



# Revolution in Democracies

## The 2019 Uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq

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May 16 and 17, 2022  
Helsinki, Finland

*Lebanese Thawra*

*October 2019-March 2020*

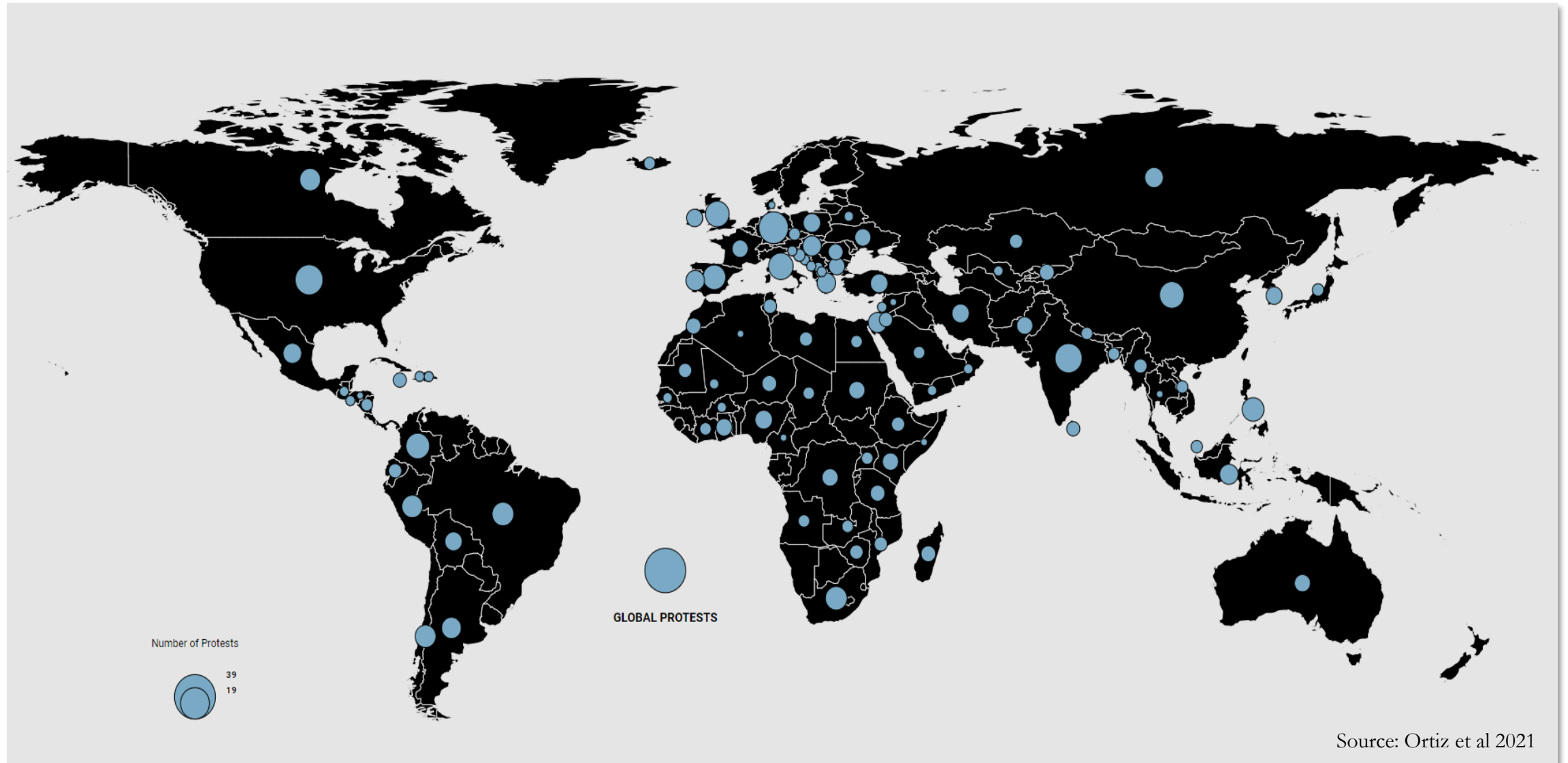


*Iraq's Tishreen Uprising*

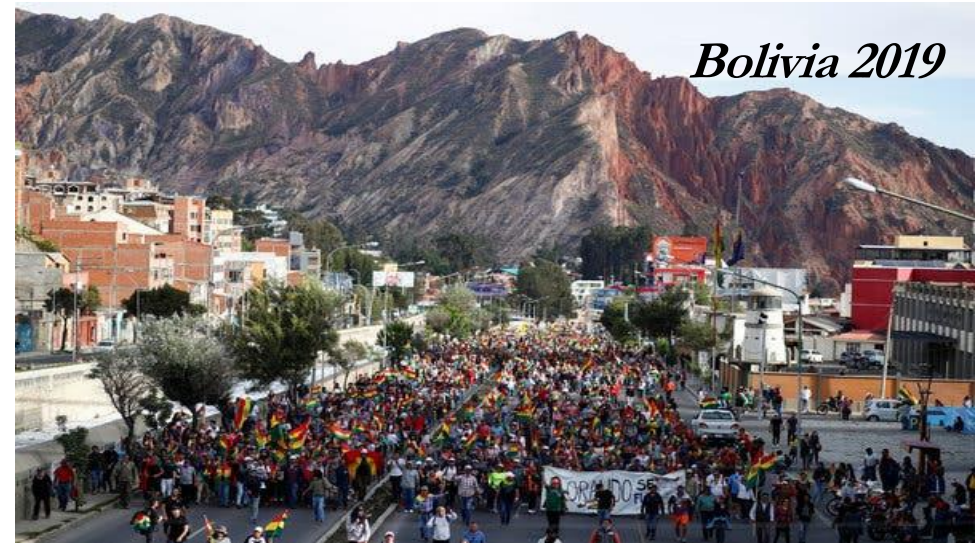
*October 2019-March 2020*



# Part of a global wave of unarmed revolutions over last decade



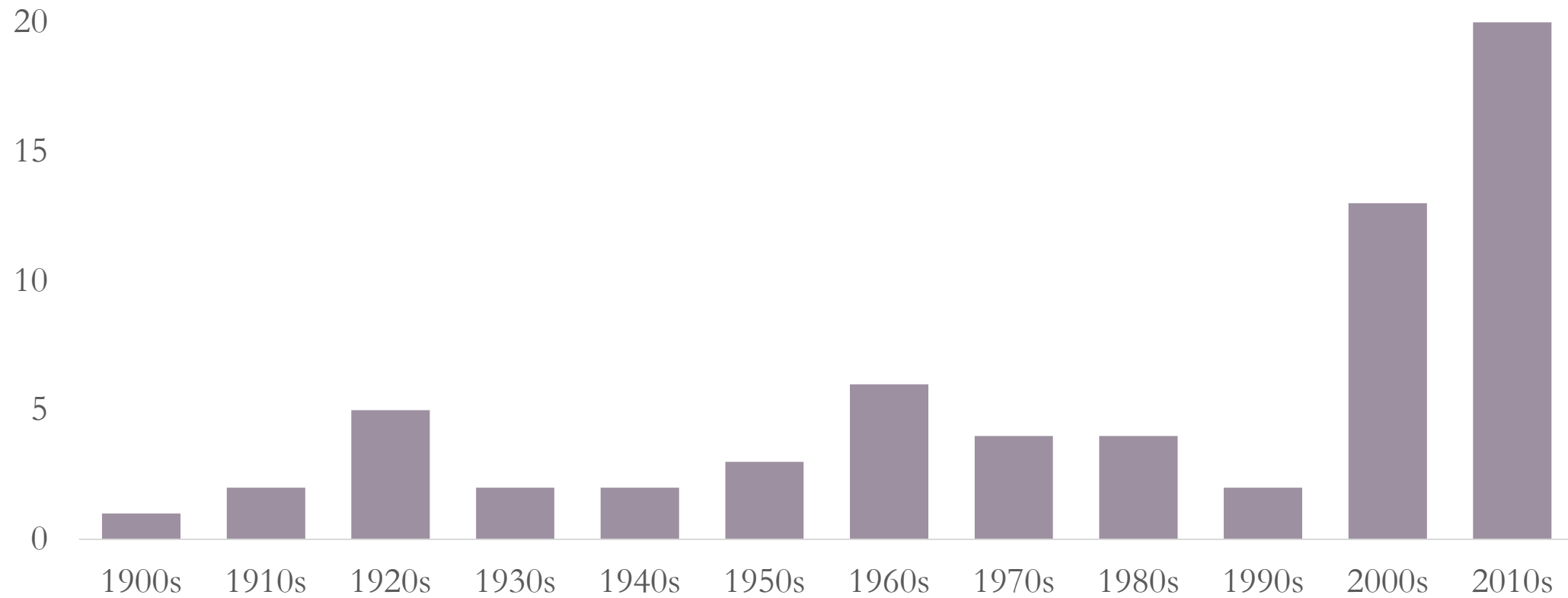
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## Number of Revolutions in Democracies (Polity >5) by Decade, 1900-2020

Source: Beissinger 2022



## Conventional wisdom is that revolutions should not occur in democracies

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“ Even imperfect and poorly consolidated democracies tend to diffuse revolutionary pressures ”

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“ Revolutionary movements that seek to overthrow democracies confront the question of why large numbers should take the extraordinary risks associated with revolution when they could wait out the regime until it must submit itself for approval at the ballot box ”

– Beissinger 2022, p. 159



# Revolutions calling for total replacement of ‘broken’ democracies

## Regimes characterized by:

- Regular competitive elections with few irregularities and little outright fraud  
*but also*
- Collusive power-sharing and “party cartels” (Slater and Simmons 2013)
- Deeply-ingrained corruption and crony capitalism
- Neoliberal economic policies and dismantling of welfare institutions
- Unaccountable state violence

# How do revolutions in broken democracies differ from those in autocracies?

## Path to success for unarmed uprisings against autocracies

- Construct “**negative coalition**” of diverse participants around single least-common-denominator goal of ousting the dictator
- Leverage moral power of unarmed resistance to **generate outrage** in response to state violence
- Use combination of mass participation and moral outrage to **elicit elite defections** from the incumbent regime

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  - ⊖ Repression perpetrated by non-state and pseudo-state actors; more difficult to trace and pin down responsibility

# Protest event data from Lebanon and Iraq

- “Event” data drawn from local Arabic-language news sources in Lebanon and Iraq
  - Superior coverage vs “off-the-shelf” datasets
- Contentious events include protests, marches, sit-ins, roadblocks, and mass attacks
- 80+ variables including location, timing, demands, size, participants, repertoire, and state response
- Iraq dataset
  - 2,641 events
  - September 2019 to March 2020
- Lebanon dataset
  - 3,224 events
  - October 2019 to March 2020

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## الاحتجاجات الغاضبة تجتاح بغداد والمحافظات

بغداد - طريق الشعب

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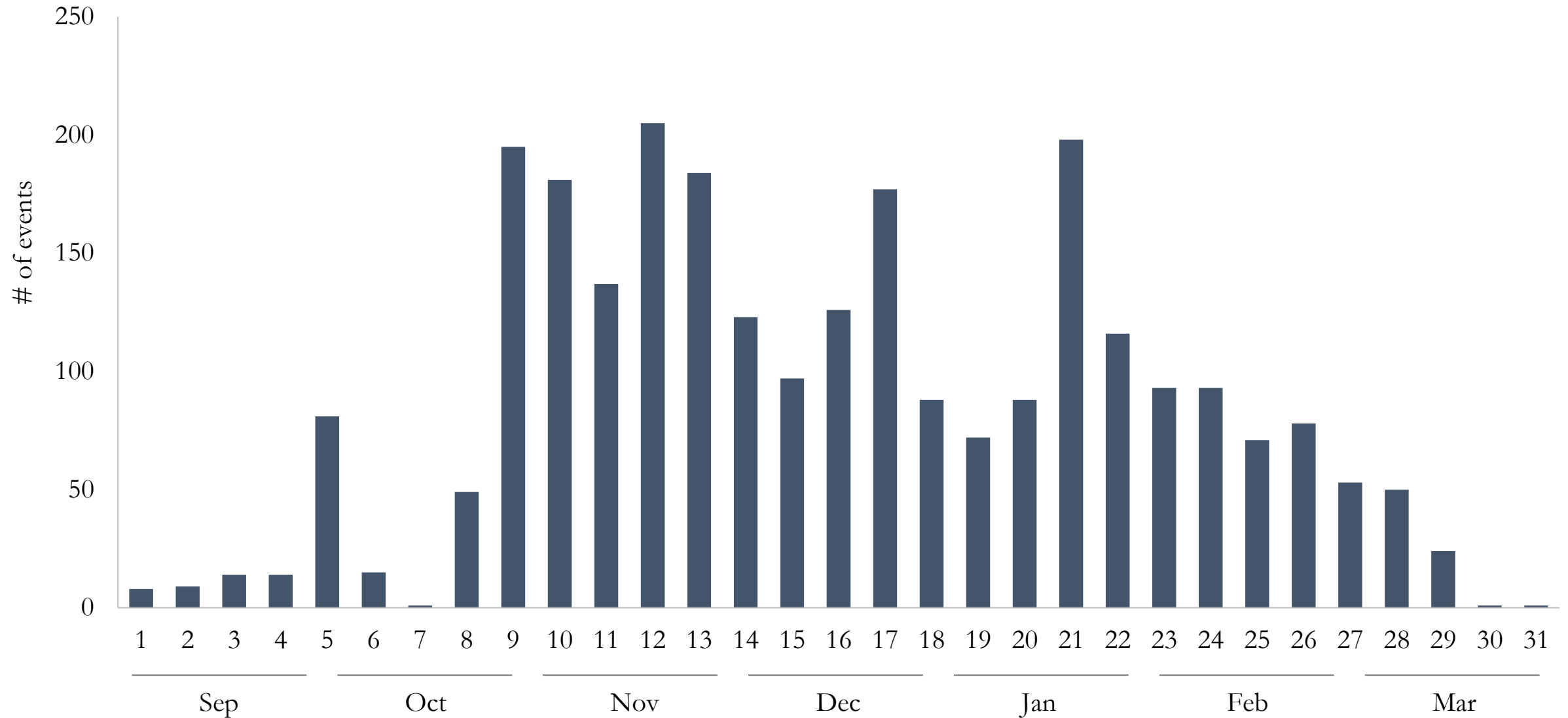
## الاعتفو الدولية طالبت بضغط النفس احتجاجات العراق .. الأمم المتحدة قلقة من أحداث العنف ومفوضية حقوق الإنسان تطالب بتحقيق شامل

