes and the demobilization index developed in the subsequent analysis.

3.2.1) Demobilization

Demobilization refers to a distinct phase of a protest campaign, wherein the scale and scope of contentious collective action decreases (Tilly & Tarrow 2015, Ch. 6). It manifests as a decline in participant numbers, activity frequency and spread. However, it is not possible to define each such drop as demobilization due to the often cyclical nature of protest campaigns. Demirel-Pegg draws attention to two characteristics of demobilization this research also adopts. First, demobilization should be delineated from a mere decline in activity. In that, demobilization is eventually linked to the absolute *end* of a campaign (Demirel-Pegg 2015). This is different

from the natural drop in protest frequency that follows a peak, and an operational definition should capture this difference. Secondly, demobilization can follow successful as much as it can unsuccessful outcomes. Considering mass protest as a way of claim-making in the larger political scheme, disengaging after having demands met, or their "raison d'être" fulfilled is expected behavior (Zeller 2021, p. 273). This research is interested in the other side of the coin, demobilization processes without any success, also called "negative" demobilization. These cases of demobilization are not explained by the claim-making framework, and the failure can be attributed to a plethora of conditions. Consequently, our definition should only include cases of negative demobilization.

I use this two-step definition to construct raw demobilization scores for each country, and calibrate set membership scores. Working with a protest event dataset, I have an advantage to work with protest count frequencies. Zeller (2021) also takes demonstration size into consideration while coding for negative demobilization. However, information on crowd sizes was not consistently available in the dataset. Therefore my demobilization indicator builds upon protest frequency. To achieve this, I chose to work with protest episodes rather than aggregated protest event days. This concept refers to series of events that occur in "temporal proximity" to each other. Protest events are sorted into the same protest wave if they occur within seven days (Leuschner and Hellmeier 2023, p. 12). This is to account for weekly reoccurring protest campaigns in a country. Leuschner and Hellmeier also incorporate a spatial element into their conceptualization to account for subnational events in large countries, but the spatial element does not relate to this research as I group student mobilizations taking place in a country as a single unit, regardless of city or region. An episode begins with a protest event, and continues as long as another event occurs within the following seven days. If the subsequent protest occurs on the eighth day, it signals the start of a new episode. Episodic formulations of protest continuity is useful because it aligns closely with the natural

organization of protest events, and allows the researcher to differentiate between shorter and smaller mobilization periods from longer and more intense ones (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2024). This is especially pertinent to the logic of demobilization, as sustained protest episodes signal strong mobilization, while their lack thereof indicates the decline and eventual end of the campaign. **Figure 1** visualizes the student protest episodes that took place between 2020 and 2024 in each of the cases. Turkey had the most episodes in this five year period (n = 45), followed by Venezuela (n = 39) and Philippines (n = 38). Regarding length of episodes, India's student movement was the most durable at 1317 days where 6789 separate events were recorded. Consequently, this was also the most intense protest episode across our dataset, with 5.1 daily average of protests. Protest episode counts, lengths, and intensity give us different information about campaign demobilization. According to the first characteristic of demobilization described above, an episode of decline constitutes demobilization when the frequency, duration, and intensity of episodes decline. I standardized the three variables to allow cross-country comparison, and then created a combined demobilization index with the formula below.

$$DEM_{raw} = 1 - \left(\frac{E + L + I}{3}\right)$$

where:

E= number of episodes in country i,

L = average duration in days of episodes, and

I = average intensity, (number of events per day within each episode).

Each case now has a corresponding raw demobilization score, ranging from 0 to 1. A higher score thus indicates fewer, shorter, and less intense protest episodes—consistent with a stronger degree of demobilization. Before assigning calibrated scores, I had to eliminate instances of

positive demobilization where protesters achieved their goals and subsequently demobilized. This was an investigative task; I researched news reports for months that corresponded with the demobilization, and looked for information on concessions in response to student protests. This stage suffered from a lack of systematic information on concessions, as the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes 3 (NAVCO) dataset reports state concessions does not yet cover beyond 2012 (Chenoweth et al., 2018). I manually scored cases with positive demobilization 0, which included Cameroon.

For the final step, I calibrated the raw demobilization scores into fuzzy-set membership scores using the indirect method in the QCA package. Based on the empirical distribution of the index values, I selected thresholds for full non-membership, crossover, and full membership at the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles respectively. In the absence of established theoretical or empirical benchmarks for calibrating demobilization scores, this study uses percentile-based thresholds to assign fuzzy set membership values. This approach ensures that cases with low demobilization (i.e., robust protest activity) receive values near 0, while fully demobilized cases receive values approaching 1, with intermediate scores representing partial or ambiguous cases. By using percentiles, the calibration scheme distinguishes between clearly demobilized, ambiguous, and robust campaign cases, while minimizing distortion from skewed data.

This approach builds upon a specific theoretical definition of demobilization. In the absence of participant counts, demobilization is visible in the degree of decline in the number of protest activity. Episodic data offers a more accurate measure of sustained protest activity than monthly aggregates, as it captures the event clusters across time. The arithmetic mean of episode frequency, average duration, and average intensity provides a composite indicator that approximates the level of demobilization. Another advantage of this systematic identification of episodes is that it avoids survivor bias, one of the common pitfalls in studies of

demobilization. The index considers all episodes short and long; and meaningfully captures the difference between a case with short but frequent bursts of student protest (Philippines), and one with few but sustained episodes (Bangladesh, Pakistan). After the calibration, we are left with positive demobilization cases (0), partial demobilizations scored continuously, and full negative demobilizations that indicate a total end of episodes (1).

