

Social Roots of Revolution: Gandhians, Maoists, and Insurgent Strategy in Nepal

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Abstract

Real-world events from the Arab Spring to Hong Kong to Ukraine have brought non-violent protest to the fore as an important phenomenon in global politics. While new scholarly attention to nonviolent resistance has consequently arisen, extant work has focused on comparative effectiveness and post-conflict outcomes, with less attention paid to when and how these campaigns emerge in the first place. This paper develops a theory of the origins and strategic decision-making of “center-seeking” insurgent movements. I argue that the social ties that underpin these revolutionary movements shape and constrain the opportunities they face, including their relative abilities to carry out the tactical repertoires of violent versus nonviolent contention. I illustrate how the interpersonal ties that a movement’s members share with other social groups as well as with the regime inform movements’ assessments of the relative viability of violent and nonviolent actions. I support the argument with four cases of revolutionary movements in Nepal, two violent and two nonviolent. Nepal’s unique history allows for close comparison between movements as well as longitudinal comparison as movements change strategy over time. Furthermore, the Nepal cases highlight the indeterminate effects of ideology as changes in movements’ social networks drive Gandhians to take up arms and Maoists to lay them down.

TWO PATHS TO REVOLUTION

In the late 1980’s, social movements in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Estonia all used a strategy of nonviolent civil resistance to topple Soviet-backed regimes. However, in Romania, what started as a similar nonviolent protest devolved into armed conflict that killed more than 1,100 people. More recently, revolutionary movements in the Arab world from Tunisia to Bahrain took to the streets to demand political change. But

while movements in Tunisia and Egypt engaged in protests, marches, strikes, and sit-ins, in Libya, revolutionaries took up arms from the outset. Syria, like Romania, started as a nonviolent campaign but transitioned into a civil war that has resulted in over 200,000 deaths.

Cases of movements with the same revolutionary goals using different strategies in adjacent states, such as seen in Eastern Europe and the Arab Spring suggest that nonviolence and violence are plausible alternatives in pursuit of regime change and that political movements seeking to topple the state therefore face a choice in what strategy they wish to pursue. So how do such movements come to embrace one strategy over the other?

Despite the obvious real-world importance of both armed insurgencies and civil resistance campaigns and despite their relationship as alternative strategies to the similar end of revolutionary change, scholarly analysis has only recently begun to address them in tandem. The academic literatures on civil war and civil resistance have evolved largely separately, thus leaving some important questions unaddressed. As Veronique Dudouet describes, “scholars and practitioners or activists in the fields of social movements, nonviolent action, political violence and conflict resolution seem to be largely evolving in parallel, often in relative isolation from each other. For instance, most security studies and conflict resolution experts are unfamiliar with the rich scholarship and empirics on civil resistance, given their narrow focus on armed conflicts and their termination through military means or negotiated settlements. In turn, most nonviolent scholars tend to hold oversimplified views on the dynamics and nature of armed struggle and warfare.”¹

The literature on civil wars has focused on variables affecting the onset of civil vi-

¹Veronique Dudouet, “Dynamics and factors of transition from armed struggle to nonviolent resistance,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 401.

olence,² conflict duration,³ and prospects for resolution.⁴ More recent scholarship has sought to explain relative degrees of violence within civil conflict, focusing on variables such as territorial control⁵, movement cohesion or fragmentation⁶, and the balance of power amongst rebel factions.⁷ However, all of these studies contrast the presence of violence with either its absence or restraint in its use. In doing so, they overlook the employment of nonviolent strategies as both an important geopolitical phenomenon in its own right, as well as a potential alternative to armed insurgency that informs where and when we see violence used.

A new wave of empirical work on civil resistance has begun to analyze violent and non-violent modes of contention in tandem. Most notably, Chenoweth and Stephan compare the effectiveness of violent versus nonviolent campaigns, finding that nonviolent campaigns are dramatically more successful than their violent counterparts.⁸

The strength of this empirical finding has brought new attention to the question of how movements come to embrace nonviolence versus violence in the first place. After all,

²Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–595 and James D Fearon and David D Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (Feb. 2003): 75–90.

³James D Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (May 2004): 275–301, Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Måns Söderbom, "On the Duration of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 253–273, and Håvard Hegre, "The Duration and Termination of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 243–252.

⁴Barbara F Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (July 1997): 335–364 and Roy Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

⁵Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (July 2012): 142–177, and Kristin M Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J M Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 02 (May 2012): 265–283.

⁷Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (Jan. 2014): 72–116.

