THE ACTIVIST’S STRATEGIC TOOLKIT

A study of environmental protesters’ responses to repressive state tactics in the Philippines

Karoline Hermansson

Uppsala University
Department of Peace and Conflict Research
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Supervisor: Holly Guthrey
1. Abstract

The studies on state repression on dissidents has for long puzzled researches with macro-level studies often reaching contradictory results. To that end, the following thesis aims to explore the micro-level effects of state repression on protesters strategies as a case-study on the Philippines, which was the deadliest country for environmental activists in 2018. This is a small n (n=5) study on environmental activists’ strategic responses to different types of repression, thus attempting to answer the question of *how experiences of repression affect environmental activists’ strategic choices.*

Environmental activism is here applied broadly, covering two sectors which are both concerned with threats to the environment and its public health consequences. The study finds that social networks constitutes a fundamental resource for the strategical adaptations of the environmental activists.

2. Introduction

The Philippines has since the rise of the people’s revolution and fall of the Marco’s dictatorship been known to have a vibrant civil society, with numerous civil society organizations emerging in the 1980’s and 1990’s causing the Philippines “to have more NGOs per capita than any other country in the Third world” (Wurfe, 2006: 5, (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Hedman, 2006; Silliman & Noble, 1998). Not the least have environmental organizations been present, as documented by Broad & Cavanagh (1994). However, the revolution did not succeed in decoupling corruption, elite-level rule and extrajudicial killings which have cause the Philippines to rank as country with the most killed environmental activists in 2018 (Bagayas, 2018; Global Witness, 2019a). Given this precarious and puzzling situation, as well as the puzzling findings in the research on the effects of state repression, it is arguably a highly interesting case for seeing the effects of repression. Thus, the Philippines has been selected as the main case for a study on *how experiences of repression affects environmental activists’ strategic choices.* The study will further be conducted through a case-within-a-case approach, studying subcases of different organizations within the environmental sphere in the Philippines, to see how they have responded to repression.

Further, the research field has, as will be elaborated on in the literature review, shortcomings in the understanding of activists and dissidents’ responses to repression, especially at the micro-level study. Thus, this exploratory empirical study aims to gather important empirical insights into the choices available to protesters in an extreme case in regard to extrajudicial killings on activists. As has been noted by the UN’s special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, John
Knox, this is a growing problem world-wide and thus these findings can be of importance for further policy work (Bengali, 2017).

The thesis is structured as follows. Under Theoretical Framework, a literature review will be carried out to account for the theoretical underpinnings of the study, elaborating on the central concepts and accounting for the strategic shift that is expected to be found. Thereafter the Research design will communicate the methods applied in this study, that is, a qualitative case-within-a-case analysis, the methods for data gathering and analysis, the limitations of the study and the coding scheme applied. The findings will be presented and analysed under Results and Analysis, to further be elaborated upon under the final section, Conclusions.

The study limits itself to the Filipino sector and that of environmental activism, using the anti-mining and anti-coal sectors as subcases. Acknowledging that the Filipino civil society endures atypically high levels of lethal repression (see e.g. Freedom House, 2019; Front Line Defenders, 2018; Global Witness, 2019), especially for being a non-authoritarian state (see e.g. Francisco, 1995, on how repression may differ between authoritarian and non-authoritarian settings) as well as the limits of this small-n exploratory study, it is nonetheless likely that some conclusions of the activists’ experiences, motives and responses to repression may translate to similar contexts and oppositional movements.

3. Theoretical Framework

I. Literature review

The literature on political repression has as noted by Davenport & Inman and Chenoweth done considerable progress over the last 40 years, especially the last two decades (Chenoweth et al., 2017; Davenport, 2007; Davenport & Inman, 2012). Yet, the field has reached few clear conclusions, and the findings on the effects of state repressive tactics remain puzzling to say the least and sometimes contradictory; as it seems to be dependent on regime type, type of sanctions, legitimacy of sanctions; personality, organization and goal of dissident and dissident groups as well as that sanctions are often effective in the short run but counter effective in the long run. (Chenoweth et al., 2017; Davenport, 2007; Davenport & Inman, 2012; Moore, 1998). There continues to be a quantitative focus in the field, and as such a qualitative study can give important insight in the causal mechanisms that can account for the diversity in the findings; and most importantly – the effect sanctions have on the individual activist’s choices.
One of the explanations for the incoherent findings have been that strategic shifts have made difficult the measurements of dissent and have caused movements that have changed strategies to be coded as dormant (Francisco, 1995: 268). Lichbach (1987) was early to argue that dissidents changed tactics, from violent to non-violent and vice-versa in the face of repression, and Tilly (1986, 2006, 2001) have made important contributions to the understanding of the strategic repertoires available to oppositional movements. Yet, micro-level studies on the strategic options made by dissidents remain rare, and if they are conducted they are usually conducted in western (or westernized) liberal settings, such as Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005), with a few notable examples in severely repressive contexts (such as Einwöhner, 2003; Honari, 2018; Moss, 2014).

Honari (2018a, 2018b), Moss (2014) and (Zwerman & Steinhoff, 2005) have made important contributions to the understandings of responses first paved for by Lichbach (1987) and McAdams, Tilly and Tarrow (McAdam, 1983; McAdam et al., 2001). Criticizing Lichbach’s rational choice-based explanations for tactical shift between violent and non-violent tactics when facing repression to avoid costs, Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) argue that though this might be true for large segments of the protesting groups, minorities of the groups find the reprisals illegitimate and answer with “raising the bar of militancy” (Zwerman & Steinhoff, 2005: 86-87).

Honari reaches the same conclusion, but argues it is dependent on the activists of agency (Honari, 2018a, 2018b). Whereas all of these accounts contribute greatly in developing the theoretical foundations beyond a mere action-reaction approach, and just as well all are likely to some degree be true, they are all short-coming in their conceptualisation of risks and costs. To this end, the following thesis will apply the framework created by Almeida (2019), who in conceptualizing “threats” contributes greatly to the field’s understanding for the protesters incentives to keep going – and thus options of responses to repression. Almeida categorizes four types of threat that are either driving or mitigating forces for many protest movements: Economic-related problems, Public health/Environmental Decline, Erosion of rights, State repression (Almeida, 2019). Whereas these are commonly known as costs, grievances or the like, aligning them along their shared aspect of threat they share allows for appropriately seeing the trade-offs that protesters and activists face.