Set Name	*Abbre.*	*Raw Scores*	*Calibration Anchors*
Demobilization (Outcome)	DEM	$1 - (\frac{E + L + I}{3})$	Full membership—0.91 Crossover—0.81 Full exclusion—0.67
Heavy Repression	HR	Proportion of repressed events	Full membership—0.15 Crossover—0.10 Full exclusion—0.05
Higher Education Autonomy	HEO	V-Dem indicator *Institutional Autonomy* (cite)	Full membership—3 Crossover—2 Full exclusion—1
Counter-mobilization	CM	Proportion of events with private coercive interactions	Full membership—0.010 Crossover—0.005 Full exclusion—0.000
Fragmented Opposition	FEO	Effective # of opposition parties (Maeda, 2009)	Full membership—4.5 Crossover—3 Full exclusion—1.5

c **Table 2.** Anchors for the direct alibrations of outcome and conditions

Figure 1. Student protest episodes in 27 EA regimes 2020-2025

3.2.2) Heavy Repression

Protest repression signifies the most immediate and visible aspect of state control over contentious activities. ACLED distinguishes between protest events that are peaceful, involve some form of intervention, or entail the use of excessive force against protesters. To obtain an overall measure of protest repression, I calculate the proportion of student protest events in a country that involved intervention or excessive force. The values range from 0 to 1, as all of the student protests were peacefully conducted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The highest proportion of protest repression was recorded in Angola, with some 30 percent of all student events being intervened in. The average HR_raw score is 0.09, which suggests that almost ten percent of all student demonstrations in our EA regimes saw police intervention. I calibrate the 0.5 anchor at ten percent, full membership at the HR condition set is set at 15 percent, and full non-membership is set at five percent.

3.2.3) Fragmented Opposition Structure

In EA regimes, a strong and united opposition front offers a strong support system to civil society elements that seek to engage in anti-government action. A strong and united opposition can help anti-government protesters in a variety of ways. In line with the political opportunity framework, a strong opposition could signal and push for the weakness of the incumbent, increasing the potential rewards of protest. Additionally, opposition parties can openly support and identify with anti-government movements and amplify the demands of protesters. On the opposite side of this coin, a fragmented opposition could signal the strength of the government, thus raising the cost of contentious action, and a lack of support for protesters on the street.

Opposition fragmentation was operationalized as the number of seats the non-government affiliated parties held in parliament. I borrow Maeda's effective number of opposition parties (ENOP) measure, which is an adaptation of Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) effective parties

measure (Maeda 2009, p.423). This measure calculates the number of non-government parties in a parliament while accounting for their relative sizes. A higher number indicates a fragmented opposition where multiple opposition parties of similar sizes coexist in parliament; whereas a value of one would indicate only one opposition party and thus a fully cohesive opposition front. While most EA regimes are identified by the existence of opposition parties elected through elections, the extent of opposition presence in the parliament is varied in our sample. In India's 17th parliament (Lok Sabha) that served between 2019-2024, there were 35 parties that secured at least one of the remaining 242 seats against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Only a few of these were significant opposition parties, however, like the Indian National Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which won 9.57 and 4.41. In this case, the effective number of opposition parties is 10.7, which indicates that there are functionally more than ten opposition parties of similar sizes. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is Angola's National Assembly, where the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) was functionally the only opposition party against the ruling MPLA for several terms. Angola's FO score is therefore 1.1, indicating a very cohesive opposition. To capture this, I follow Haesebrouck and van Immerseel's (2020) calibration decision for parliamentary fragmentation. They fix the crossover anchor at 3 parties, a hypothetical situation in which there are three parties of equal size in parliament. I apply the same logic to the crossover threshold. The full exclusion threshold is set at 1.5 parties, because values closer to one indicate a singular functional opposition party and a fully non-fragmented opposition structure. The full inclusion threshold is set at 4.5.

$$FO_{raw} = \frac{1}{\sum (S_{OP})^2}$$

3.2.4) Higher Education Autonomy

Protest longevity can also be influenced by the internal strength of activist organizations. The university setting overcomes multiple collective action problems associated with protesting. Pre-existing co-ed social networks facilitate easier mobilization (Crossley, 2008), the campus space allows for assembly and organization (Turam, 2015; van Dyke, 1998). Therefore, higher education has often been the target of repressive governments, and breaches of institutional autonomy have gone hand in hand with de-democratizing processes. In turn, this increased control impacts student organization on campus. This control often takes place via "autocratic legalism," wherein governments enact legislative changes that concern the governance of higher education institutions (Tomic and Radeljic, 2022). With these legislative amendments, university administrations could increase penalties for on-campus activism such as in Turkey[2] (Human Rights Watch), allow law enforcement entry on campus, increase in-campus surveillance, control extracurricular events happening on campus, appoint pro-government voices to administrative positions... These steps increase the cost of on-campus activism and block one of the most permeable routes of mobilization available for students.

V-Dem lists *Institutional Autonomy* as one of its indicators of academic freedom, and uses the Lima Declaration's definition: *"*the independence of institutions of higher education from the State and all other forces of society, to make decisions regarding its internal government, finance, administration, and to establish its policies of education, research, extension work and other related activities"[3] (Fernando, 1989). The research uses the V-Dem rankings from 0 (no autonomy) to 4 (complete autonomy). The average score of the EA regimes in question is 1.69,

[2] In early 2021, Turkish authorities arrested hundreds of students protesting President Erdoğan's appointment of a government-aligned rector to Boğaziçi University. The protests were met with police violence and criminal investigations. Human Rights Watch reported the move as emblematic of the government's broader disregard for human rights and university independence.

[3] The Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education was ratified at the World University Service (WUS)'s 68th General Assembly in 1988.

ranking below the world average of 2.18 within our time limits. Each country's four-year averages constitute the raw HEO scores. There is variance between the scores, with the highest average belonging to Papua New Guinea with 2.88, and the lowest to Egypt with 0.60. I calibrate the scores so that a score lower than 1 is a full non-member of the condition set, a score of 2 is the crossover point, and institutional autonomy scores above 3 are full members of the set.