⁸M J Stephan and E Chenoweth, "Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (2008): 7–44 and Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

if nonviolence really is more effective, why would any group choose to take up arms?

But empirical research on the determinants of movement strategy has produced few strong findings. Echoing the civil war literature, Chenoweth and Lewis (2013) find that armed campaigns are more likely when environmental conditions make fighting easier. But their findings are less clear when it comes to what affects the onset of civil resistance. In their analysis of a revised dataset of violent and nonviolent campaigns, “the only significant correlates of nonviolent campaigns are flat terrain and older, more durable, authoritarian regimes.”⁹ They cite this as evidence of the robustness of civil resistance as a strategy, but offer little theory as to why these correlations exist.

Butcher and Svensson (2014) propose a modernization theory approach, arguing that processes of industrialization create structural conditions more conducive to nonviolent mass mobilization.¹⁰ They report strong positive correlations between manufacturing as a share of a state’s GDP and the likelihood of a nonviolent campaign onset. However, it is difficult to understand exactly what mechanisms are at play from such a broad, state-level macroeconomic variable.

Cunningham (2013) examines the subset of self-determination movements.¹¹ Unlike previous studies, she moves beyond state-level macro variables and uses group-level data on the size and concentration of ethnic groups. She finds that groups are more likely to rebel using either strategy when they are politically excluded, but that armed insurgency is more likely the larger and more concentrated the group while smaller more diffuse groups are more likely to opt for nonviolence. This result runs contrary to Cunningham’s own

⁹Erica Chenoweth and Orion A Lewis, “Unpacking nonviolent campaigns Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 421.

¹⁰C Butcher and Isak Svensson, “Manufacturing Dissent: Modernization and the Onset of Major Nonviolent Resistance Campaigns,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (July 2014).

¹¹Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, “Understanding Strategic Choice: The Determinants of Civil War and Nonviolent Campaign in Self-Determination Disputes,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 291–304.

theoretical predictions and the intuitive logic that a larger group size would make a movement more likely to embrace nonviolence given that strategy's reliance on mass support. More research is therefore necessary on the relationship between movement support and strategy.

Finally, Wendy Pearlman (2011) draws upon qualitative evidence from the case of Palestinian resistance to illustrate the role of organizational cohesion in conditioning the strategic options and incentives available to a movement.¹² It is likely true that a certain level of organizational discipline is necessary for a nonviolent movement to even get off the ground. However, this amounts to a necessary but not sufficient condition for civil resistance: plenty of violent insurgent movements are highly disciplined, organized, and cohesive.¹³

These studies have all pushed forward the scholarly analysis of nonviolence with increased rigor and empirical analysis. However, they offer only partial explanations for why and how movements come to embrace either armed insurgency or civil resistance. Furthermore, in the cases of Cunningham and Pearlman, they focus specifically on struggles for secession, setting aside those movements seeking total state capture. This study seeks to fill these gaps.

I assume that revolutionary movements must choose between two fundamentally different strategies in pursuit of their goals. *Civil resistance* describes a strategy based on the primarily nonviolent use of social, psychological, economic, and/or political pressure in order to exert coercive power on an adversary.¹⁴ It is different from spontaneous demon-

¹²Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, Oct. 2011).

¹³For a complete study on organization and fragmentation within armed rebel movements, see Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (July 2012): 142–177.

¹⁴Based on definitions established by Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973) and Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 6. The literature on nonviolence additionally uses the terms

stration in that it is employed in the form of a campaign by a movement with identifiable leaders and an organizational structure.¹⁵ It is also different from institutionalized protest in that it occurs outside the channels of normal political activity, and often outside of the law.¹⁶ In short, it is the most intensive and coercive form of political contention short of taking up arms.

Armed insurgency, by contrast, is a strategy of confronting the security apparatus of the state directly with armed force. This encompasses both strategies that seek to capture and control territory, as well as strategies that employ violence to break the political will of an adversary. Armed insurgency may include the use of non-violent tactics, but the actors are dependent upon the use of violence in order to achieve their goals.