Further, specifying on repression against environmental activists is not a new phenomenon of study, as for example Boykoff (2008) and Mireanu (2014) who shed light on the criminalization of environmental activists in Europe and the US, Birss (2017) who does a similar contribution for Latin America and Yew (2016) who helps our understanding of the same issue in Malaysia. Mireanu notes;
“...criminalization of environmental activism is far from being an isolated aspect of one government's policy. It is part of a global trend whereby the contemporary capitalist state is repressing any significant interference in its strategic alliance with multinational companies.” (Mireanu, 2014: 87)

This explanation aptly fits with the explanation of the rise of killings of environmental activists being tightly connected to conflicts with business interests over finite resources and the high prevalence of corruption in the countries or areas most affected, as noted by Global Witness (2019a, 2019b) and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment John Knox (Bengali, 2017). Environmental activism, and even the repression of it, was early well-studied in case studies by Broad (Broad, 1994; Broad & Cavanagh, 1994) who pointed to a deep and widespread engagement for the environment – due to the dependency of it – in the Philippines in the late 80s and early 90s.

Moreover, studies on repression in the Philippines studying the post-dictatorship remain scant (for studies of the repression under the Marcos dictatorship, see eg. Lanza, McCoy, Sutton, & Winichakul, 2009; McCoy, McCoy, Sutton, & Winichakul, 2009), despite intense reports from media and international human rights organizations the like. Noteworthy examples on the contrary are Boudreau’s (2009) mapping of repression in the Philippines and the “authoritarian survival” of the system as well as Tusalem’s mapping of extra judicial killings by region (2019). Neither of these do, however, study the effects of the repression. Consequently, the need for gathering up-to-date data on the issue of the repression and its consequences in the Philippines persist.

II. Theory

Threats

One of the early strands of research on repression and dissent argued that the involved actors must be understood through the prism of rational choice (e.g. Lichbach 1987), and that actors would therefore be likely to seek the path of least resistance – for the dissidents, that is the least repression. This theory, however, proves inaccurate when dissidents continue despite severe repression. One reason for this might be that it does not account for the cost of inaction, which to activists who perceive that inaction will cause continuous devastation of their environment, livelihood and health constitutes a serious threat. The threats-strand of repression research allows us to understand how threats can act as the “negative conditions intensifying existing grievances and creating new ones in stimulating collective repression” (Almeida, 2019: 45). Thus, structural threats can work as an enhancement of grievances and a drive for collective action. This account
to some extent also opposes that which argues opportunities are one of the most important factors for dissent, as shown by for example Einwohner (2003), or in Tilly’s words: “a given amount of threat tends to generate more collective action than the ‘same’ amount of opportunity” (Tilly, 1978: 134-135). Further, understanding activism in terms of threats allows for one more alley of understanding. In seeing state repression as one type of threat comparable to the threat to environmental detriment and its consequences for public health points to the real-world trade-offs that these activists must do. Commonly, threats to human rights are also entangled in both types of threats previously mention. As will be shown in the results section, this often quite accurately depicts the trade-offs available to the activists and explains why one keeps going despite the “costs” of repression; the threats of ruin of environment and its accompanying costs on public health, livelihood, loss of ancestral lands and impairment to human rights are costs that must be weighed similarly.

Strategic shifts

Understanding why activists persevere is, however, not quite enough. The question remains of how, in the face of severe repression, they are able to. Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) in their monumental study on the New Left in Japan and the United States found that while increased state repression caused the majority of the movement to retreat, a minority continued their resistance. Zwerman and Steinhoff argue the continuing minority were able to persevere due to strategic shifts that allowed them to “absorb” repression, as well as that their new, more radical and often violent actions attracted a new, younger cohort of activists (2005: 85). Lichbach was early to argue that shifts between violent and non-violent tactics would be a natural path for dissidents: as violence caused too much repression, groups would change to non-violent tactics and vice-versa to avoid further repression (Lichbach, 1987). This theory has gotten some support (see e.g. Francisco, 1995), but should arguably also apply to shifts between different non-violent strategies.

When choosing between different tactics, Tilly has found that groups often choose between a limited set of strategies, called their strategic repertoire, which is usually limited by the ideas of the dissidents: embedded in ideas, culture and habit (Tilly, 1978). Bearing in mind the strong Filipino culture of non-violent civil society organizing and movements, it is not unlikely that Filipino environmental activists when facing repression would consider changing tactics mostly within the accepted norms of non-violence and cooperation within their strong civil society networks.
Opportunity, networks and resources

The literature on the importance of opportunities for dissent is, as most of the field on the repression-dissent nexus, divided. As Einwohner’s study on rebellion amongst Jews in the Warsaw ghetto during the holocaust shows, when opportunities are missing, necessity might just be able to create it (2003). Organizational networks, however, seem to be of necessity for sustainable dissent (see e.g. Mora, 2016). Mora found that oppositional movements in the United States tend to last longer and be more successful if they arise from an already well-established civil-society network. Returning to the rich civil society which has been a prevalent element in the Filipino political context since it rose to successfully end dictatorship in 1986, it is likely that this network and culture of civil-society organizations, will be able to sustain protest even in the face of repression. This vibrant civil society within a repressive context must also be understood as one of the aspects making the Philippines quite unique in the study of state repression, as its population enjoys high degrees of freedom at the same time as it suffers harsh but inconsistent lethal state repression.

The argument

Seeing the deeply rooted culture of non-violent civil society-organizations in the Philippines and the comparably high degrees of freedom enjoyed on the one hand, and the threat to individuals and communities of environmental decline, detriment of public health and increasing repression on the other, this thesis expects that environmentalists see little option but to continue their struggles. It expects them to be able to do so drawing from the resources of a strong civil society and strategic adaptations largely within a non-violent repertoire.

III. Concepts and definitions

The paper revolves around three main concepts; repression, environmental activism and strategies or tactics.

State repression is a phenomenon that refers to actions conducted by the state to repress political activity (Earl 2011). It is however much debated how to more precisely define it; should one only include activities conducted by the state, or also other instances working in its close relations, such as paramilitaries? (Earl 2011; Earl 2003). Davenport defines it narrowly, as a set of state actions that violate First amendment type of rights – or outside the American context, the freedoms of religion, speech, press, petition, and assembly (Davenport 2007a). Following Tilly’s
example, state repression will be defined broadly as *actions that increase the cost of protest* (Tilly, 1978). This as using a broad definition allows to maintain the thickness of the concept and distinguish between different types of repression when operationalizing it (Coppedge, 1999).

In the case of the Philippines it is, however, rarely clear whether activists are targeted by the state or by private companies. Company harassments of activists might normally be defined as merely a crime, but as corruption causes close ties between officials and business interests, it is rarely a clear line between crimes committed by state and private interests. In cases like the killing of Gloria Capitan, the killer is yet unknown (Front Line Defenders, n.d.: 47; Global Witness, 2019), in other cases the companies are protected by police, military or paramilitary forces (Global Witness, 2019: 6; Lumibao, 2017). But even when it is more difficult to trace the link of repression to the state, what remains clear is the state’s complicity and the silence of the judiciary (see e.g. Freedom House, 2019). Therefore, repressive acts committed also by companies will be included in the definition, as long as the state either passively or actively appear supportive of the repressive deeds.