3.2.5) Counter-Mobilization

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, countermobilizations can serve as informal repression on mass mobilizations in EA regimes. These movements can intimidate and, most significantly, directly interact with protesters, raising the cost of participation for future participants. Countermobilizations can take place across time and place in various forms. Civil society groups can collect signatures or publish statements against a movement. They could also organize standalone demonstrations in response. Zeller (2021) identifies "channeling" and "coercive" action from nonstate actors as INUS conditions for negative demobilization. Channeling actions seek to disrupt and restrict mobilization without resorting to violence, often through simultaneous demonstrations, disruptive action, or legal avenues (p. 273). Nonstate coercion occurs when private counteragents use violence or threat of violence to disrupt mobilization, which entails physical interaction. I focus on countermobilizations that happen as physical encounters, because they are the most observable at the event data level. ACLED reports interactions at an event level and details the exact actors interacting. For the countermobilization variable, I am interested in protesters' interactions with other private actors. The dataset lists events without any interaction as "Protesters only," and they comprise the majority of (15,831 of 17,034) student protests in our population. Other events include "Rioters-Protesters", "Protesters-Protesters", "Protesters-External/Other", and "Political

militia-Protesters" interactions in descending order. In the CON_raw scores, I note down the proportion of events marked by a private coercive interaction. The values range from zero to six percent, indicating the low proportion of student protests subject to nonstate intervention. However, the size of these interactions is another important factor that can influence future activity. I calibrate the scores so that zero encounters constitute full exclusion from the set, and over one percent of events having physical encounters constitute a full membership in the condition set. The crossover point of 0.5 is set at 0.5 percent, as the actual midpoint of available data.

In this chapter, I presented the methodological choices and the theory-grounded operationalization of the conditions and outcome. The unit of analysis is protest episodes, defined as the period where events occur within seven-day windows. Episodes capture weekly protests, and allow us to observe campaign longevity. Consequently, demobilization is defined in terms of a consistent decline in episode frequency, length, and intensity as well as unfulfilled campaign demands (negative demobilization). Calibration decisions for set membership scores also reflect theory and data availability. Finally, I present truth tables for the presence (DEM) and absence of the outcome (~DEM) with related coverage and consistency scores. The next section will discuss which configurations of conditions constitute necessary or sufficient conditions and present solution formulas for demobilization.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the steps and results of the QCA of protest demobilization, following the analytic protocol outlined by Oana, Schneider, and Thomann (2021). I begin by identifying single necessary and SUIN conditions. Subsequently, I conduct a sufficiency analysis for both the presence and absence of the outcome, examining the causal configurations that lead to demobilization and sustained activity. For the outcome and its negation, I generate the parsimonious solution. The chapter aims to trace the conjunctural and asymmetric causal pathways through which demobilization occurs, while remaining attentive to coverage, consistency, and the theoretical plausibility of the identified configurations.

4.1) Necessary Conditions

As per good practice standards, I begin the analysis with scoping out necessary conditions for the outcome (Oana, Schneider, and Thomann 2021, Chapter 7.4). A necessity relationship implies that whenever the condition is observed, the condition is likewise present. *H1* had posited that HR would be a necessary condition for DEM in EA regimes, as direct repression at protest sites are strong demotivators for future participation in the long run. In other words, demobilization would never be observed without the presence of heavy repression. The *QCAfit* in the QCA package allows us to test this hypothesis. The analysis tests necessity in terms of set membership: in most of our cases, we expect their partial membership in condition set HR to be bigger than in the outcome set DEM (Oana, Schneider, and Thomann 2021, p. 65). The analysis does not yield any necessary conditions above the consistency threshold of 0.9 (p. 69). H1 thus fails as HR does not constitute a necessary condition for DEM, with a consistency score of 0.49 and a coverage score of 0.79. The low coverage score indicates that in only half of the cases' HR membership scores are higher than their DEM membership scores, as visualized in **Figure 2** below. Indeed, six countries populate the upper-left quadrant, indicating

deviant consistency in kind (DCK) cases. These cases display the complete opposite of the necessity relationship; the outcome is present without the condition, thus refute the necessity hypothesis forcefully.

I then repeat the analysis for single necessary conditions for the negated outcome. Again, no condition passes the 0.9 consistency threshold, but the negated condition ~HR comes closest with 0.86. The coverage and relevance of necessity (RoN) scores are likewise permissible[4], indicating a potentially non-trivial necessity claim for the negated condition ~HR. I once again map the distribution of cases to visualize if there are any DCK cases (see **Figure 3**). Here, Mauritania is the only DCK case while multiple cases are deviant consistency in degree (DCD) cases; whose membership in either the condition or the outcome are not "qualitatively" different than other cases fulfilling the necessity relationship (p. 71). Theoretically, this would indicate that the absence of heavy repression is necessary for non-demobilization (i.e. sustained mobilization) in EA regimes.

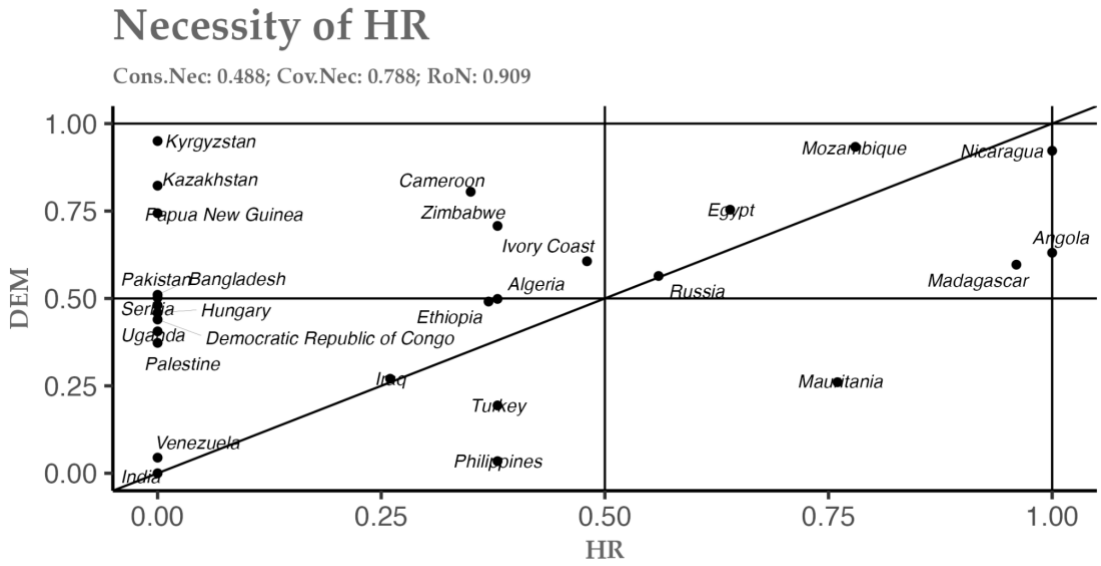

Figure 2. XY plot of necessity relationship between heavy repression and demobilization

[4] Oana, Schneider and Thomann, 2021 note that no fixed thresholds have yet been set for coverage necessity and RoN scores However, RoN scores approaching 0.50 could be "reason for concern" (p.74).