I treat these concepts as “ideal types” of strategy that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. This assumption may be problematic: certainly some groups engage in behavior that encompasses a spectrum of violent and nonviolent forms of contention. However, this binary classification, while simplistic, is nevertheless sufficiently realistic to be useful for theoretical and empirical analysis. Even when violent groups engage in some of the tactics of civil resistance, the primary logic of their strategy still follows that of armed insurgency in that it relies on directly confronting the state’s security forces on the battlefield. By contrast, scholars of civil resistance have gone to great lengths to point out that

nonviolent direct action, nonviolent struggle, strategic nonviolence, or unarmed insurrection. For the purposes of this research, the terms are interchangeable. Some scholars and advocates have questioned the degree to which civil resistance campaigns can truly be considered “nonviolent,” and they raise a fair point. Civil resistance campaigns can quickly become violent when regimes employ brutal repression, when movement leaders resort to violence to coerce participation in nominally nonviolent activities, or when tactics generally considered to be nonviolent, such as strikes, have severe economic consequences that can be considered “violent” in a more loosely defined sense of the word. I use the term nonviolence along with with civil resistance for stylistic variation and because the relative absence of violence vis a vis armed insurgency is nevertheless the defining characteristic of civil resistance. However, I do so recognizing the imperfections of this term.

¹⁵Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 14.

¹⁶Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 6.

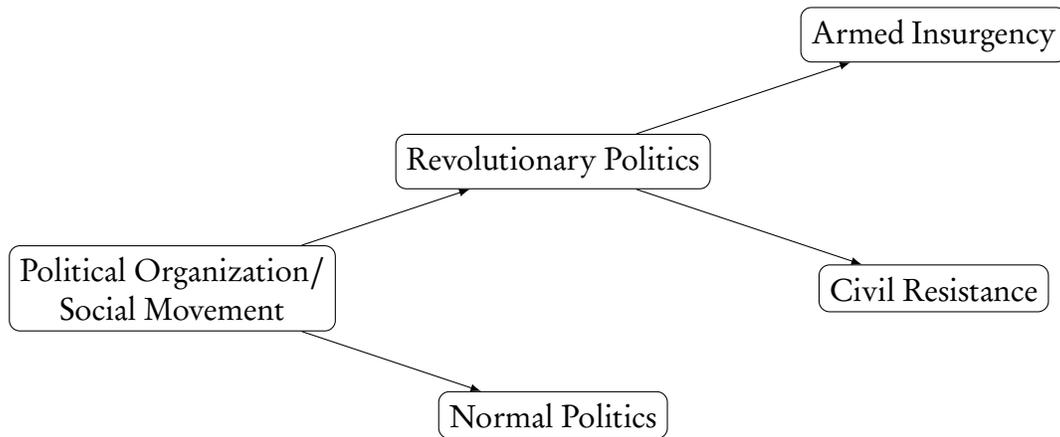


Figure 1: *Conceptualization of pathways to armed insurgency and civil resistance.*

when a group attempting civil resistance engages in even a a low level of violent activity, it undermines the strategy and the conflict quickly takes on the dynamic of insurgency.

While the decisions of revolutionary movements are likely affected by numerous factors, both rational and non-rational, I argue that the nature of a movement’s network of supporters often has a decisive impact on its behavior. The strategic logic of civil resistance and armed insurgency are different and each has unique requisites of success. For civil resistance, mass popular support is paramount. For armed insurgency, it is less so; access to arms and resources are the more decisive variables. In particular, if a movement’s base of support is circumscribed to a particular identity group, it can expect difficulty in activating the mechanisms that are crucial for nonviolence to be effective. These identity barriers can act as a limit on gross mobilization potential, make encouraging loyalty shifts from the regime more difficult, and may allow for state security forces to engage more easily in brutal repression, even of nonviolent demonstrators. Such a movement will be more pessimistic in its assessment of the potential effectiveness of civil resistance and consequently more likely to embrace a strategy of armed insurgency.

SOCIAL BASES OF REVOLUTION

The differing requisites of success for civil resistance versus armed insurgency provide a basis for assessing the comparative efficacy the two strategies in a given context. One of the strongest findings in the literature on civil resistance is the importance of mass popular support to the effectiveness of campaigns. The logic behind this is straightforward: more people engaging in nonviolent anti-regime mobilizations—from street protests to strikes to boycotts—increases the effectiveness of those tactics, raises the costs imposed on the regime, and heightens the threat to regime power.

Simply put, the more people that are involved in carrying out the nonviolent repertoire of tactics, the greater the disruption those tactics cause and the greater the coercive leverage upon the regime. Nearly all nonviolent tactics benefit from greater participation, whether they be acts of commission such as protests and demonstrations or acts of omission such as strikes and boycotts. In fact, as DeNardo points out, “it is nearly impossible to imagine political circumstances where the disruptiveness of dissident activity would diminish as its scope increased.”¹⁷

While popular support can be helpful for armed insurgency, it is not as central a requirement of success as in the strategy of nonviolence. Research on insurgency has shown how small groups of rebels can defeat the most powerful regime adversaries¹⁸ and that the number of participants is far less important in predicting the outcome of violent campaigns.¹⁹

As Fearon and Laitin write, “Given the right environmental conditions, insurgencies

¹⁷James DeNardo, *Power in Numbers: The Political Strategy of Protest and Rebellion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 35.