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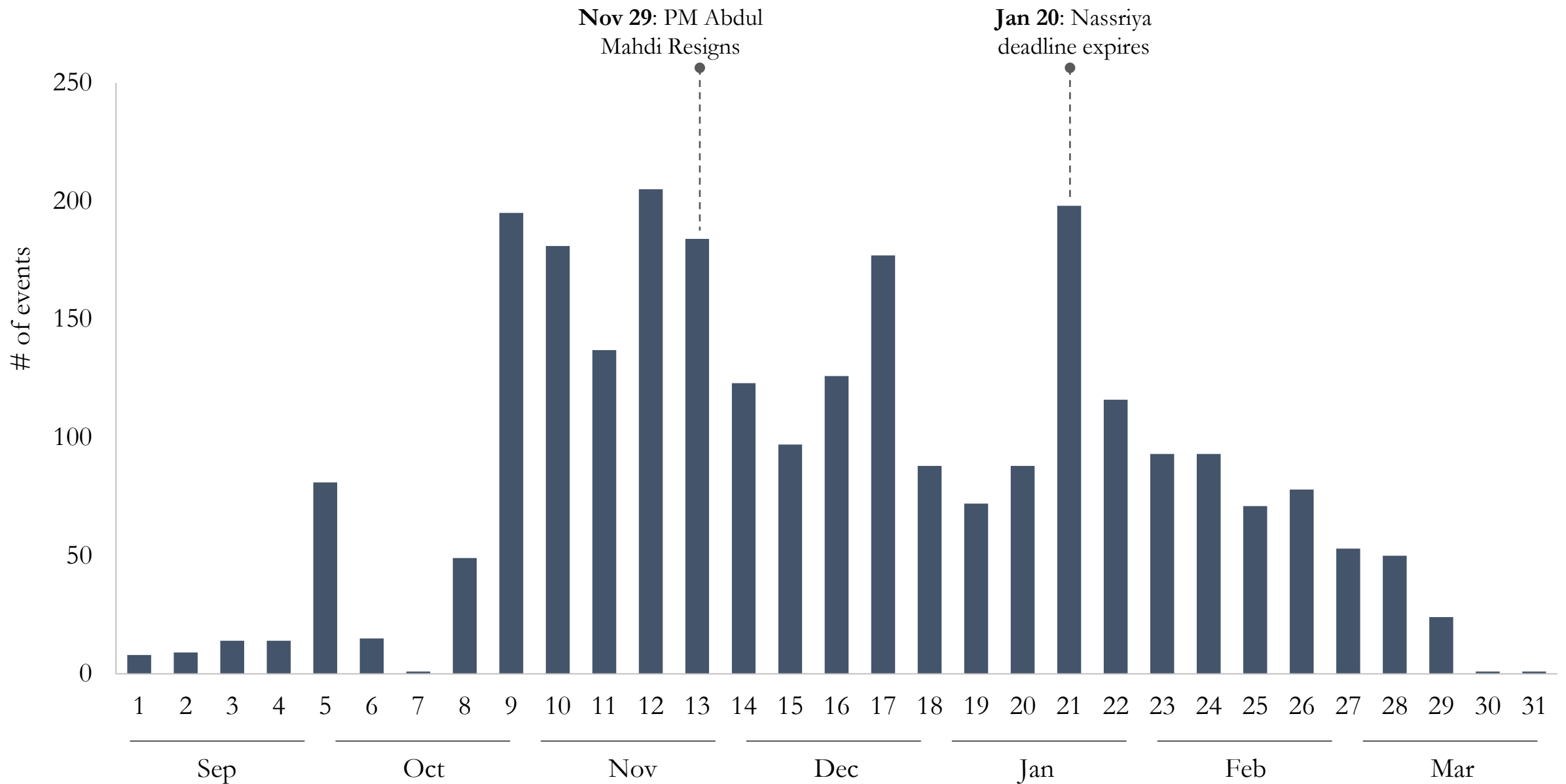
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# Phases of protest: weekly event counts in Iraq