However, this research is interested in instances of demobilization specifically, and does not have testable hypotheses regarding sustained mobilization.

After finding that HR does not constitute a necessary condition for the outcome by itself, I move onto the analysis of SUIN conditions, which are "sufficient but unnecessary part of a factor that is insufficient but necessary for an outcome (Mahoney et al.,2009, p. 126). In other words, is heavy repression part of a necessary configuration for demobilization? Can we assert that either HR OR another condition is necessary for demobilization? While not explicitly stated in *H1*, HR as a SUIN condition would also confirm the hypothesis. I use the *superSubset* function to find any necessary disjunctions of the presence of the outcome DEM. I limit the depth argument to two conditions, to prevent a set too large to be empirically meaningful (Oana, Schneider and Thomann, 2021, p. 80). There are two necessary disjunctions for the presence of the outcome: ~FO + ~HEO, and ~FO + ~CM. Both disjunctions pass the consistency threshold (0.9), and have coverage and RoN scores above 0.6 and 0.5 respectively.

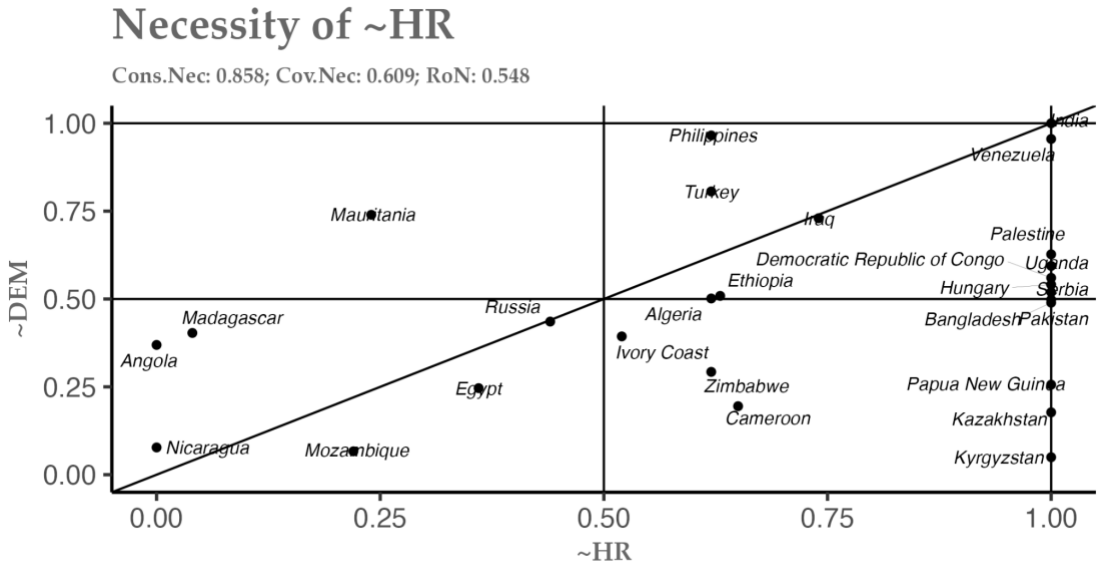

Figure 3. XY plot of necessity relationship between negated DR and absence demobilization.

Once again, HR does not feature as a disjunct of these necessary configurations. So *H1* fails completely, and the two necessary disjunctions will be discussed in more detail as potential higher-order concepts in the following chapter.

The SUIN analysis for the negated outcome finds ~HR + HEO as a necessary disjunction. This finding is not explored further, as it seems to be a trivial set relationship (RoN score: 0.47). In other words, the set ~HR + HEO is large enough to cover both the outcome and its negation; which weakens its relevance for ~DEM in this case.

4.2) Sufficient Conditions

Having found no support for our hypothesis of necessity, the sufficiency analysis follows. *H2, H3*, and *H4* laid out expectations regarding sufficient conditions of demobilization. A condition is considered sufficient when the outcome consistently occurs in its presence. In the context of fuzzy sets, a condition X is sufficient for an outcome when the X membership score is lower than the membership score in the outcome set for most cases (Oana, Schneider, & Thomann, 2021, p. 89). I begin the analysis by constructing a truth table using the *truthTable* function in R. This lists all potential conjuncts of our conditions ($2^4 = 16$), and the corresponding cases for each combination. I set the raw consistency threshold at 0.9, and the proportional reduction in inconsistency (PRI) threshold at 0.5. Combinations that score below these limits will not classify as sufficient. **Table 2** shows that three combinations fulfill the sufficiency criteria for the presence of the outcome, and at least one case represented by one of these combinations (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012, p. 153). On the contrary, four combinations of conditions do not feature in any of the 27 cases, and thus are classified as logical remainders. They will factor into the solution formula shortly. Following good practice suggestions once again, I also produce the truth table for the negation of the outcome ~DEM using the same threshold values (**Table 3**). Five rows pass the sufficiency test, meaning there are five conjunctions of conditions

that are sufficient for the negation of the outcome. This truth table likewise has four logical remainders.