¹⁸Ivan Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128.

¹⁹Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

can thrive on the basis of small numbers of rebels without strong, widespread, popular support.”²⁰ Instead, scholars of insurgency have emphasized other factors, such as access to natural resources, foreign sponsors, the availability of arms, and the select use of asymmetric tactics as the keys to rebel victory.²¹ Movements committed to revolution who have limited initial capability to generate mass mobilization are more likely to arrive at the conclusion that armed insurgency offers a pathway to victory that civil resistance does not.

The dynamics of popular support go beyond numbers: *who* participates may be as important as *how many* participate. Some scholars have noted the importance of breadth or diversity in a movement’s base of popular support. For example, Chenoweth and Stephan write that movements are more effective “when participants reflect diverse members of society.”²² But the qualitative nature of movement support has yet to be rigorously examined, perhaps because of the difficulty in conceptualizing and measuring movement “breadth.” What kinds of diversity are necessary for a movement and why is it important?

I argue that it is not diversity for diversity’s sake that shapes a movement’s strategic calculus as much as a movement’s degree of what I term “social overlap”—ties of kinship, caste, religion, ethnicity, class, or association—both with other sections of society as well as the regime.

First, the shape of a movement’s social network informs its potential size. “Popular” ties with other segments of society is in most cases a likely antecedent to mass mobilization. Interpersonal connections provide pathways for the diffusion of ideas. In the case of revolutionary movements, they provide channels through which grievances are shared, frames are

²⁰James D Fearon and David D Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (Feb. 2003): 81.

²¹For example, see Daniel Byman, “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (Apr. 2008): 165–200; Paul Staniland, “Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia,” *International Security* 37, no. 1 (July 2012): 142–177, and Ivan Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128.

²²Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 30.

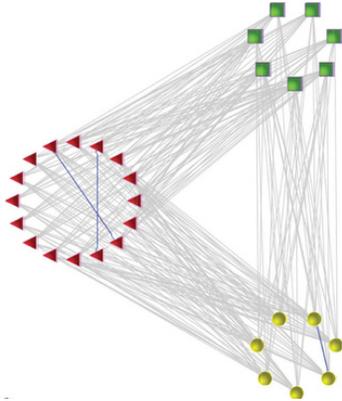


Figure 2: “High Overlap” Model: If even a small movement (yellow) has many social ties with other segments of society (red) and especially the regime (green), it has a greater potential to spread its message, win loyalty shifts, and avoid repression. This should make the movement more likely to embrace a strategy of civil resistance. Above image of a theoretical model of a homophilic network from Feng Fu et al., “The Evolution of Homophily,” *Scientific Reports* 2 (Nov. 2012).

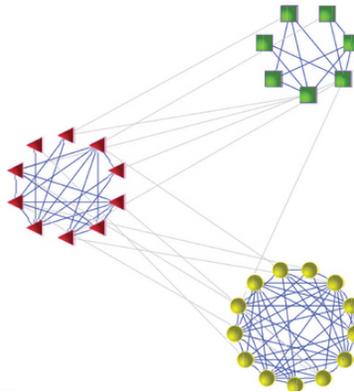


Figure 3: “Low Overlap” Model: A movement (yellow) that has few common ties of ethnicity, kin, religion, class, or other forms of association with other segments of society (red) and the regime (green) will likely struggle to activate the mechanisms that make nonviolent strategies successful. They may be more inclined to turn to arms. Above image of a theoretical model of a heterophilic network from Feng Fu et al., “The Evolution of Homophily,” *Scientific Reports* 2 (Nov. 2012)

aligned,²³ and sympathizers are turned into mobilizers. Butler et al. describe revolutionary mobilization as a process of linking together groups with shared grievances.²⁴ Overlapping ties between social groups are the mechanism through which this linking occurs. A movement whose initial supporters have numerous bridging connections with other segments of society will be better able to grow their movement. But a movement whose base of supporters have few of these heterophilic ties will struggle to grow. In this case, the size of the movement's immediate social cluster presents a ceiling to potential mobilization.