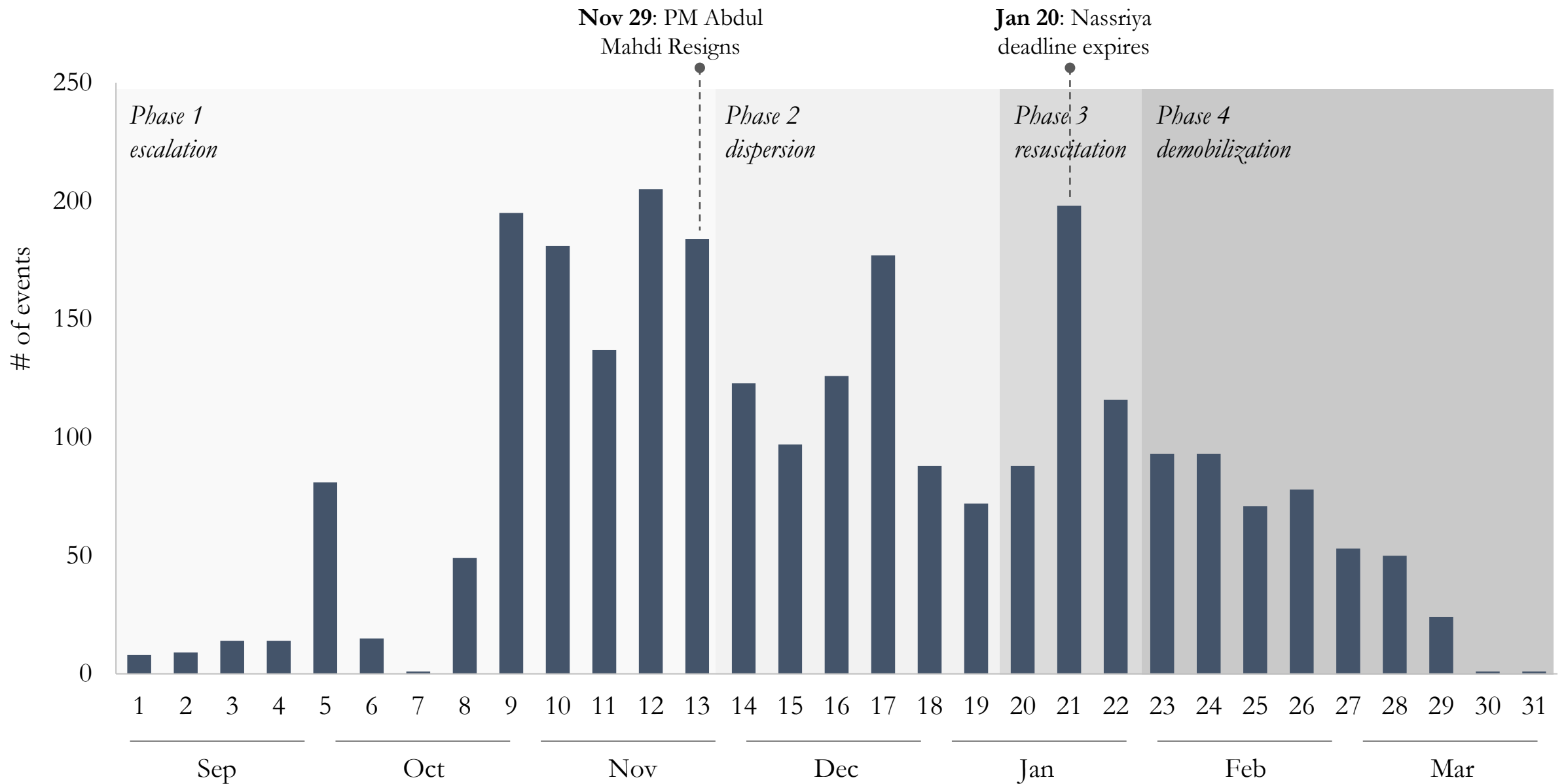




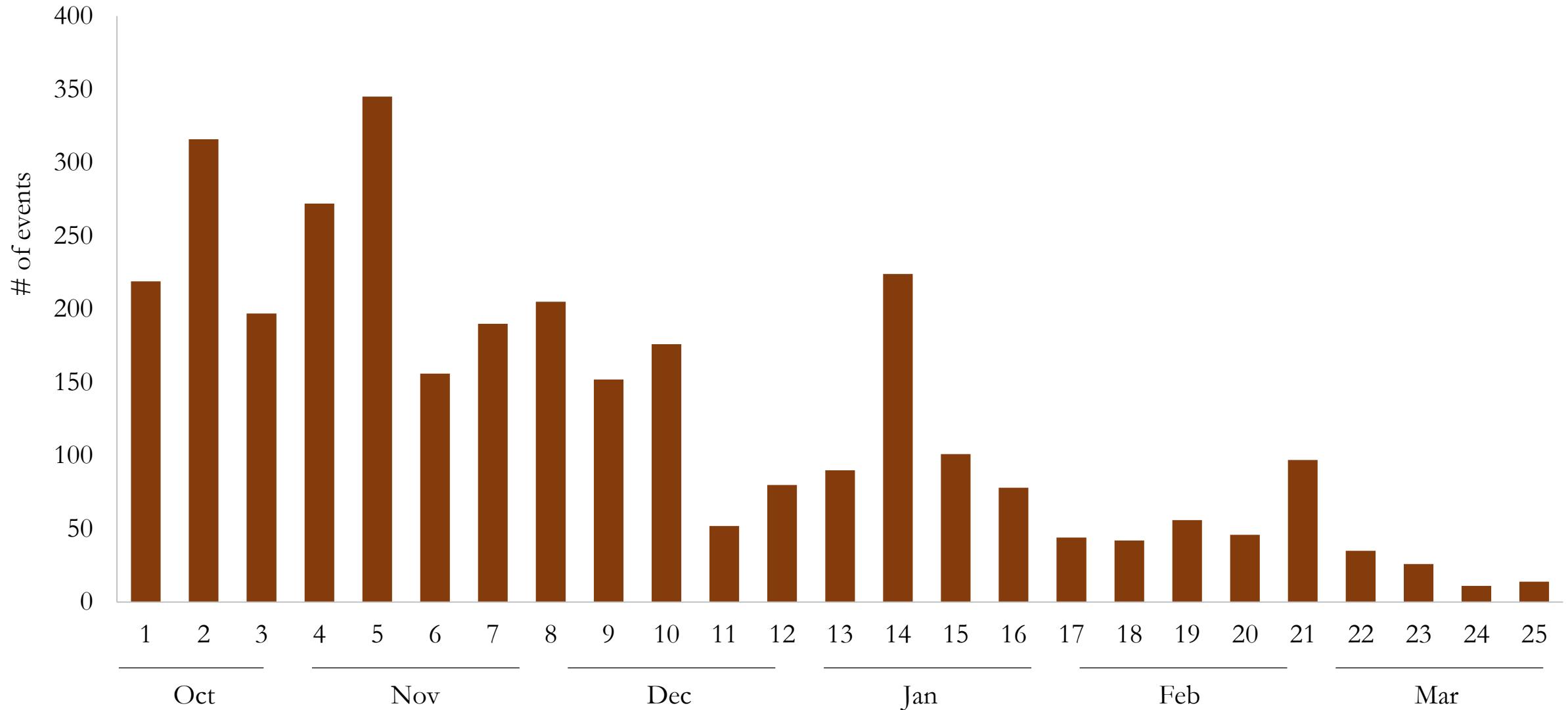
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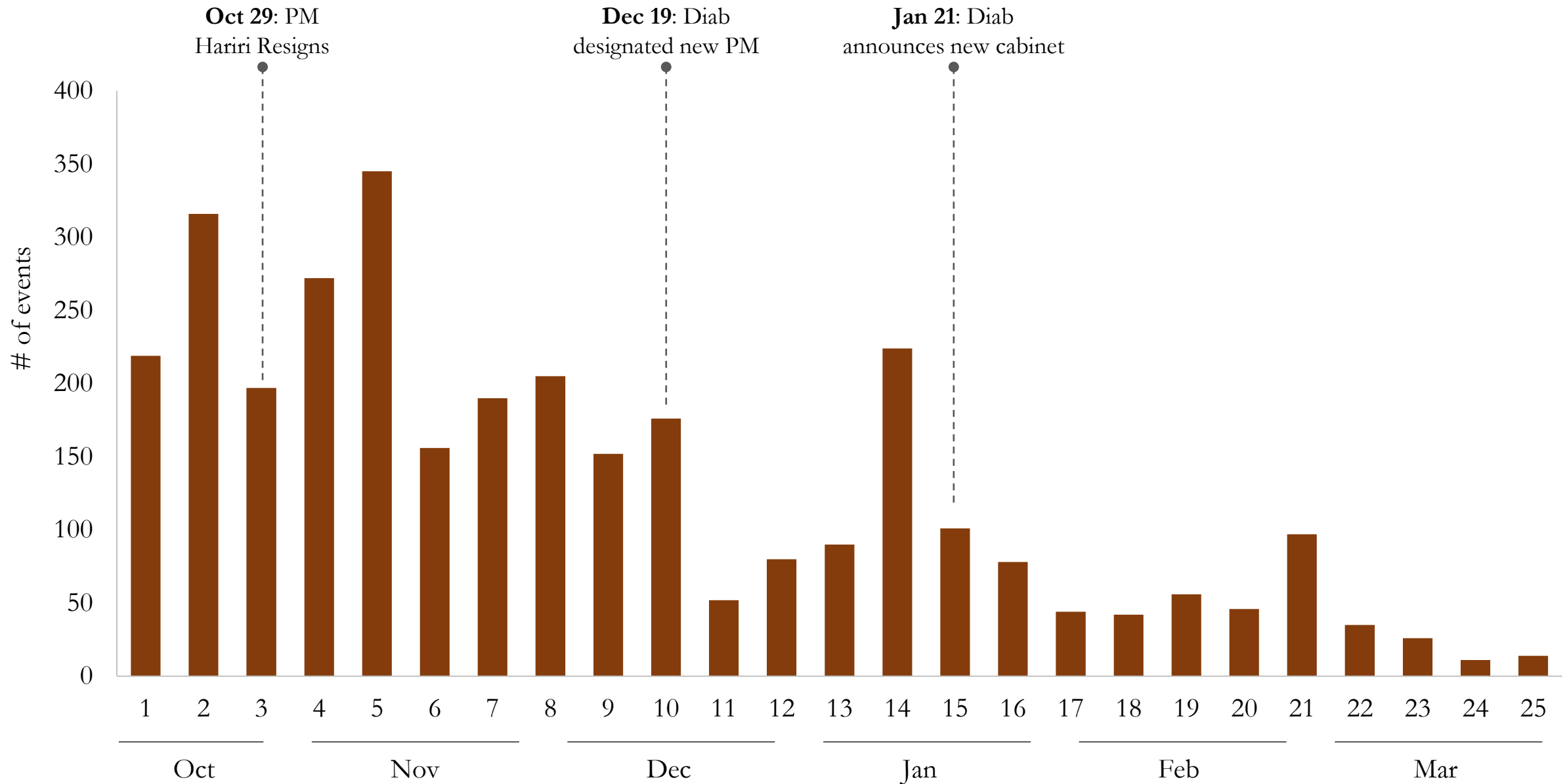