Environmental activism will in this paper be limited to actions against the type of threat which Almeida calls threats to public health and environmental decline (Almeida, 2019: 48–49). The threats to public health are in this interpretation of Almeida only those caused by environmental decline. Almeida’s definition further draws on Johnson and Frickel’s (2011: 305) definition of “ecological threat” as “costs associated with environmental degradation as it disrupts (or is perceived to disrupt) ecosystems, human health, and societal well-being”.

Environmental activists then, are the persons who engage in this struggle. This again is a broad definition, only to allow for the differences between different type of groups and individual activists. This, however, leads to the ensuing question – what is an activist? Dissidents, protesters and activists are used interchangeably in much of the literature and therefor also in this literature section. Dissidents and protesters are however, commonly used to connotate an oppositional movement as a whole, with dissidents usually targeting a government, political system or the like (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). An activist however, is “a person who uses or supports strong actions in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d., Italics added for emphasis). Thus, activists refer to either affirmative or critical stance of an issue, such as environmental issues, and not a system as a whole and is deemed fit for the purpose of this study.
Alongside Honari, strategies will be defined as “a plan of collective action intended to accomplish goals within a particular context” (Maney, Kutz-Flamenbaum, Rohlinger, & Goodwin, 2012: xvii, in Honari 2018). Though agreeing with Schock & Demetriou in that a strategic shift is perhaps most suitably limited to a “decisive change in the predominant forms of action by challengers engaged in struggle” (2019: 5; Italics added for emphasis), it could be beneficial for the research field to disaggregate also between different non-violent tactics. Therefore, continuing on the argument of thick definitions for the purpose of exploring a nuanced image of activists’ strategic adaptations, the definition of strategic shift here applied refers to a change in form of action by challengers engaged in struggle.

4. Research design

The following section will outline the methods used in this paper; starting with the method of data gathering, which is in-depth interviews, to continue with the tools for analysis of information, case selection and operational definitions of variables.

I. Method for data analysis

The research is conducted through a within-case analysis of the Philippine setting, with a comparative aspect in that it applies the case-within-a-case technique, separating the overarching case, the Philippines, into subcases which are different types of environmental organizations. The case-within-a-case (or in Yin’s words; the embedded single case-study, Yin, 2014: 48) research strategy is a useful strategy to see how a phenomenon may unfold in different settings (Gondo et al., 2010). This as it gives more leverage and generalizable understanding than studying a single-case, but allows for more thorough understanding than cross-case analysis which traditionally attempts “to determine causal relationships across a few isolated variables” (Gondo, Amis, & Vardaman, 2010: 135). Thus, the study aims to explore how different experiences of repression may affect strategy choices between activist groups.

Coding protocol and data analysis

An inductive coding approach was applied through the five phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clark (2006). Thematic analysis allows for organizing qualitative data, identifying and reporting patterns without losing the richness of the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79-80). The coding was carried out with the aid of MaxQDA, a software for improving and speeding up qualitative data analysis (see Yin 1989).
II. Data gathering

The data used for this study is primary findings from a small-n in-depth interview study. Whereas a larger number of cases is always desirable for reliability and generalizability of findings, the small-n finds its strength in providing rich contextual descriptive information (Almeida, 2019), which is further motivated by the gaps in micro-level studies in previous research. In this line of thought, as well as due to time and resource constraints, the number of conducted interviews has been restricted to five. Albeit not as generalizable as a larger-n study, the sample size is yet large enough to be able to generate the novel data necessary for the exploratory purpose of this study.

The interviews have been conducted following the semi-structured format. This approach draws on the benefits of a closed interview-approach as this allows for comparability as the approach makes certain the same topics are covered in each interview. The semi-structured format, however, allows for follow-up and exploratory questions where the researcher finds reason to go more in-depth or where finding areas not previously expected (Berg, 2004: 78-83; Bronéus, 2011). The format is thus deemed appropriate for the purpose of the study.

As noted by Berg, telephone interviews are less ideal than face-to-face interviews, as the inability to read facial expressions and non-verbal ques might cause issues of establishing good rapport with the interviewee (Berg, 2004: 93-94). However, they conclude that telephone interviews can sometimes be preferable due to travel constraints or when researching an inaccessible milieu. Thus, using video calls allows for some of the benefits of face-to-face interviewing, as the interviewer and interviewee can see each other, but answers to logistical constraints. Further, video calls can, when good internet connection can be established, be useful as this medium allows for participation in study to go unobserved by other members of the community. Thus, it can circumvent issues of rumor-spreading and the like, which as observed by Fujii (2010) might cause hindrances to data-gathering, and at worse security concerns. Thus, interviews conducted via video call was deemed an appropriate and resource-efficient method of data gathering. The software suggested for all interviews was Skype, a well-established in academic settings as it is considered reasonably safe and easy to use (see eg. Honari, 2018; Johnson, Reynolds, & Mycoff, 2016: 306). However, interviewees often had own preferences regarding which software to use, sometimes due to security concerns and sometimes dependent upon which one they were accustomed to. Thus, it became clear at this point already that the interviewees followed different levels of security protocols and the calls were made with the program of their choosing.
Further, the interview participants were chosen through a selection of environmental organizations or network organizations who either have suffered from members being killed or are well-known organizations within their sector. Although far from a perfect sample, this was deemed to be an appropriate point of entry to the research setting, which often can be an obstacle when conducting research in sensitive settings (Berg, 2004: 150-152; Bronéus, 2011). After initial contacts were established, the continued participant selection followed the Snowball Sampling Method, which is argued by Cohen and Arieli (2011) to be a suitable sampling method in conflict settings, as other methodologies might not be applicable. Although the researcher in this case did not set foot in the research setting, the researcher found the Snowball Sampling Method beneficial as few participants in the environmental groups would show their names or contacts on the internet. Having initial contacts as gatekeepers this sampling method therefore allowed the researcher to come in contact with a five of individuals involved in as many different organizations within the anti-coal (two interviewees) and anti-mining settings (three interviewees). Thus, it is very difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the generalizability of the sample, as it should be considered a sample of convenience rather than of perfect strategical choice. The study may, nonetheless, provide fruitful insights in how activists might mitigate risks and persevere despite severe repression.

This interviewee-selection procedure disregarded those activists who have decided to quit when facing repression and allowed for the focus of strategies applied by the activists who have chosen to continue. It must also be noted that this method only managed to reach organizational coordinators, or in Honari’s terms “formal activists” (2018: 4) as the engaged in the most affected communities, and especially indigenous communities, rarely have internet connection. It was mentioned in several of the interviews that these are the ones who suffer the highest risks of their engagement. This is unfortunately a limitation of the study.