But social overlap impacts movement strategy beyond simply informing the size of potential popular support. The same social ties that activate mobilization are important in activating another dynamic central to the strategy of civil resistance: defection. Scholars of nonviolence have cited winning over defections from the regime, particularly from the security forces, as an important correlate of movement success.²⁵ Greater social overlap means a higher number of direct kinship, professional, associational, or other social ties between members of the regime and participants in the challenging movement. These overlapping social networks provide pathways for spreading the movement's message and increase the moral obstacles to violent repression of the movement. Scholars of nonviolent action have highlighted the importance of direct personal ties with movement members in encouraging regime members to change sides from Ukraine to Lebanon.²⁶

Conversely, even when a movement has a large base of supporters, if there is little

²³Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, Sept. 2001), 16.

²⁴Christopher K. Butler, Scott Gates, and Michele Leiby, "Social Networks and Rebellion," in *Conference on Disaggregating the Study of Civil War and Transnational Violence* (San Diego, CA: University of California, San Diego, Mar. 2005), 7.

²⁵See, for example, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Annika Locke Binnendijk, "Holding Fire: Security Force Allegiance During Nonviolent Uprisings" (PhD diss., 2009).

²⁶Rudy Jaafar and Maria J Stephan, "Lebanon's Independence Intifada: How Unarmed Insurrection Expelled Syrian Forces," in *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East*, ed. Maria J Stephan (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Annika Locke Binnendijk, "Holding Fire: Security Force Allegiance During Nonviolent Uprisings" (PhD diss., 2009).

social overlap between that base of support and members of the regime, that is if members of the regime are less likely to have friends, family members, and associates involved in the movement, the less likely they are to defect. Movements that see little chance in winning over defectors will be discouraged from embracing civil resistance and more likely to take up arms.

Social overlap between movement and regime also influences a regime's ability to employ repression. Even if social ties between the movement and regime are not sufficient to convince a regime member to all-out defect, members of regime security forces will be less willing to stomach opening fire on a crowd that includes friends and family. The greater the number of bridging ties, the more difficult it will be for the regime to compel its security forces to engage in brutal and indiscriminate repression.

Social psychology suggests that this connection between movement and regime may not need to be literal. Simply seeing movement members as more socially proximate is sufficient to raise inhibitions against repression even if the security force member does not have a direct connection with the target. For example, in numerous follow-ups to Milgram's infamous shock experiments,²⁷ scholars have consistently found human subjects to be more reticent to harm another individual when that individual is more socially different in terms of race, clothing, and linguistic dialect or accent.²⁸ In the context of actual protests, Davenport et al. found that police officers in the United States were more likely to make arrests in demonstrations in which a majority of participants were black than ones

²⁷In these experiments, subjects were pressured to push a button that they were told would inflict an electric shock on a human in an adjacent room. While the shock recipients were in fact actors faking sounds of pain, the subjects believed the situation to be real and were willing to apply the electric shock. Milgram himself pointed out the study's implications for loyalty and command in the context of state repression. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper / Row, 1974).

²⁸See William D Brant, "The Effects of Race and Social Distance on Obedience," *Journal of Social Psychology* 112 (Dec. 1980): 229–235 and C. Daniel Batson et al., "Is Empathic Emotion a Source of Altruistic Motivation?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40, no. 2 (Feb. 1981): 290–302.

in which the participants were of the same race²⁹.

Social overlap is a characteristic of a movement's base of support that theoretically should affect a movement's calculations about the relative viability of a violent versus non-violent strategy. A group with fewer popular ties is more likely to struggle to generate large popular support to begin with due to its lack of bridging connections with other elements of society. But even if it succeeds in overcoming the hurdle of mass mobilization, a group with few regime ties will struggle to achieve some of the other key strategic mechanisms of civil resistance: winning over defections will be difficult, and the regime may be more willing to engage in brutal repression. In such situations, we should expect a revolutionary movement to be more likely to consider violence.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

I use qualitative case studies to assess the plausibility of the theory developed above and to gain further insights into the processes through which revolutionary movements come to employ a strategy of either armed insurgency or civil resistance in their efforts to overthrow a regime. I investigate four cases of revolutionary campaigns, two violent and two nonviolent, all of which occurred in the country of Nepal between the middle of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.