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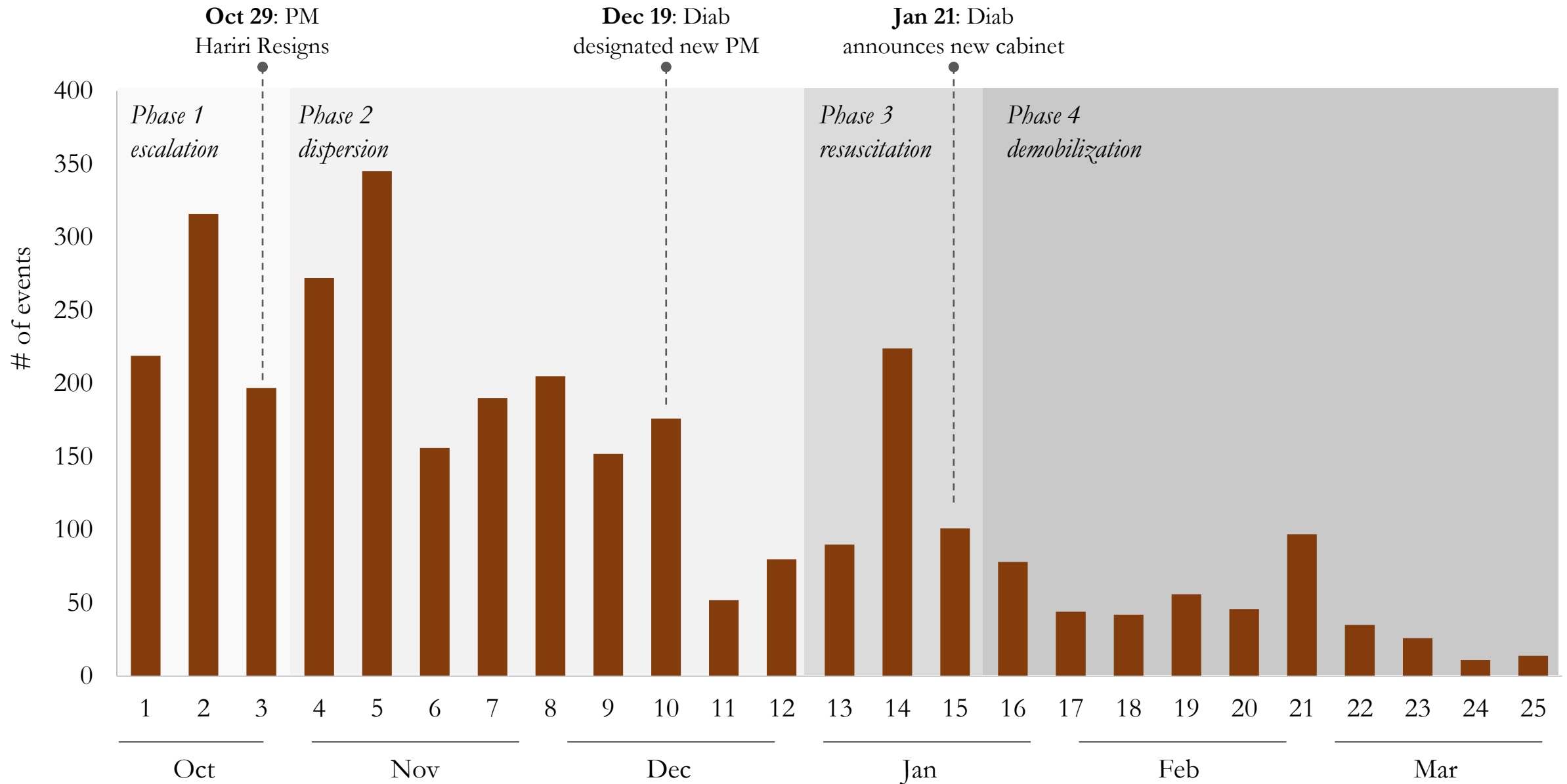
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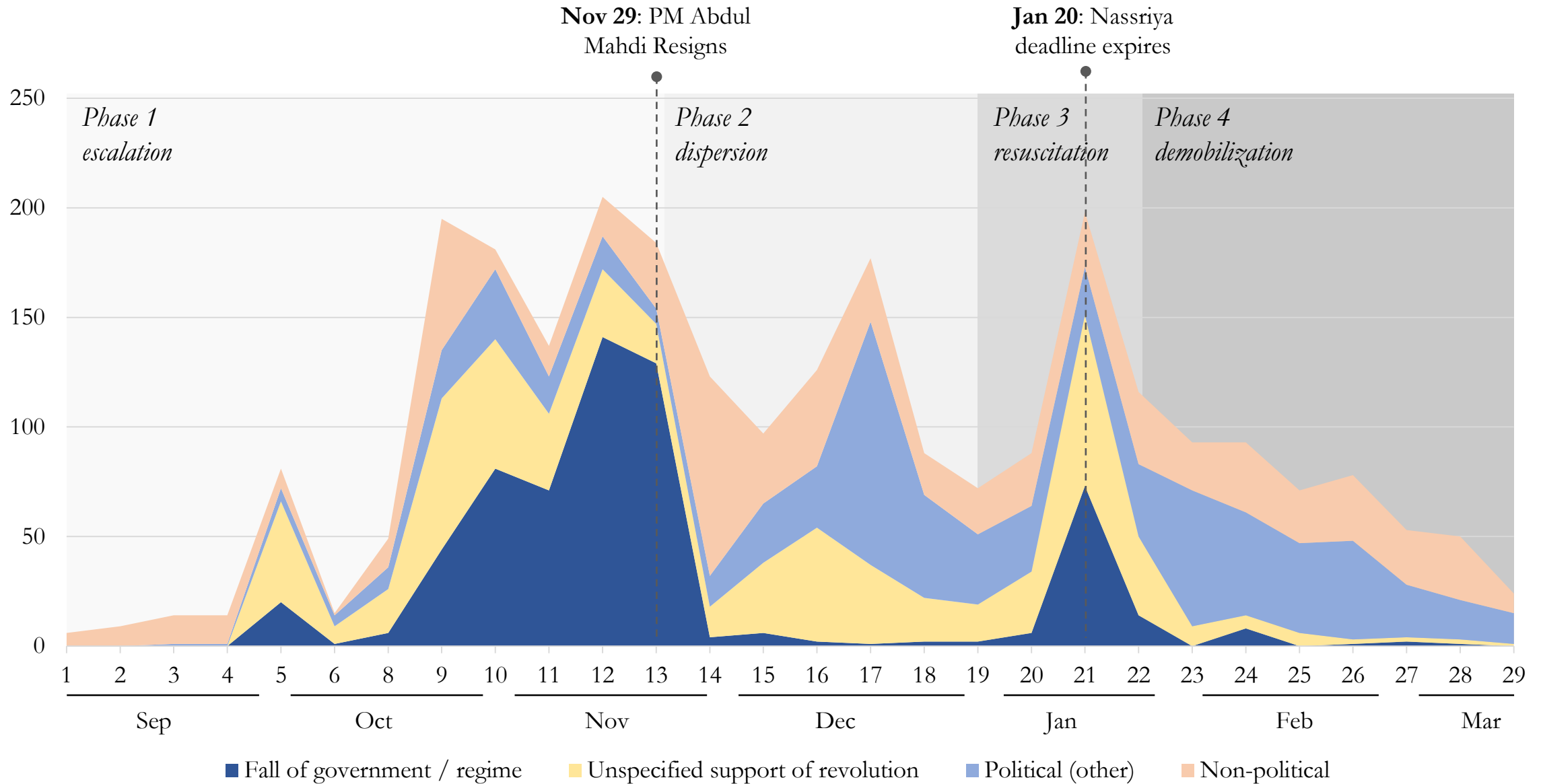