HR	*FO*	*HEO*	*CM*	*OUT*	*n*	*incl*	*PRI*	*cases*
1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	*Madagascar*
1	0	0	0	1	4	0.961	0.913	*Angola, Egypt, Mozambique, Nicaragua*
0	0	1	0	1	1	0.925	0.614	*Ivory Coast*
1	1	0	1	0	1	0.864	0.339	*Russia*
0	1	1	0	0	1	0.848	0.382	*Pakistan*
0	0	0	0	0	4	0.814	0.479	*Algeria, Ethiopia, Turkey, Zimbabwe*
1	1	0	0	0	1	0.813	0.308	*Mauritania*
0	0	1	1	0	2	0.812	0	*Palestine, Serbia*
0	1	0	0	0	5	0.807	0.518	*Cameroon, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda*
0	0	0	1	0	3	0.758	0.023	*Bangladesh, DR Congo, Venezuela*
0	1	1	1	0	2	0.753	0.300	*Papua New Guinea, Philippines*
0	1	0	1	0	2	0.665	0.003	*India, Iraq*
1	0	0	1	?	0	–	–	–
1	0	1	1	?	0	–	–	–
1	1	1	0	?	0	–	–	–
1	1	1	1	?	0	–	–	–

Table 2. Truth table for the outcome DEM

HR	*FO*	*HEO*	*CM*	*OUT*	*n*	*incl*	*PRI*	*cases*
0	1	0	1	1	2	0.999	0.997	*India, Iraq*
0	0	1	1	1	2	0.990	0.945	*Palestine, Serbia*
0	0	0	1	1	3	0.945	0.776	*Bangladesh, DR Congo, Venezuela*
1	1	0	1	1	1	0.931	0.661	*Russia*
1	1	0	0	1	1	0.911	0.670	*Mauritania*
0	0	1	0	0	1	0.880	0.386	*Ivory Coast*
0	1	1	0	0	1	0.876	0.497	*Pakistan*
0	1	1	1	0	2	0.871	0.634	*Papua New Guinea, Philippines*
0	0	0	0	0	4	0.797	0.430	*Algeria, Ethiopia, Turkey, Zimbabwe*
0	1	0	0	0	5	0.764	0.412	*Cameroon, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda*
1	0	1	0	0	1	0.756	0	*Madagascar*
1	0	0	0	0	4	0.587	0.087	*Angola, Egypt, Mozambique, Nicaragua*
1	0	0	1	?	0	–	–	–
1	0	1	1	?	0	–	–	–
1	1	1	0	?	0	–	–	–
1	1	1	1	?	0	–	–	–

Table 3. Truth table for the negation of the outcome ~DEM

4.3) Solution Formulas

In the next step, I employ standard analysis to logically minimize the truth table and report the solution formula. I choose the parsimonious solution as it offers the most analytically efficient and theoretically insightful explanation of demobilization, without sacrificing consistency and

coverage (Oana, Schnedier, and Thomann, 2021, p. 129). Unlike the conservative solution (see **Appendix 1**, also for the intermediate solution), which only includes conditions observed in the empirical data and avoids using logical remainders (thus missing %25 of the possible configurations), the parsimonious solution draws on counterfactual reasoning to incorporate simplifying assumptions.

HR*~FO + ~FO*HEO*~CM —> DEM

Term	*inclS*	*PRI*	*covS*	*covU*	*Cases*
$HR * FO$	0.915	0.823	0.405	0.218	*Angola, Egypt, Mozambique, Nicaragua; Madagascar*
$FO * HEO * CM$	0.946	0.776	0.305	0.118	*Ivory Coast; Madagascar*
Solution	0.905	0.775	0.523	–	–

Table 4. Sufficient terms for the presence of outcome

The parsimonious solution for the presence of the outcome identifies two distinct sufficient conjunctions. Either the combination of heavy repression and a non-fragmented opposition front (HR*~FO), *OR* the joint presence of non-fragmented opposition, higher education autonomy, and low pro-government countermobilization (~FO*HEO*~CM) is sufficient for the demobilization of student protests in EA regimes. Both disjuncts exhibit high consistency scores (0.915 and 0.946), indicating that when these conditions are present, demobilization follows over 90% of the time. The complete solution formula has a consistency score of 0.905, comfortably above the conventional 0.80 threshold for sufficiency, and a solution coverage of 0.523, meaning that just over half of the cases with high demobilization are explained by these configurations. The unique coverage of each term are low (0.218 and 0.118), indicating that they partially overlap in the cases they explain.

To substantiate these parameters of fit on the case level, I visualize the distribution of our cases across DEM and solution formula membership scores (**Figure 4**). This will help us understand which cases exhibit the sufficiency relationship, and which ones contradict it (Oana, Schneider, and Thomann, 2021, p. 115). None of our cases fall on the lower-right quadrant, which means

none of them is a member of the solution formula while a non-member of the outcome set (deviant case consistency in kind). In short, our no empirical evidence directly contradicts the claim of sufficiency. That being said, there are plenty of cases (n = 7) that are simply unexplained by the sufficient term. The demobilization of student protests in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, and Zimbabwe is attributable to neither of the sufficient terms (deviant cases coverage). Student campaigns in Angola, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mozambique and Nicaragua, on the other hand, are typical cases of demobilization for the solution formula.