Selecting multiple cases from within the same country of Nepal confers several advantages. The common context controls for several potentially confounding variables such as geography, culture, and transnational ties. Yet despite this common backdrop, we see vari-

²⁹Christian Davenport, David A Armstrong II, and Sarah A Soule, "Protesting While Black? The Differential Policing of American Activism, 1960 to 1990," *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 1 (Feb. 2011): 152–178.

ation in the dependent variable as revolutionary movements have employed both armed insurgency and civil resistance in different cases. Furthermore, there is variation even within movements as both the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) have utilized each strategy in different campaigns. The result is a set of cases that enables comparative analysis approximating Mills' ideal of the "method of difference."³⁰ By keeping so many external conditions constant, the analysis can be focused on the factors that precipitated variation within each movement's strategic behavior.

Nepal offers several practical advantages as a site of inquiry as well. As the revolutionary conflicts have been largely resolved, it is possible to conduct research and obtain crucial information. Leaders of erstwhile rebel groups are now key figures in institutionalized politics and have been willingly to speak openly to journalists, historians, and other scholars about their decisions and actions during conflict.

The cases draw upon six months of original field work in the country, including over sixty interviews with leaders of the political movements in question, as well as civil society activists, leaders of rival movements, members of the state security forces, journalists, and scholars who had access to crucial information.

1 THE 1950 ANTI-RANA REVOLT

Nepal is made up of a complex patchwork of ethnicities, tribes, religions, and castes that form over 100 distinct social groups.³¹ Identity-based differences between groups are exacerbated by a rigid political and social hierarchy and extreme economic inequalities. Hindus generally enjoy a position of greater privilege than non-Hindus, Indo-Aryan ethnic groups

³⁰John Stuart Mills, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (New York: Harper / Brothers, 1882).

³¹R Manchanda, "Making of a 'New Nepal'," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 5036

dominate indigenous, Tibetan, and Mongoloid peoples, and hill-based tribes have greater access to political power and economic prosperity than tribes that come from the southern plains.³² And caste-based divisions create an additional hierarchy beyond all of the aforementioned ethnic, linguistic, and tribal relations.

This complex amalgamation of peoples was united into the single political entity of Nepal through the conquests of the Gorkha dynasty in 1769 and was ruled more or less as a hereditary monarchy until 1990. While the king maintained sovereign rule by law, a noble family, the Ranas, achieved de facto control of the administrative apparatus of the state, including the army, for over a century from 1846 to 1951. The Ranas maintained their rule through a combination of brutal repression and extreme isolation from the outside world. Schools were banned, illiteracy was high, and travel was tightly controlled. Political activity was limited to the confines of the palace and “took the form of behind-the-scene efforts to persuade the rulers to adopt certain courses of action or, alternatively, of participation in sub rosa intrigues and conspiracies aimed at the ruling group.”³³

As a result of this stifling political and intellectual environment, many higher class families moved to India, particularly Benares, Calcutta, and Darjeeling, where they enrolled their children in Indian secondary schools and universities. In India, these families, and particularly the young students, were exposed to Indian nationalist and anti-colonial fervor, especially the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1947, a group of exiles, under the leadership of B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh founded a new political party, the Nepali National Congress, modeled after India’s own National Congress party. In one of the initial resolutions passed at the party convention, it was declared that the party would engage in a strictly “non-violent people’s movement” in

³²Paul Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (May 2010): 1283

³³Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 14.

an effort to bring democratic governance to Nepal in the same way they had helped do so in India.³⁴

Only a few months after the founding party convention, the Nepali National Congress engaged in its first nonviolent action: a strike at a jute mill in the city of Biratnagar, Nepal, just across the border from India. The immediate goals of the strike were not revolutionary; the strikers sought simply the right to unionize, a higher wage, and a shorter work week.³⁵ Party leaders, meanwhile, saw it as an opportunity to raise awareness of the party and its goals within Nepal. Additionally, the historian Bhola Chatterji writes that the leadership felt the need “to test the organizational strength of the party, and to ascertain what mass support it enjoyed.”³⁶

Nevertheless, the regime quickly arrested party leaders involved in organizing the strike, including B.P. Koirala. The movement used these arrests to spark further protests demanding the release of the political prisoners. While the campaign was an unprecedented public challenge to the Rana regime, it came nowhere close to presenting an existential challenge. Between April 13th and May 6th demonstrations occurred in Biratnagar, Birgunj, Janakpur, Ilam, and the Kathmandu valley, but local police were largely able to quell the protests.