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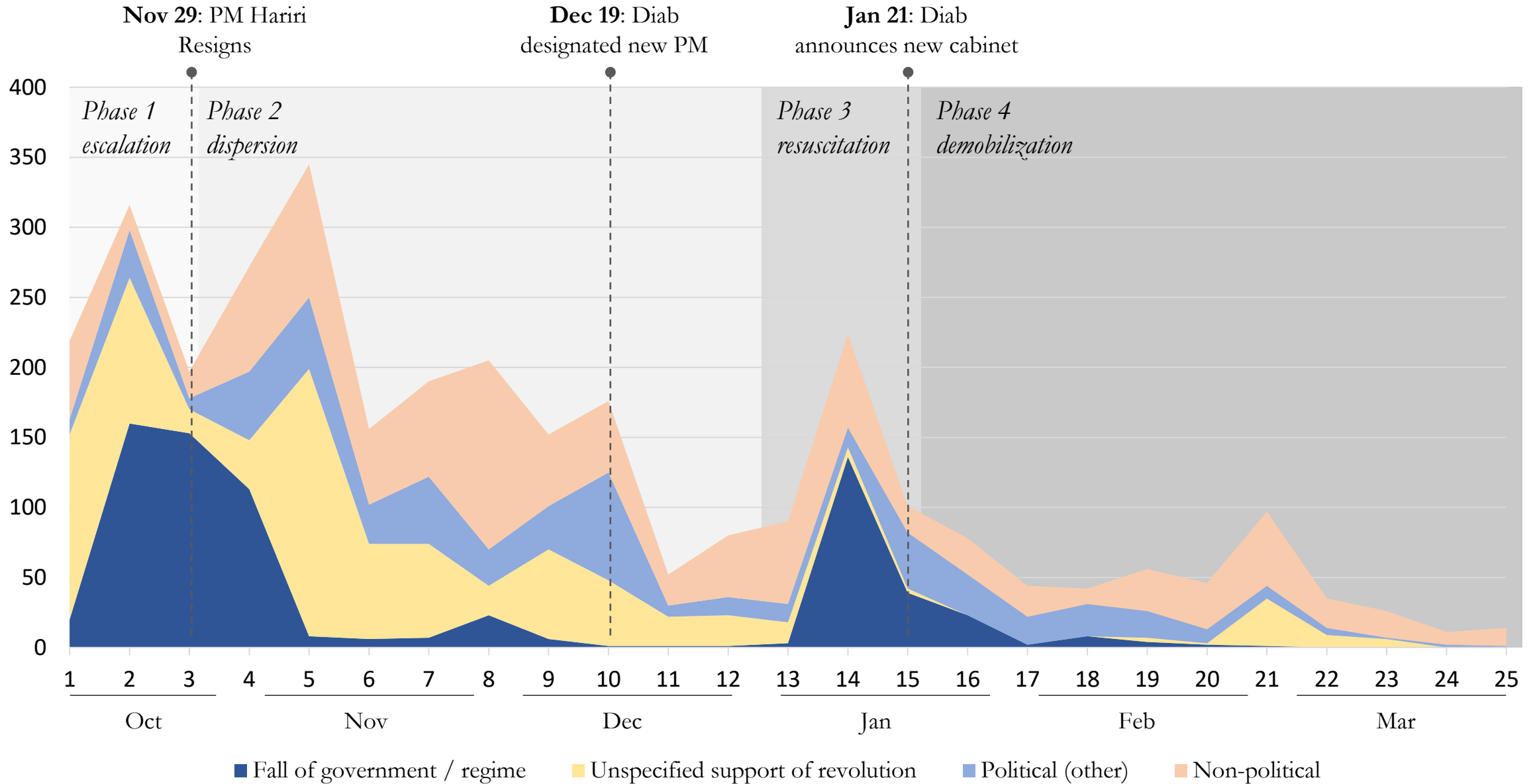
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# Demand cycling: weekly protests by demand type, Iraq