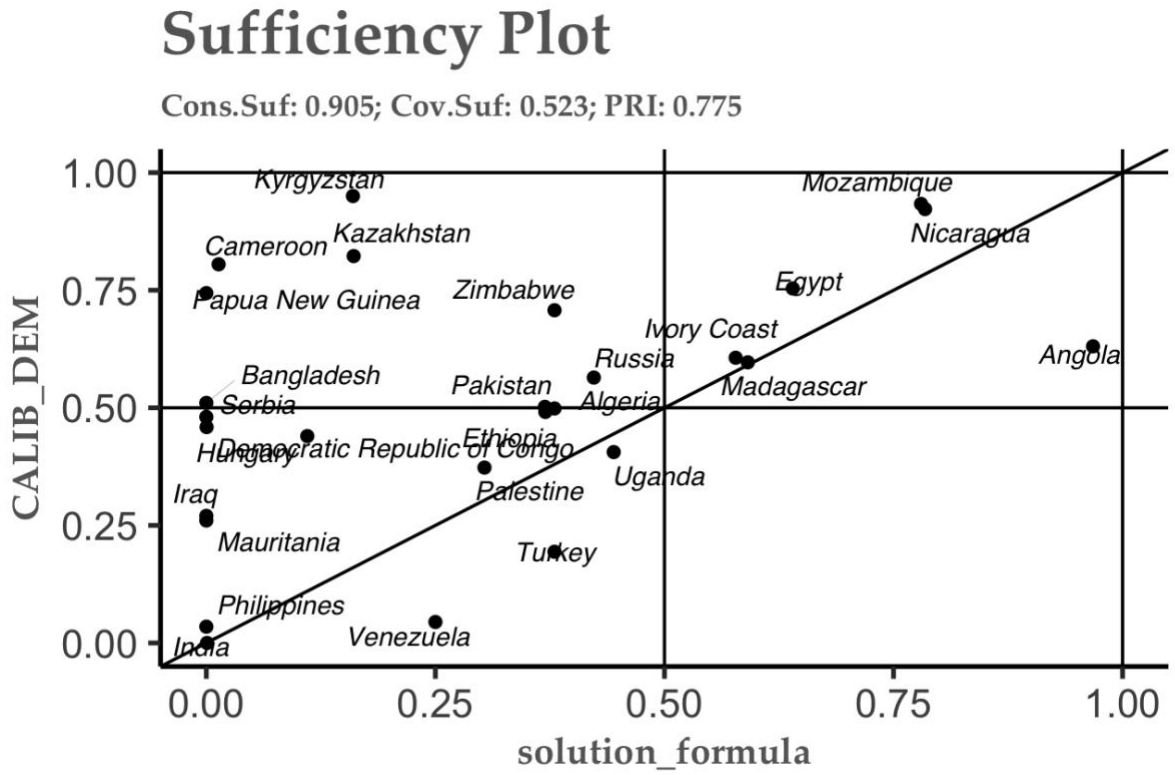

Figure 4. Distribution of cases across the sufficient solution set for DEM

The parsimonious solution for the absence of demobilization (~DEM) identifies three sufficient disjuncts with high empirical consistency (inclS = 0.872) and solution coverage (covS = 0.683), presented in **Table 5**. The first disjunct, HR*FO, suggests that when heavy repression and

fragmented opposition are present, protest campaigns do not demobilize. This finding, while against the hypotheses, reflects the ongoing divergence in the literature regarding the effect of repression on dissent. The second disjunct ~FO*CM, suggests demobilization is not observed when a unified opposition is present in conjunction with pro-government countermobilizations. The low unique coverage (covU) of this term is however problematic, and it does not individually contribute to the overall solution formula as much as the other terms. The third configuration, ~HEO*CM, shows that even without higher education autonomy, countermobilizations can robust communication infrastructures can sustain mobilization.

HR*FO + ~FO*CM + ~HEO*CM –> ~DEM

Term	*inclS*	*PRI*	*covS*	*covU*	*Cases*
$HR * FO$	0.899	0.674	0.323	0.195	*Mauritania*; *Russia*
$FO * CM$	0.949	0.812	0.327	0.055	*Bangladesh*, *DR Congo*, *Venezuela*; *Palestine*, *Serbia*
$HEO * CM$	0.859	0.680	0.433	0.117	*Bangladesh*, *DR Congo*, *Venezuela*; *India*, *Iraq*; *Russia*
Solution	0.872	0.696	0.683	–	–

Table 5. Sufficient terms for the absence of outcome

The solution term for the negated outcome is not as strongly supported by empirical evidence, as **Figure 5** depicts two deviant cases consistency in kind. Bangladesh and Russia, indicated by plus markers on the lower-right quadrant, directly contradict the sufficiency claim made above. These cases are members of the solution set, yet not of the negated outcome; which is against the logic of sufficiency. DR Congo, India, Iraq, Mauritania, Palestine, Serbia, and Venezuela are typical cases for the non-demobilization of student campaigns. While this is useful information, non-demobilization does not immediately concern the present research.