It became clear that the movement lacked the popular base of support necessary to generate sufficient mobilization to coerce the Rana autocracy into granting lasting political reforms, much less topple the regime altogether through a strategy of civil resistance. Support for these early revolutionary movements was largely confined to a small network of Nepali-speaking, high caste, Hindu elites based in major urban centers such as Kathmandu and Biratnagar or in exile in India. The movement had few bridging ties to other segments of Nepali society, limiting the base of support that it could mobilize toward nonviolent

³⁴Rajesh Gautam, *Nepali Congress* (New Delhi, India: Adroit Publishers, 2005), 54

³⁵Rajesh Gautam, *Nepali Congress* (New Delhi, India: Adroit Publishers, 2005), 54

³⁶Bhola Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics* (Calcutta, India: World Press, 1967), 39.

contentious action. According to Chatterji:

“The peculiar character of Nepalese society precluded the possibility of the emergence of any large-scale mass movement. . . What began therefore as the first popular effort at organizing a movement for the overthrow of the Rana regime was bound to be secretive and restricted to a small group of men.”³⁷

Low literacy and linguistic barriers created further impediments to the transmission of revolutionary messaging. By 1950, Nepal’s literacy rate was only five percent and only 25 phone lines existed in the entire country.³⁸ Mountainous terrain and a patchwork of 93 different spoken languages made spreading political ideas even more difficult.³⁹

Estimates for the number of participants in the Jute Mill strike range from 3,000 to 10,000 while accounts of the 1947 satyagraha demonstrations in Kathmandu place the peak number of demonstrators in the streets at between 20,000 and 30,000 Nepalis.⁴⁰

This was, relative to Nepal’s prior political history, an extraordinary outpouring of support for an opposition movement. Yet compared to the levels of support garnered by civil resistance movements that succeed in toppling regimes, it falls far short. Nepal’s national population at the time was about 8 million, meaning that the Nepali National Congress had only been able to mobilize less than four-tenths of a percent of the population, under even the most generous estimates. To put this in perspective, scholars of civil resistance point out that nonviolent movements are generally successful when they mobilize 3.5 percent of the population,⁴¹ nearly ten times the mobilization level of the 1947

³⁷Bhola Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics* (Calcutta, India: World Press, 1967), 29.

³⁸John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 128.

³⁹R Manchanda, “Making of a New Nepal,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (2006): 5036.

⁴⁰Estimates of demonstration size come from Prem R Uprety, *Political Awakening in Nepal* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1992), 124, 127 and M P Koirala, *A Role in Revolution* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Jagadamba Prakashan, 2008), 74, 87. It is hard to verify the accuracy of participation estimates, and given the sympathies of both writers to the Nepali Congress party, it is likely that they overestimate the actual number of participants.

⁴¹Erica Chenoweth, *The Dissident’s Toolkit*, Oct. 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/10/24/the_dissidents_toolkit.

movement.

Some leaders of the Nepali Congress movement had social relationships with regime elites. For example, M.P. Koirala, one of the most senior leaders of the movement, had previously been appointed by the Rana family to serve as a government functionary within the Agricultural Board and Forest Department.⁴² There is some evidence that these social connections enabled the opposition movement to win loyalty shifts. Two members of the Rana family, Subarna Shamsher and Mahabir Shamsher, turned against the government in 1948 after being relegated from the line of succession and formed the Nepal Democratic Congress.⁴³ NNC leaders with connections to the regime, such as M.P. Koirala, reached out to the dissident Ranas and eventually facilitated the merger of the two parties into the unified Nepali Congress.⁴⁴

While these overlapping ties between movement and regime brought some advantages, they were not sufficient to facilitate large-scale defection or to compensate for the movement's lack of popular ties at the grassroots level. Exceptionally low literacy rates compounded this problem by making it even more difficult for the Nepali National Congress to spread their revolutionary message.

Even B.P. Koirala and the Nepali National Congress began to question the efficacy of civil resistance in Nepal after seeing the failure of the Jute Mill strike and subsequent satyagraha to achieve even modest political goals. In his biography of Koirala, Kiran Mishra observes that the failure of the pre-revolutionary nonviolent protests to generate sufficient mass mobilization drove B.P. Koirala to the conclusion that civil resistance would not be effective in Nepal:

“During his hunger strike, BP came to realize that the path of nonviolent mass move-

⁴²M P Koirala, *A Role in Revolution* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Jagadamba Prakashan, 2008), 64.

⁴³Pancha N Maharjan, “*The Nepali Congress: Party Agency and Nation Building*,” in *Political Parties in South Asia*, ed. Subatra Mitra, Mike Enskat, and Clemens Spiess (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 279.