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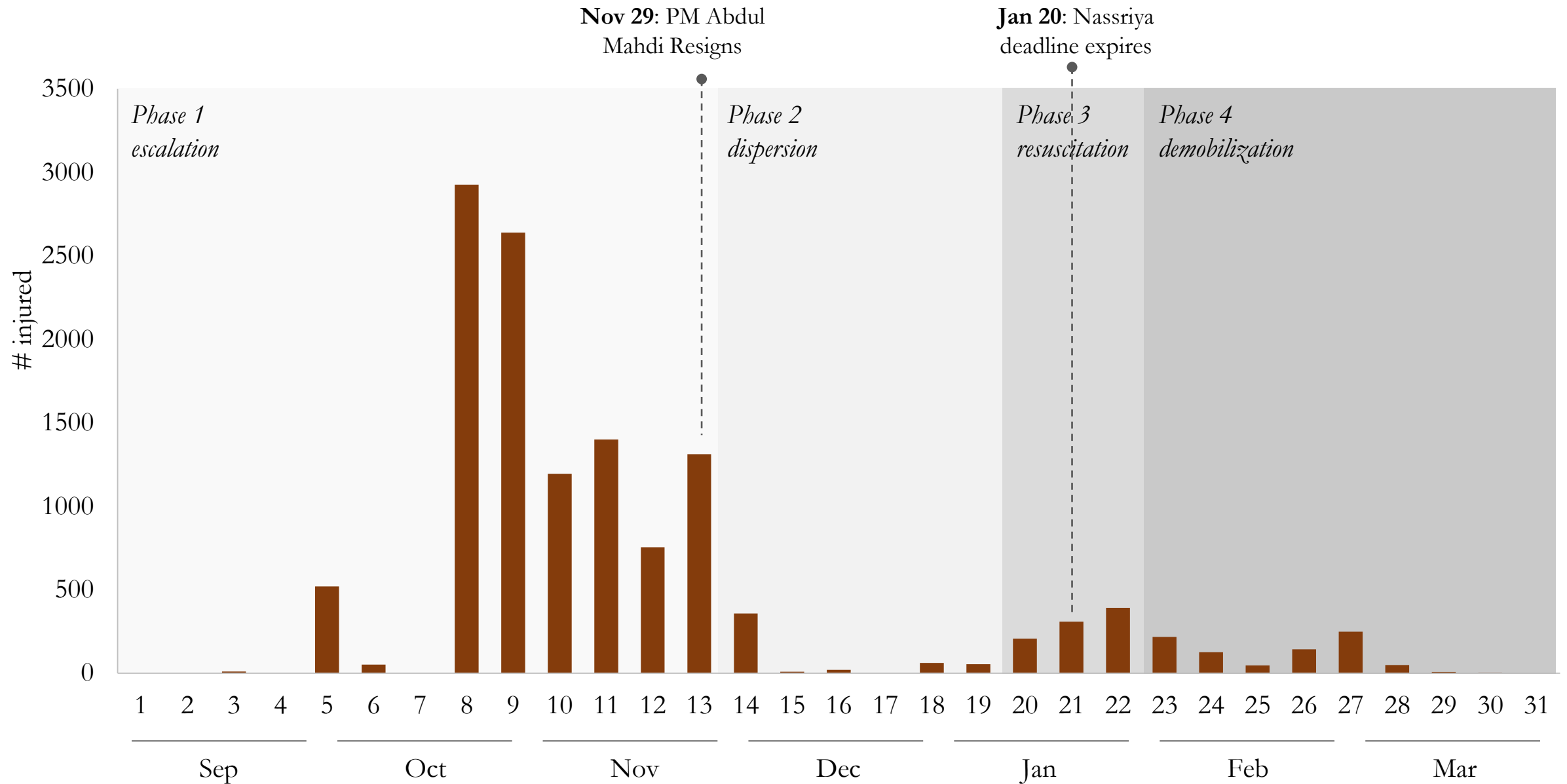