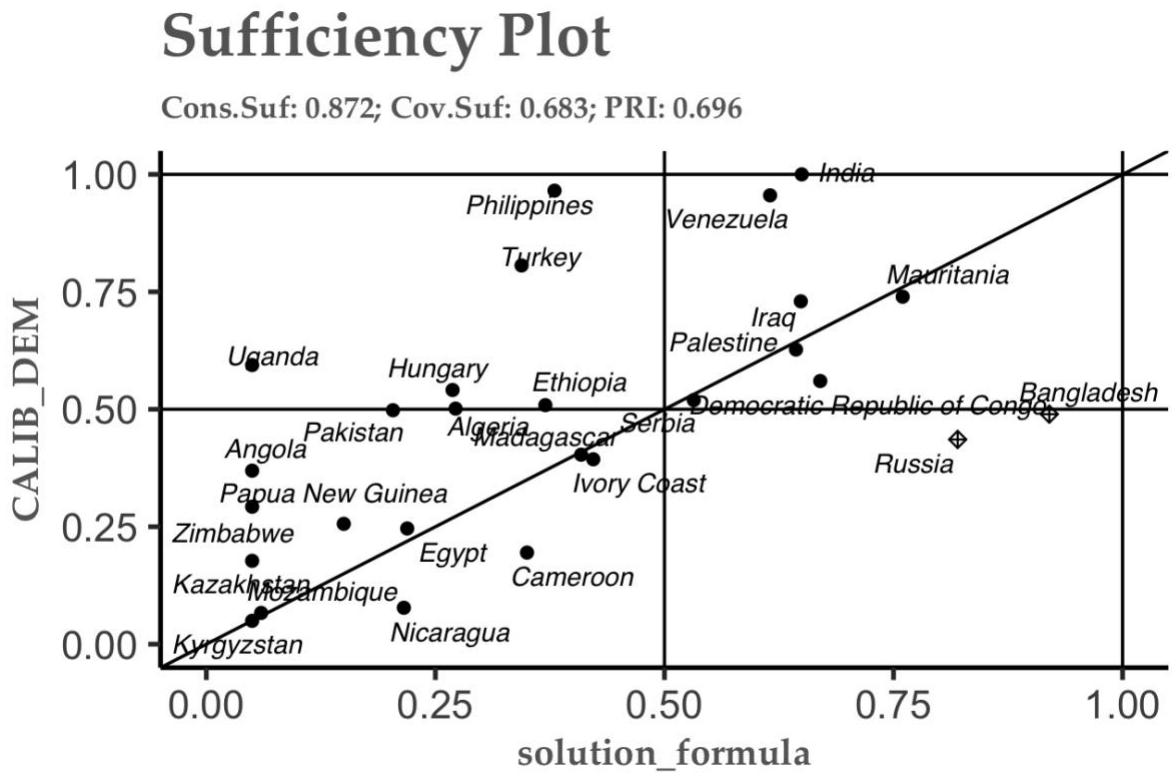

Figure 5. Distribution of cases across the sufficient solution set for ~DEM

How does the sufficiency analysis pertain to our hypotheses? We had previously purported that conditions FO, ~HEO, and CM would be INUS, individually insufficient conjuncts of sufficient terms. None of the INUS conditions that feature in our solution formula for the presence of the outcome: HR, ~FO, HEO, ~CM align with the hypotheses regarding INUS conditions (*H2, H3, H4*). Initial results from the sufficiency analysis seem to refute these hypotheses as well. I will argue in the next section, however, whether the results for the sufficiency analysis for HR could support *H1*.

Chapter 5: Student Demobilization in EA Regimes

The analyses of necessity and sufficiency leave us with several individual and combination of conditions. However, a string of conditions do not hold much explanatory value, as they should be theoretically supported. The initial results have not supported any of the four hypotheses. Are the examples to the contrary in this study strong enough to change conventional wisdom about the determinants of demobilization? And what do our findings on the negated outcome (~DEM) signify in terms of a theory of mobilization? This chapter addresses these questions, and discusses results in light of theoretical expectations.

5.1) Revisiting the Hypotheses

H1: Heavy Repression (HR) as necessary condition of DEM

The first hypothesis was the only one involving a necessity relationship. It expected to observe overt state repression as a prerequisite of student demobilization in EA contexts. However, the necessity analysis did not yield any single necessary conditions that surpassed the consistency threshold. Even more troubling for our hypothesis, the negated condition (~HR) had a higher consistency score than HR. This finding is in line with the broader debate around the effect of repression on protest activity. While some studies suggest that repression deters dissent (Demirel-Pegg, 2021), others point to backlash effects (Lewis and Ives, 2023; Aytaç et al., 2018) or inverted-U relationships (Francisco, 1995; al-Anani, 2019), where moderate repression may escalate rather than suppress collective action. The original hypothesis reflected the assumption that EA regimes would be more likely to apply heavy-handed tactics to stifle protest activity. The empirical evidence, however, suggests a more complex dynamic. While it does not constitute a necessary condition, the stronger association between non-repression and demobilization invites further inquiry into potential causal mechanisms. Does the absence of

repression signals successful co-optation, exhaustion of movement resources, or the achievement of strategic aims? These are worthwhile questions for future research.

H2-4: *Low HE institutional autonomy (~HEO), Fragmented Opposition (FO), Countermobilization (CM) as INUS conditions of DEM*

The sufficiency analysis did not support the expectations laid out in the INUS hypotheses, none of them appeared independently as part of the final parsimonious solution. Instead, the solution formula highlights a different configuration. Perhaps most significantly, the negated fragmented opposition condition appears in both pathways, suggesting that more cohesive opposition structures may be associated with demobilization under certain conditions. Heavy repression (HR), contrary to its expected necessity in *H1*, features only in conjunction with cohesive opposition (~FO). Once again, defying expectations, high autonomy of higher education institutions (HEO) contributes to demobilization only when both opposition is cohesive (~FO) and countermobilization is absent (~CM). These results indicate that the hypothesized conditions are neither sufficient on their own nor consistently involved across causal pathways. Such rigorous rebuttal of our hypotheses calls for exploration into alternative configurations of conditions that coexist with demobilization of student protests.

5.2) Alternative Configurations for Demobilization

Primarily interested in explaining demobilization as an outcome, this research uses QCA tools to explore the various pathways that lead to the outcome in question, even if the initial hypotheses did not capture them. The SUIN analysis revealed two necessary disjuncts that are consistently linked to the presence of demobilization:

$$(\sim FO + \sim CM) \leftarrow DEM$$

$$(\sim FO + \sim HEO) \leftarrow DEM$$

Taken separately, none of the disjuncts are conceptually informative. They tell us that either cohesive opposition (~FO) *OR* absence of countermobilization (~CM) is necessary on the one hand, and that (~FO) *OR* non-autonomous higher education institutions is on the other. In the context of EA regimes, these superset relations do not hold much causal meaning. It could easily be that non-members of FO are a bigger group than members of DEM. Neither theory nor empirical evidence clarifies how either a cohesive opposition, a non-autonomous higher education sector, or the absence of countermobilizations would be part of a necessary disjunct for demobilization. Oana, Schneider, and Thomann advise researchers to "meaningfully interpret SUIN conditions as functional equivalents of a higher-order concept," (p. 80). However, the conditions determined for this research range in scope and operational level. A "meaningful" functional equivalent of these necessary disjunctions do not exist for our purposes.

The parsimonious solution for demobilization identified two paths. We observe demobilization in most cases where heavy repression (HR) *AND* a united opposition front (~FO) coexist. (~FO) features once again in the second subset of demobilization; in conjunction with autonomous higher education (HEO) *AND* the absence of pro-government countermobilizations (~CM). Even though there is almost zero support for the theoretical framework, this new configuration problematizes some of our prior assumptions about demobilization.

5.3) Absence of Demobilization

We have explored an alternative path to demobilization to our theoretical framework after the analysis did not yield any empirical support for our expectations. Many of the observed patterns contradicted our hypotheses, prompting a reassessment of our assumptions. Indeed, the research question is strictly interested in demobilization, and justifies this interest with the

insufficient attention current literature has spent on it against its counterpart process, mobilization. As I have discussed in detail in the literature overview, demobilization and mobilization are not mirror images of each other, also called "causal asymmetry" in set theoretical language (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). A standalone study of mobilization in EA regimes can and should employ different conditions than this study, so we cannot gain much insight about demobilization per se from the results of ~DEM analyses here.