Interviews, further, do have inherent limitations as data-gathering method. As discussed by Fujii (1995), interviewees might be encouraged to enhance stories, with or without intent. This is always an issue, especially as the interviewer holds a position of power, and it is not unlikely that an interviewee would for this reason say what she understands as expected of her. What is worth having in mind is also that the increased occurrence of extrajudicial killings has caused an increase in focus on and support for activists in the Philippines. This can for an involved person be experiencing repression be seen as giving credibility and enhancing one’s cause, which several interviewees mentioned that it in some ways had done and be an incentive to enhance one’s
stories. For this reason, the major events of repression, the killings, have been double-checked with reports from news and monitoring NGOs like Global Witness and Frontline Defenders.

III. Case Selection

Main case

The case selection for the study was done according to Gerring’s principle of an extreme case, i.e. a case which shows extreme values on the variable of study (Gerring, 2006). An extreme case is considered apt especially when conducting hypothesis generating or exploratory research and having an open-ended estimation of one variable, the dependent one in this case. An extreme case may not produce the most generalizable results, but is apt for getting insights in mechanisms previously unknown or mechanisms that might also be at work in less extreme cases, but become more apparent in the extremes (Gerring, 2006: 101-102). The Philippines, having the highest number of killed environmental activist globally for 2018 thus seemed like a suitable case for generating novel insights for the field (Global Witness, 2019a).

The Philippines is further theoretically interesting as most studies on repression have been done either in Western democracies or severely repressive autocracies. The Philippines is considered a flawed democracy, with much higher degree of freedoms than most repressive authoritarian cases but yet citizens in political opposition are at a high degree targets of extrajudicial killings, especially since the incumbent President Duterte took office (EIU Democracy Index, 2017; Freedom House, 2019). This could therefore also allow it to be considered a deviant case; and most importantly an empirically understudied type of setting for dissent.

Subcases

According to the local environmental and human rights organization Kalikasan PNE, 223 environmental activists died in the Philippines between 2001-2018 (Chavez, 2019; Global Witness, 2019a). According to Global Witness, 116 of these have taken place since the incumbent president, President Duterte, took office in 2016 (Global Witness, 2019a). The sectors of environmental activism, organized by their goals, that have been the most targeted are environmental activism concerning the mining industry, agricultural business and land grabbing, illegal logging and activism against coal fired power plants. What these all have in common are that the causes protested against are perceived as a threat to first and foremost the environment, and its prolonging, public health (Almeida, 2019). Out of these, activism against mining and coal fired power plants was chosen to be followed upon. This as the issue of land grabbing /
agribusiness was difficult to resource limitations, as it is mostly targeting indigenous groups who have very poor internet connections, as well as this largely takes place in Mindanao, an area suffering internal conflict and martial law, making interviews inappropriate due to both security and logistical concerns (Chavez, 2019; Global Witness, 2019a). The struggle against illegal logging was deemed inappropriate as it is not only activists fighting for this cause, but also forest rangers who are public servants, and their role as activists is thus theoretically unfit (Cinco & Enano, 2019; Formoso, 2019). Thus, the sectors of anti-mining and anti-coal plants will be compared, to see how two similar groups mitigate the presumably somewhat different levels of repression experienced. The level of experienced repression is presumably due to bigger conflicts with the business sector, as outlined by for example Global Witness, both within the Philippines and globally (2019a, 2019b).

The unit of analysis is thus the organisational sector, anti-mining groups or anti-coal groups. However, the experience of repression will naturally take place on the individual level and care has been taken to let each interviewee elaborate on their own experiences and strategic changes, just as well as connect this to the changes of the over-all group. The study cannot claim high representability for each group; but each interview has shone light on aspects of each group and its sector.

IV. Ethical considerations

Before conducting the interviews, a number of ethical considerations have been taken into account. These regard first and foremost safety concerns for the interviewees, but also the ethics of the study itself and the risk of sensitive subjects for interviewees. For these reasons, a letter of informed consent was given to all interviewees when scheduling interviews as well as orally presented before each interview. The letter outlined the precautions taken to secure the anonymity of each interviewee, which is done by anonymizing all names as well as names of organizations and locations as these could cause identification of the interviewee. The names were never stored with the notes from the interviews, and the storage of these were on an encrypted hard drive which only the researcher had access to. Further, the choice of Skype, deemed as noted previously to be a safe program for video calls, was chosen to reduce security concerns. When desired by the interviewee, we used encrypted software, such as Signal.

Moreover, the paper does cover a sensitive topic. For the comfort of the interviewee, all interviewee questions were designed in a matter that opened for explaining as in-depth or shallow
as preferred in order to allow the respondent to answer on a level comfortable to them (as outlined by Yin, 1989: 46). It was also clearly stated in the letter of informed consent that a respondent by no means was obliged to answer all questions or even continue their participation if anything would be perceived as uncomfortable, in order to avoid discomfort for the interviewee to the largest degree possible. For this very reason, the interviewees were also asked at the end of each interview if there was anything they wished not to be published. For this reason, some aspects have been omitted or elaborated upon in more general terms. Specific harassments or killings have only been mentioned when discussed in general terms that will not endanger the anonymity of the respondent.

V. Operational definitions

As repression has been defined broadly to allow for thickness and variation, repression will in this paper be operationalized as actions that increase the cost of activism. The repressive tactics can be both from state and the private sector, as have been elaborated upon in the theoretical definition. The strategic shift is also defined broadly as a change in action by challengers engaged in the struggle to enable inclusion of any, if at all, changes in strategy after the experiences of repression.

5. Result & Analysis

For anonymisations, all names of locations or organisations have been removed. For the same reason, care has been taken to use gender-neutral language and the interviewees will in the following sections be referred to as interviewee A, B, C, D and E.

The activists and their motivations

Starting out we mapped the activists’ role and experience in the movement, as well as their motivations for the struggle. All five activists where formal activists (see Honari 2018), meaning that they had formal roles within organisations. Four of them had coordinating roles and long experiences, 22-35 years, in working with communities for environmental or land issues. One was a youth activist working with education and awareness building and had been involved formally for a few years. All five work full-time as advocates of their environmental issues, however, only two gets paid, causing economic hardships for the advocates. For their motivations, all five motivated their actions in terms of the threats to environment and public health much like theorized by Almeida (2019).
Threats to communities, especially indigenous ones, and the potential social conflicts where also mentioned. Only one cited the threats to himself and his own family as one of the major reasons, others referred to the threats to other communities as what caused a sense of that there was no option but to fight for these issues.