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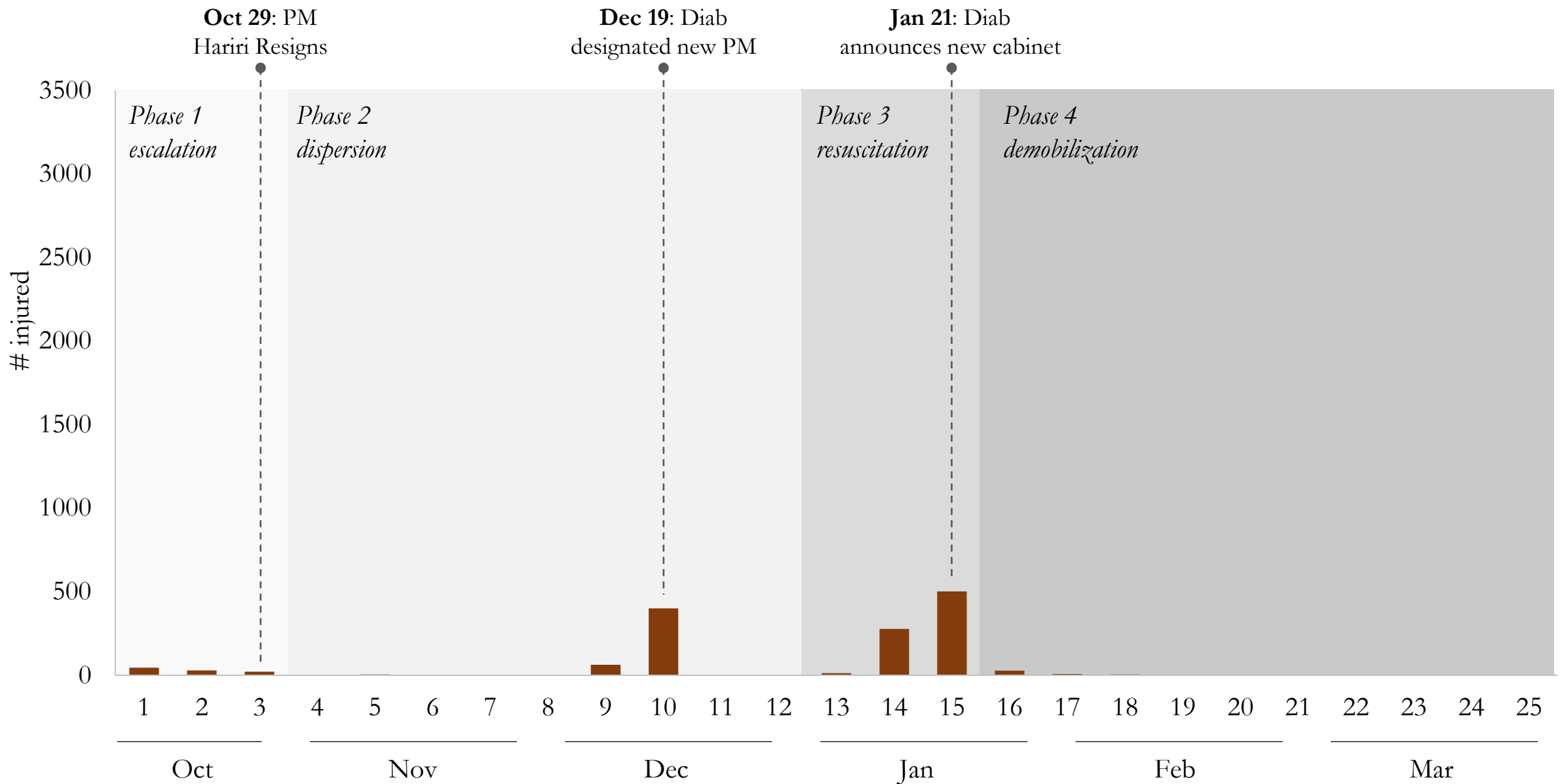