However, we can refine our theoretical framework for demobilization since the solution contradicted initial expectations (Oana, Schneider, and Thomann, 2021, p. 215). Most importantly, let us begin defining what the negation of outcome DEM signifies: Is it non-demobilization? Is it mobilization? A secret third thing? Members of the demobilization set were student protest campaigns with episodes that were low in number, average length and intensity. By this logic, members of the non-demobilization set are campaigns with many, long, and intense episodes between 2020 and 2025. In this sense, the ~DEM set refers to sustained, robust protest campaigns, and I will use the name robust campaign for the negated outcome set moving forward. Literature on movement and campaign survival (add **something**)

Although no single condition met the threshold for necessity, the analysis yielded three sufficient terms for ~DEM: HR*FO, ~FO*CM, ~HEO*CM. Each of the three sufficient paths to robust protest campaigns highlights a distinct configuration of structural and political dynamics. The first term, HR*FO, indicates that in cases where both heavy repression and a fragmented opposition co-occur, student campaigns may still persist rather than demobilize. This counterintuitive result challenges the assumption that repression necessarily leads to protest decline. It is possible that repression in fragmented contexts may fail to uniformly suppress mobilization, or may even incite backlash effects among activist subgroups unable to coordinate exit strategies. The second pathway, ~FO*CM, suggests that in contexts with a

unified opposition and active pro-government counter-mobilization, protest campaigns remain robust. One interpretation is that strong oppositional coherence allows student movements to sustain themselves even when confronted with countermobilization, possibly because they can frame repression or antagonism as unjust, thereby galvanizing support.

The third path, ~HEO*CM, describes cases with limited institutional autonomy in higher education but the presence of countermobilization. Here, student movements may persist due to external political polarization or societal support that compensates for constrained academic space. Together, these configurations reveal that robust campaigns are not simply the result of favorable conditions, but can emerge from complex, and at times adverse, interactions of institutional weakness, state opposition, and organizational dynamics. These findings open avenues for rethinking the strategic resilience of protest actors in EA regimes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the conditions under which student protest campaigns demobilize in EA regimes. Through a fsQCA, it identified multiple conjunctural pathways that lead to demobilization, most notably the parsimonious solution:

$$HR*{\sim}FO + {\sim}FO*HEO*{\sim}CM \longrightarrow DEM$$

This formula reveals that demobilization is most consistently associated with the combination of heavy repression and a lack of opposition fragmentation, or with unfragmented opposition, limited higher education autonomy, and the absence of pro-government countermobilization. These configurations challenge conventional assumptions and suggest that demobilization results not simply from repressive state action, but from a complex interaction of state capacity, institutional closure, and oppositional structure. Studying protest demobilization as a distinct phenomenon from mere protest decline or de-escalation is crucial, particularly in EA regimes where sustained mobilization is rare, but where episodic protest moments emerge with high political stakes. While much of the literature focuses on protest onset and escalation, this project emphasized how and why campaigns dissipate, revealing the institutional and political environments that fail to sustain contentious campaigns.

The task of defining and operationalizing demobilization posed conceptual and empirical challenges. Demobilization is not simply the absence of protest, but the termination of a campaign's capacity to regenerate contention. There are multiple ways to conceptualize and operationalize demobilization, each foregrounding different aspects of protest dynamics. This study adopts an episodic conceptualization, defining demobilization in terms of declining frequency, intensity, and duration of protest episodes. The index reflects this conceptual choice and provides one pathway for measuring sustained protest engagement. Alternative

conceptualizations emphasizing, for example, leadership suppression, media visibility, or protest goals—would likely yield different patterns and causal configurations.

Looking ahead, comparative case studies of countries within the identified solution paths could help clarify the causal mechanisms underlying demobilization. For instance, does the absence of countermobilization in an unfragmented opposition setting reflect regime complacency, or the quiet success of repressive containment? How does limited higher education autonomy interact with civil society capacity? These are questions that QCA alone cannot answer and that future qualitative research can explore in depth.

The study also faces several limitations, both in its data and method. ACLED data may underreport protests in heavily surveilled or repressive states. Additionally, the temporal grouping of data into monthly aggregates and protest episodes—may obscure micro-level triggers and turning points. Fuzzy-set QCA itself is constrained by its dependency on calibration choices and sensitivity to skewed distributions, especially in small-to-medium-N research.

Finally, the configurations identified in this study do not exhaust the universe of possible demobilizing mechanisms. Processes such as co-optation, covert repression, protest fatigue, or strategic withdrawal may not manifest directly in protest event data, yet critically shape the lifecycle of campaigns. Future studies could incorporate qualitative evidence, activist interviews, or state policy analysis to detect these less visible, yet potent, forces of demobilization.

In sum, this study provides a novel conceptual and methodological framework for examining how protest campaigns fade in electoral authoritarian regimes. By identifying the institutional and political configurations associated with demobilization, it lays the groundwork for deeper inquiry into the durability and vulnerability of collective action in illiberal contexts.

Appendix

Conservative Solution:

HR*~FO*~CM + ~FO*HEO*~CM -> DEM

Term	*inclS*	*PRI*	*covS*	*covU*	*Cases*
$HR* \sim FO* \sim CM$	0.912	0.828	0.375	0.188	*Angola, Egypt, Mozambique, Nicaragua; Madagascar*
$\sim FO * HEO* \sim CM$	0.946	0.776	0.305	0.118	*Ivory Coast; Madagascar*
Solution	0.902	0.779	0.493	–	–

Intermediate Solution:

HR*~FO + ~FO*HEO*~CM -> DEM

Term	*inclS*	*PRI*	*covS*	*covU*	*Cases*
$HR* \sim FO$	0.915	0.823	0.405	0.218	*Angola, Egypt, Mozambique, Nicaragua; Madagascar*
$\sim FO * HEO* \sim CM$	0.946	0.776	0.305	0.118	*Ivory Coast; Madagascar*
Solution	0.905	0.775	0.523	–	–

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