I’m not a fisherman, I mean I have a choice [right], to get out, to move out from the community because I can find other job that would pay me, right? It’s what other people do, if there are still many challenges, and it’s causing them a lot of stress, they can always say oh, I resign. I will find another job. But you know, listening to the people, and being with the people, you cannot just resign (interviewee A, anti-coal plant activist).

Because I love the environment and we have only one eco-system, so if we don’t protect the earth, where can we go, where can we live? They [the communities] are suffering right now from sickness, tuberculosis, skin diseases and there’s cancer also. The most cases are of tuberculosis. And then the livelihood also: they don’t have livelihood anymore because the companies are taking our lands and our resources. That is why I will not stop (Interviewee E, anti-mining activist).

Interviewee E continued on to explain that in a small barangay (the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines), out of 4000 inhabitants, 500 had tuberculosis. Claims of tuberculosis were made also by interviewees in reference to proximity to coal fired power plants, and fit with the high numbers of tuberculosis reported in the Philippines by WHO (World Health Organisation, 2019).

One interviewee explained how raising children in a community with polluted water resources had affected their motivations: “I don’t want them to experience a lot of environmental destruction, as what we have observed in some parts of the country as of now” (Interviewee D, anti-mining activist).

Types of repression
The types of repression experienced were, as theorized, distinguishable by environmental issue, but also by the time the individual had been active as well as geographical location. The anti-mining activists had experienced as much as two massacres and about two killings annually within their ranks. Further, they suffered harassments, threats, criminalisation and one was being prosecuted in two separate lawsuits for their advocacy work. The same person also had a bounty on their life. “They are threatening to kill me. If I will not stop. I have a price on my head, only
3000 pesos. Haha. That’s the irony of all this” (Interviewee E, anti-mining activist), referring to the meagre sum of money. The common type of criminalisation, “red tagging” as it was referred to by the interviewees, was to hold people as communists as well as claim “illegal possession of fire arms or they plant evidence in the homes or offices of the activists” (Interviewee C, anti-mining activist).

Most targeted is the southern region of Mindanao, which is confirmed by the figures of Global Witness and Kalikasan PNE (Chavez, 2019; Global Witness, 2019a), with the most recent massacre in the town of South Cotobato in 2017 (Espina-Varona, 2017; Fonbuena, 2017). Seven indigenous persons were killed in an attempt to claim their land back from a coffee plantation for the international Nestle company. The same area is also a contested mining site (Lumibao, 2017), as mentioned by two interviewees. The individuals interviewed within the anti-mining movement also had experienced a great deal of harassments and threats.

We've been through many kinds of risks. There was a massacre in 2010, in Mindanao. Intimidation, harassment, illegal arrests and killing, and actually another massacre in 2017. I cannot count it in my fingers actually, the different kinds of human rights violations we've been through” (Interviewee D, anti-mining activist).

One of the anti-coal plant activists explained:

Well, in 2016 my colleague was killed. It was the first, she was the first environmental rights activist that was killed during Duterte’s reign. It was Duterte you know. Three years ago, we said that these killings would transform, or this war on drugs would transform into a war on the legitimate dissents. A war against the opposition. And we were right about that (Interviewee A, anti-coal plant activist).

This shows on severe repression, but yet less severe than what was suffered by the anti-mining activists. Apart from this, repeated harassments and threats where mentioned. The young anti-coal activist was the one to have experienced the least risk, presumably due at least in part to the short time engaged as well as the issue of coal appears less deadly than coal, according to these testimonies as well as for example Global Witness (2019).

As to who was the perpetrator of the ill-doings, it in most cases was hard for the interviewees to tell between the government representatives, usually local, or businesses. This as their actions and
interests in many cases where intertwined, as local politicians would be shareholders or directly bribed by the companies. For example, interviewee A’s colleague had been killed by yet unknown perpetrators, whereas the price on interviewee E’s life was put by the local communal captain. The instance in South Cotobato mentioned above was carried out by the military, which reportedly claims the ones killed where part of the communist New People’s army (Lumibao, 2017).

**Strategic shifts**

For four out of the five, a strategic shift – mostly seen in increased security precautions, could be seen since president Duterte assumed office and risks according to the same four increased. This included all anti-mining activists and one anti-coal plant activist. One interviewee answered that he has perceived the shift from the year before Duterte took office:

> From 2015 - 2017 - up to now. I remember specifically when we had general assembly last year. Then the whole general assembly said the network had to produce its own manual on security risk assessment and planning, and all of our members had to receive security risk assessments and briefings (Interviewee C, *anti-mining activist*).

Another interviewee mentioned that after the death of a colleague, they thought differently about security:

> Because the threats are real, I have to institute some protocols and safety measures. Sometimes it would really limit you. Like it would limit you from talking to one person to another, because you have to be careful of people you meet every day (Interviewee A, *anti-coal plant activist*).

Only one stated that he had not changed his strategies: “Uhm, not a bit. Because I don’t really take their... I know that there are risks, but I don’t really care much about it. I’m really... my mind is set to be looking forward to our goal” (Interviewee B, *anti-coal plant activist*). This was also the person who had experienced the shortest experience in advocacy work and had noticeably less experience of repression.

**Geographical differences**

Geographical differences set the backdrop to each activist’s engagement, both in terms of level of risk they experienced and the strategies available to them. The differences where most noticeable in terms of whether or not the local government and/or church were positive and helpful in the
cause, whether it was a community that suffered increased military presence due to Martial Law or due to the special legislation on economic zones, which allows areas that are deemed of national economic importance observe higher military presence in order for the state to protect its investments, called ‘Investment Defense Forces’ (Global Witness, 2019: 28). Lastly, what was repeatedly mentioned was the increased risk for peripheral communities, especially indigenous ones.

The importance of a good relationship with the church is, for example, important in the networking strategies mentioned above. In other areas, the bishops or priests where considered bribed. The situation was similar with the local governments. This had a deep impact on the possibility of the communities to fight against environmental destruction, as interviewee C made clear when answering to whether human barricades of mining sites are effective:

Yeah! Actually, both barricades are supported by the local governments. We did have a barricade set up in one island several years ago, and that was not supported by local government, that ended violently. There was one person killed. By the security guards of the mining company. But these two barricades set up right now are both technically and officially supported by local government, so they have been quite effective (Interviewee C, anti-mining activist).

Interviewee E had a similar experience, but theirs was impacted by the ambivalent relationship to the church: “when we had a barricade in 2010, we had two priests joining us, but when the bishop learned that they were joining us, he transferred them to other [towns].” Interviewee C summarized it as:

If the mining company is influential with the local politicians, they can actually use the local police or paramilitaries to harass the activists in the areas. In areas where the local government is sympathetic to us, you would see less intimidation. There are still harassment and threat, but varying degrees. And it’s easy to see the correlation if the local government are sympathetic or not with the anti-mining communities (Interviewee C, Anti-mining activist).