# State response: weekly injuries, Iraq



# State response: weekly injuries, Lebanon



# Non-state and pseudo-state repression

**Iraq** – Popular Mobilization Forces militias  
(e.g., Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq,  
and Kataib Hezbollah)



**Lebanon** – Shi'a political parties (Hezbollah  
and Amal)

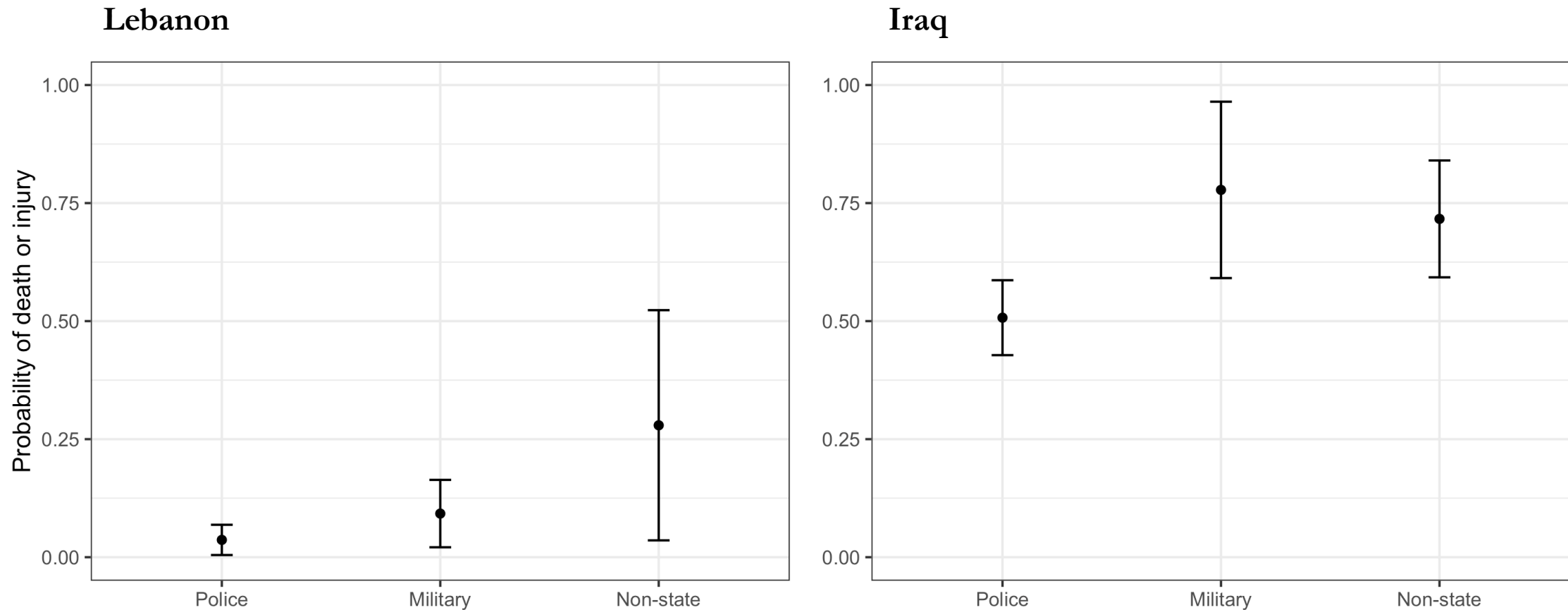


# Distribution of repression across actors

## Share of repressed events involving different repressive actors

	Iraq	Lebanon
Police	85%	56%
Military	5%	43%
Militia, party, or thugs (non-state)	17%	7%

# Probability of severe repression (injury or death)



\* Binomial logistic regressions. Additional controls: event tactics, size, demand type, capital city

\*\* Regressions on the subset of events where at least one repressive actor is present,  $n = 561$ .

## Conclusion: revolution more difficult in democracy?

- Revolutionary uprisings in democracies likely to continue – as long as democracy remains “broken” in many parts of the world
- Paradoxically, removing these broken democratic regimes through revolution may prove *harder* than ousting autocratic regimes
- Need for more theory-building about revolutionary mobilization in these “broken” democracies



Art credit: Jamil Molaeb

## Appendix – Revolutions in Democracies, 2010-2020

Name of Uprising	Location	Region	Start Year	End Year	Outcome	Polity Score (t-1)	VDem RoW Category (t-1)
#EndSARS Uprising	Nigeria	Sub-Saharan Africa	2020	2020	Failed	n/a	Electoral democracy
2019 Chilean Protests	Chile	Latin America	2019	2020	Failed	10	Electoral democracy
Montenegrin #Resist Protests	Montenegro	Latin America	2019	2019	Failed	9	Electoral autocracy
2019 Albanian Protests	Albania	Eastern Europe	2019	2019	Failed	9	Electoral democracy
Bolivian Uprising	Bolivia	Latin America	2019	2019	Success	7	Electoral democracy
2019 Colombian Protests	Colombia	Latin America	2019	2020	Failed	7	Electoral democracy
Lebanese Thawra	Lebanon	Middle East	2019	2020	Failed	6	Electoral autocracy
Tishreen Uprising	Iraq	Middle East	2019	2020	Failed	6	Electoral autocracy
#OneofFivemillion Protests	Serbia	Eastern Europe	2018	2019	Failed	8	Electoral autocracy
2018 Nicaraguan protests	Nicaragua	Latin America	2018	2018	Failed	6	Electoral autocracy
White Revolution	Romania	Eastern Europe	2017	2017	Failed	9	Electoral democracy
2017-2019 Protests in Honduras	Honduras	Latin America	2017	2019	Failed	7	Electoral autocracy
2016 Macedonian Colorful Revolution	N. Macedonia	Eastern Europe	2016	2016	Failed	9	Electoral autocracy
Moldovan Maidan	Moldova	Eastern Europe	2015	2016	Failed	9	Electoral democracy
#ResignNow Uprising	Guatemala	Latin America	2015	2015	Success	8	Electoral democracy
Honduran Indignados	Honduras	Latin America	2015	2015	Failed	7	Electoral autocracy
2014 Bosnian Spring	Bosnia-Hercegovina	Eastern Europe	2014	2014	Failed	n/a	Electoral democracy
Gezi Park Protests	Turkey	Middle East	2013	2013	Failed	9	Electoral democracy
Euromaidan Uprising	Ukraine	Eastern Europe	2013	2014	Success	6	Electoral autocracy
2011-2012 Protests in Maldives	Maldives	South Asia	2011	2012	Success	n/a	Electoral democracy