The southern Mindanao has been declared under Martial law in May 2017, presumably due to the on-going conflict between the state and the insurgent groups fighting for Mindanao independence (Proclamation No. 216, 2017). Interviewee C, however, referred to it as a military
junta and argued it had other political motivations. This caused its main consequences to be that “we cannot question the military deployment; we can only question why you are using guns against the communities. Why are you using cannons to bomb your so called the rebels? Actually [they] are not banning rebels [they] are banning communities” (Interviewee D). This correlates strongly to what has been reported by Global Witness and others, that the martial law allows for the military to be deployed against the population far beyond its claimed purposes (Global Witness, 2019a). This correlates with Mindanao being the deadliest area for activists in the Philippines (Chavez, 2019), but interviewees declared that this was a problem also in other areas, mostly those declared special economic zones or where there were strong ties between local government and the corporations, that allowed for military to be deployed liberally. In these special economic zones, the military’s strong presence has a deep impact on the situation for activists. One such case is South Cotabato, where 8 indigenous people were killed (ABS-CBN News, 2017; Chang & Ufberg, 2018; Lumibao, 2017):

[The] local or national government can evoke this obscure law to say the military should come in and protect these industries. So, there are high profile cases, in South Cotabato for example, where a mining company has asked the local government to protect the mining operations, so the military came to the area (Interviewee C, anti-mining activist).

These areas, then became especially dangerous. Activists in both the mining- and coal-sectors had experiences of the increased military deployment of these zones and its correlation to increased harassments and threats.

Lastly, the areas of increased military deployment occasionally coincide with communities being far-flung from the national centre, geographically and culturally. Peripheral communities were repeatedly mentioned as those that suffer the biggest environmental threats, as this is often where mines, power plants and similar hazardous activities are placed. They also suffer more “because the communities are left defenseless, sometimes some of the communities have no internet, no cell-phone signal. and we just hear news the following morning that somebody was shot” (Interview D, anti-mining activist). The peripheral communities are further often inhabited by indigenous groups, who are threatened more in two ways; firstly, because they are heavily dependent of the forests and other natural resources that are depleted by the business interests. This causes them to “be culturally displaced aside from being physically displaced […] and that introduces a whole menu of social conflict because of traditions and indigenous practices would be violated” (interviewee C, anti-mining activist). It was also repeatedly mentioned that the
industrial projects, mines and coal plants the like, caused many communities losses of livelihood, which was mentioned as part of the threats these projects posed.

I. Main strategies

Having established the general nature of the activists’ motivations, experiences of repression and their views on strategic shifts, the following sections aim to elaborate on the six themes of strategy and contextual resources and limitations that continually arose in the interviews.

Methods of advocacy

It was difficult to see any general themes in the methods used by the activists. Their contexts varied depending on the organization’s geographical position, focus and relationship to the authorities. The interviewees mentioned strategies that spanned from working with awareness-programs for youths and having seminars in communities to using human barricades at mines, to having street protests to talking in the congress or at international forums. In interviewee C’s words it was mostly about “creative non-violent action”. It was clear, however, that the anti-mining activists were the ones who had better relationships to the authorities and were able to talk directly to the congress, the Department of Environment and also occasionally at international forums. Interviewee A, an anti-coal plant activist concluded that a few positive state departments would listen to them, but not act on it:

They would welcome you to their offices, they would listen to what you have to say. They would receive your letters or your petitions. We experienced that with the Environmental Management Bureau. But unfortunately, they would just accept it, they would not act on it. [...] other agencies, they would not even receive your letter, they would not even accept your letter. They would say; “Ah this is not our [problem], we cannot accept your letter” (Interviewee A, anti-coal activist).

Further, when asked about the use of online activism the answers were mixed. The use had increased, according to interviewee C, both due to wanting to reduce the use of paper and as it mitigated the risks of physical activities. Interviewee D however, meant that online activism was necessary for their advocacy with or without the security risks. For interviewee E, who was engaged in a community which did not enjoy proper internet connection, seminars would be held by targeted leaders over the phone.

Security protocols
The three mining-activists were, despite active in different organisations and different regions, all part a national anti-mining network. Being a big network, they had sufficient resources to have been trained by experts in security risk assessment. This caused them to follow strict security protocols, which were apparent already in my first contact with them, as they only communicated by encrypted channels and put deep emphasis on security precautions as anonymisations. This was especially clear in their use of communications, but also the establishment of safe houses for individuals when targeted. The anti-mining activists appeared well-prepared, had well-developed support-networks for targeted individual, mentioned to be especially important for the “younger generations in [the organization because], I think when they are exposed to harassments and threats, they get rattled (interviewee C, anti-mining activist). This proves interviewee C’s calm way of dealing when faced with threats:

The more serious call was two years ago, when they actually knew my license plate and the color of my car. [...] But I kind of knew that was expected already. Because that was the time our campaign was peaking, we were at the height of our campaign and part of our annual assessment was expecting that we would be targeted, since the advocacy was already making headway (Interviewee C, Anti-mining activist).

Similar precautions were taken by the anti-coal activists, although in a less consistent manner. All activists had changed their movement patterns, which will be touched upon in the next section.

**Becoming louder versus lying low**

A type of strategy that was of different type between the two types of organisations was the strategies of becoming more vocal in face of repression, versus lying low. The anti-coal activists had, since suffering the killing of one colleague, become more outspoken:

We believe that one thing [we can] do to avoid more attacks is to go higher, to be more visible. Like, make your campaign more aggressive, so that people will know that you are campaigning [...] So in case you are attacked the probability of the accountable person would be [increased]. The accountable person would be the company, or anybody that has an involvement in the company. The suspects could be narrowed down. (Interviewee A, Anti-coal plant activist).

This tactic is, evidently, connected to Duterte’s war on drugs. This type of visible-and-fearless approach of the anti-coal activists was also noticeable in their general communication. They did
not ask to be anonymized for example but saw every opportunity of gaining visibility as an opportunity to get spotlight to their issue, and thus limit their risks.

The contrary could be seen in the anti-mining activists, especially on the national level. They had strict protocols for which messaging and calling platforms were deemed secure enough and laid much emphasis on the anonymization procedures. This was also visible as they when an activist was being targeted with threats would remove the activist from the public eye, sometimes put them in safe-houses and follow strict security protocols in where they go, who they talk to etc. Interviewee D (anti-mining activist) made clear that “we are not hiding”, but, continued on to explain that they might adapt their movements and limit where they go, as for example interviewee E, who would hold seminars over the phone when fearing to enter an unsecure community. The anti-coal activists also mentioned changing locations and being careful in who they talk to and where; but to a lower degree and in a much less structured way. This, however, relates strongly to resources – most apparently in terms of a stronger social networks.

These findings clearly signal that activists may not simply turn silent in the face of great risks. As these answers would have been difficult to track over time in a macro-level study, they also do signal why it macro-level studies might have difficulty following activists’ responses to repression.

**Social networks**

One strategic resource that was often mentioned, most prominently among the anti-mining activists, was *social networks*. The use of social networks enabled to share intelligence and pass the torch on between individuals and organisations fighting for the same cause, but also institutions or well-known persons outside the movement. “We partner with institutions that have high credibility, like the Catholic church, or a university, they become the front organizations, their logos and their names become the organizers of our events and then we proceed with activities.” (Interviewee C, anti-mining activist). Or as another activist coined their biggest asset “we are good in network-building” (Interviewee D, anti-mining activist). This resource allowed for targeted individuals or organizations to lie low, and the movement to continue. This tactic was, however, mostly available to the anti-mining activists, as they enjoy a higher degree of public support and support by some, though few, local governments and the catholic church. The catholic church was in fact one of the driving forces behind the public organization against mining in the 1990’s (Wurfel, 2006: 10).
All interviewees also mentioned international networks, and the benefits of their issue becoming increasingly in the spotlight, not the least since Duterte came to power and extrajudicial killings increased. Frontline Defenders, Global Witness and Focus on the Global South were a few of the organizations mentioned that had helped shed a light on their issues, but also more human rights organizations that are not typically connected to environmentalism had become increasingly engaged. All mentioned this as an asset in international moral and political support for their issue, for two this was also as their financial contributions was what enabled their continued engagement. This was, however, only available to the anti-mining activists.

The answers show that the social networks were one of the most important resources for the organizations and was what enabled strategic security adaptations, especially among the anti-mining activist. The anti-coal activists did enjoy support of social networks too, but to a lesser degree and in a less coordinated fashion, which might have caused them to continue with arguably more dangerous tactics.

Silenced by repression?
Interestingly, only one activist from the anti-coal campaign mentioned that fear of repression has caused some individuals, leaders of targeted communities were those mentioned, to become silent. The anti-mining advocates mentioned that their organizational network strengthened communities and individuals targeted by environmental destruction to struggle despite repression. This connects strongly to previous findings on the importance of organisational structure, which is well-known to be strong in the Philippines and has proven to be so also in this study, especially among the anti-mining activists (compare Almeida, 2019; Mora, 2016). Also, killings were mentioned as sacrifices that strengthen the rest of the groups, both in the meaning that the past could not have died in vain and that the consequences of each death had often meant increased support for the struggles. Or in an interviewee’s words; “many of the sacrifices have been very relevant. [...] [After the killing] within five years, the three mining projects within the locality were stopped. They haven’t operated since. So that’s an inspiring story for many of us” (interviewee C, anti-mining activist).

These findings correlate to the strain of research arguing that when repression is seen as illegitimate, it will enhance the anger of oppositional movements and allow them to continue, as for example the studies by Zwerman & Steinhoff (2005) on the American and Japanese “New Left” movements. Zwerman & Steinhoff found that when violent repression increased, a
majority of the movement waned but a minority turned to violent tactics and attracted more young new recruits. The killings and threats these activists have experienced seem to have had a strengthening effect on the morale of the Philippine movement, once again especially for the anti-mining activists but interestingly, turning to violence was never mentioned as an option, differing it from findings like those mentioned above. This also allowed for the movement to continue with a broad support. Once again, however, this was true especially for the anti-mining activists, pointing to the importance of broad support networks to enable activists to persevere in the face of repression. There is little evidence, however, that points to that the high levels of popular support enjoyed by the anti-mining groups are a consequence of the illegitimacy of the repression. Rather, the issue has had large popular support since the Catholic Church encourage this struggle in the 1990’s (Wurfel, 2006: 10). However, the illegitimate repression has clearly affected the international recognition of the activists’ situation, which to some degree have helped their struggle.

6. Conclusions

Four out of the five interviewees in this study have been found to have experienced severe repression, albeit of varying type and degree. As a consequence of this, the same four have adapted their strategies, but mostly in ways that limit their risks and utilize the strengths that can be found within their organisational networks. There is however a clear difference between both groups and individuals, as the anti-mining activists had experienced instances of the repressive killings yearly and were also seen to have adapted the most strategies to stay secure. The anti-coal activists on the other hand had one interviewee who experienced little repression and one who had experienced the murder of a colleague. The relationship between experience of repression and strategic adaptation can arguably be supported by the fact that the interviewee who had experienced the least repression was also the only the one who claimed not to have changed their behaviour. What is important to have in mind is, however, that the organizational resources have an apparent role in the possibility for tactical adaptations – something that the anti-mining campaign enjoy to a higher degree through their broader popular support. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions regarding the impact of experiences of repression vis-à-vis the impact of organizational resources.

Further, no interviewee had such a decisive shift in strategy that it fits fully into the literature on strategic shifts – which in the words of Schock & Demetriou (2019: 339) requires a “decisive change in the predominant forms of action by challengers engaged in struggle, such as from
nonviolent to violent resistance or vice versa”. Such a shift has not been seen, and with awareness of that this could have been affected by the sample of the study, the findings lend leverage to the conclusion that the Philippines’ culture of a strong non-violent civil society has affected the activists to continue their activism within the bounds of non-violent strategies. Rather than decisive strategic shifts, they have then turned to strategic adaptations to mitigate risks.

What can then be learned from the study? Firstly, we find that threats composed a fundamental motivation for these activists, as all activists mentioned the threats to the environment and its consequences on loss of livelihoods or detriment of public health to their own families or other communities as motivations for their continued struggle. The findings do then to some degree contradict the rational choice hypothesis, as this would have the activists step down when encountered with the lethal risks that evidently come with their activism. If anything, the anti-mining activists mentioned finding strength in the deaths of their colleagues. For the anti-coal activists, and with their lesser organizational capabilities, community leaders where once mentioned to step out of the spotlight as consequences of the risks that came with their advocacy.

Secondly, the study shows how “absorption” of repression (in the words of Zwerman & Steinhoff, 2005) can be related to the importance of organizational resources such as strong activist networks, and thus connects different theoretical schools of the repression-dissent nexus. This could also be put in the simple terms of being stronger together – as one of the findings of the study, is that the anti-mining activists had a larger support network both nationally and internationally, which allowed for them to overcome repression. This also points to the importance of international organizations continued support for grassroots activists in their struggle for human rights; be they environmentally related or not. Nonetheless, there is a need for further research to find the most successful recipes for non-violent change.

Interestingly, the anti-mining activists did as presumed meet more severe repression, probably due to the industry being financially stronger than the energy industry. But it did also enjoy the greater public support, which enabled the adaptations necessary to overcome the repression. Theories arguing that when repression is seen as illegitimate, the movement will garner higher levels of support due to the illegitimate response are however difficult to assess on the national
arena, but could be said to be true for the international support the anti-mining movement has received since the repression under Duterte has become more well-known.

Lastly, the strategic adaptations made by these activists, though small, do present changes that could be enough to explain for the variations in protest activity that could lead to difficulty measuring continued activism on the macro-scale; the pass-the-torch-strategy is a clear example of this. Most of the measures taken are, in interviewee C’s words evolving around “creative non-violent action”. These creative means of changing methods and messenger could to some degree explain why measuring reactions to repression does not lend itself easily to macro-level studies.
7. References


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8. Appendices

I. Informed consent form

The purpose of the research project

The repression-dissent nexus has evolved considerably over the last decades, yet the effect of repression on protest movements remain debated. What is especially lacking in the field are qualitative studies on severely repressive settings; accounting for the choices activists face in the face of dangerous political activity. The Philippines, having become increasingly dangerous for governmental critics in the last decade and especially so for activists in the environmental realm, constitutes a fruitful case for study. The study will examine how and whether environmental activists in four realms of environmental activism (anti-coal, anti-mining, anti-land grabbing and anti-climate change) continue in the face of severe repression. The issue will be examined through in-depth interviews with activists within the different movements. The questions are of importance to the understanding of democratic struggles in repressive settings, and of policy importance as they might allow outside supporters to gain an understanding of the struggles protesters face and how they can be supported.

The study will therefor examine the research question *How does state repression affect environmental activist strategies?* It is hypothesized that activists working in a realm that meets greater conflict with business interests will need to choose more covert strategies to pursue their goals.

Your possible participation in the study

You have been selected as a possible participant in the study due to your engagement or relations to an environmental organization. During the interview, you will be asked a set of questions that you may choose to answer or refrain from answering. Only discuss things that you feel comfortable sharing with the researcher. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. I will only use direct quotes if you give your consent.

If you later wish to clarify a certain aspect of the interview, you are at all times encouraged to contact the researcher in order to make an additional comment or revision to your statements. Also feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions and concerns about how the information in the interview will be used.
How the study will proceed

If you choose to participate, the interview will begin as soon as you have given your consent to participation. The responsible researcher will carry out the interview. You may choose to withdraw your participation at any time before, during or after the interview.

The information is collected during video interviews. You may therefore do the study wherever you are comfortable and feel able to speak freely.

The information will be stored and analyzed at Uppsala University in Sweden. The results of the study will be used for a Bachelor Thesis and will be uploaded online in accordance with the university’s procedures for Bachelor Theses. In the published material, the interviewees will remain anonymous. This includes the names of organizations and towns or villages where this information might jeopardize the anonymity of the participant. During the interview, the researchers will take notes in order to remember the information that you provide. If given your consent, the interview will be recorded. After the interview, the researchers will type these notes on the computer and add the information to already existing information collected from other interviews. I will use the compiled material to draw conclusions, which will be presented in the final paper. If you so wish, you have the right to read and consent to any quotes, that I plan to use, before uploading the paper.

Risks and benefits of participation in the study

Participation in this study should not entail any particular risks to the participants. The information collected during the fieldwork will be stored and analyzed at Uppsala University in Sweden, and the information provided will be used for academic purposes only. This information will be carefully handled and protected. Some of the issues that will be addressed during interviews may be perceived as sensitive or upsetting to you. In such a case, you may choose not to respond to a specific question or talk about certain issues. You may also, at any time, withdraw participation from the study. The benefits of participating in this study are modest, but important. Your participation will contribute towards improving both academic research, general understanding of the situation activists as yourself face and the support needed.

Information management and confidentiality

The information you provide will only be available to the main researcher in its original content. Research material will be digitalized in password-protected computer files that are transferred to
an external hard drive, which is also password protected and kept at Uppsala University. It is only the researcher that will have access to the original data.

**How will you learn about the results of the study?**
If you want to learn about the results of the study, please contact the researcher Karoline Hermansson (contact details provided below). You are always entitled to access the results for the study, when such results have been produced. The results of the study will be disseminated to participants only upon their request.

**Voluntary participation**
Your possible participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw your participation at any time before, during or after the interview. If you want to withdraw participation after your meeting with the researcher, contact us using the information provided below. Upon your request, all information collected from your initial participation will be destroyed.

**Responsible for the project**
Responsible for this project are Karoline Hermansson, student at Uppsala University in Sweden, supervised by Dr Holly Guthrey (Assistant Professor).

Please turn to Karoline Hermansson if you have questions or concerns relating to this study:

Karoline Hermansson  
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies  
Uppsala University  
E-mail: Karoline.Hermansson.9683@student.uu.se  
Telephone: +46 734 298 697

**Consent to participation**
By participating in this study, you give your consent that you have understood the purpose of your participation, as well as the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study.
II. Topic Guide

1. Please tell me about yourself - who are you and what do you do on a daily basis?
   a. Where from
   b. Education
   c. Work
   d. Activism

2. What issues engage you the most?
   a. Why is this?
   b. How does this issue affect your community?

3. To what degree would you consider yourself active for this cause?
   a. What is your role in this group/organization/movement?
   b. For how long have you been active?

4. Are there any risks with being active the way you are?
   a. What are the risks?
   b. How long you have been aware of these risks?
   c. How has your activism changed since becoming aware of these risks?
   d. How do you take the risks of [answer to previous question] in account in your actions?
   e. Have you had experience of [the risks mentioned]?
   f. Who or what causes these risks?

5. Have you had the same role since your activism began, or have you changed roles?
   a. What made you change roles? (Connecting to experiences mentioned above)

6. What do you think would happen if people did not organize for this cause?
   a. What do you think would happen to the cause if you personally did not organize for this cause?

7. How do the goals of your organization align with the goals of the government?

8. How do the goals of your organization align with local or national business interests?
   a. Do you consider any of these actors dangerous?
   b. In what way?
   c. Which is the most dangerous? Why?
9. Since you have become aware of these risks / experienced (what is mentioned above) – how has your engagement changed?
   i. Has this caused a/ the change of your role in the organization?
   ii. Are you less or more outspoken?
   iii. Have you changed tactics – like going more/less online, writing more/less pamphlets or debate articles, protesting more/ less in the streets?
   iv. What precautions do you take?
   v. What makes you keep going?

10. Why/ why not different sets of strategies?
11. Have you (individually) changed strategies or has the entire group?
12. What sort of trade-offs where you thinking of before making this decision?
13. What options were available to you?
14. Is there anything you want to add?
15. Do you have any questions?