⁴⁴M P Koirala, *A Role in Revolution* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Jagadamba Prakashan, 2008), 103.

ment must be amended. In Kathmandu, he found that people were not responding to their call for nonviolent satyagraha.”⁴⁵

According to another historian, Bhola Chatterji: “By the time 1949 rolled out, the top leadership of the Nepali National Congress had admitted the necessity of a reorientation of the party’s basic struggle through non-violent methods. The conviction was now firmly rooted that the ultimate overthrow of the Rana regime could not be effected except by force.”⁴⁶

In April 1950, members of the Nepali Congress met covertly in a movie theater owned by one of their leaders, Mahabir Shamsheer, to formally decide upon a strategy through which to overthrow Nepal’s Rana regime.⁴⁷ While the initial language of the Nepali Congress charter called for political change in Nepal “through constitutional and peaceful means,” an amendment was put forth to replace the language to “through all possible means.” According to M.P. Koirala, “this amendment, of course, was meant to include violence,” and it passed by a vote margin of roughly 140 to 60.⁴⁸

Following the convention in Calcutta, members of the new Nepali Congress began communicating with potential dissidents within the Royal Nepal Army and stockpiling munitions both across the border in India and in safe havens within Nepal.⁴⁹ At midnight on the 11th of November, Nepali Congress armed guerrilla units launched attacks in areas along the India-Nepal border. They succeed in capturing several border territories and, with India’s help, forced a negotiated settlement that brought an end to the Rana dictatorship, a restoration of the monarch’s political powers, and a promise to begin drafting a democratic constitution.⁵⁰

⁴⁵Kiran Mishra, *B.P. Koirala: Life and Times* (New Delhi: Wishwa Prakashan, 1994), 26.

⁴⁶Bhola Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics* (Calcutta, India: World Press, 1967), 48.

⁴⁷Parmanand, *The Nepali Congress Since Its Inception* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1982), 31.

⁴⁸M P Koirala, *A Role in Revolution* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Jagadamba Prakashan, 2008), 111.

⁴⁹Rajesh Gautam, *Nepali Congress* (New Delhi, India: Adroit Publishers, 2005), 288

⁵⁰Pancha N Maharjan, “*The Nepali Congress: Party Agency and Nation Building*,” in *Political Parties in South*

2 JANA ANDOLAN

While the 1950 movement succeeded in removing the Rana autocracy and securing a commitment from the monarch to move toward the establishment of a parliament, Nepal's initial democratic experiment was short lived. The king, who had regained formal political powers as part of a compromise to create a constitutional monarchy, delayed the drafting of a constitution and the implementation of parliamentary politics. Elections were finally held in 1959, but only a year later, the palace disbanded parliament and took full effective political control of the state. Over the next 30 years, Nepal was governed through what was termed the panchayat system, which presented a veneer of electoral politics to a process that in actuality gave the king absolute power that he exercised through a hierarchy of landowning nobility.⁵¹ While far from democratic, the years of panchayat rule in Nepal represent a period in which opposition movements were able to substantially build and expand their bases of popular support. Increasing education and communicative infrastructure allowed for political ideas to spread more readily and for Nepalis to learn from the examples of other political systems around the globe. Political movements were able to organize, though often clandestinely. And occasional elections gave these movements the opportunity to take stock and gather information about their levels of popular support and ability to organize and mobilize their members. Finally, the emergence of a nascent civil society in the mid to late 1980s created a platform for bridging ties between political movements and their respective networks of supporters.

The Nepali Congress party was able to use the decade of democratic experimentation in the 1950s to expand its network of popular support. It did this largely by building relationships with local elites in the belief that their support would trickle down to others

Asia, ed. Subatra Mitra, Mike Enskat, and Clemens Spiess (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 280

⁵¹For an extensive treatment of the political dynamics under the panchayat system, see Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966).

in their communities. With this strategy, Nepali Congress was able to assemble relatively quickly “an effective, nationwide machine.”⁵² In the 1959 elections, the party won a plurality with 37.2 percent of the vote.⁵³ This gave the movement a strong indicator of its ability to mobilize popular support across the country.

While after 1960 political parties were banned, student and professional organizations were permitted. The Nepali Congress therefore focused its energies on building such organizations which while nominally unaffiliated, in reality maintained close ties with the underground political party. They established a student organization, the Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh, which formed local associations at all campuses and in all districts. The party also launched organizations of school teachers and professors. Students who were introduced to the movement as members of the student association or from sympathetic teachers often continued to stay involved with the party after they graduated and entered the workforce. Through this process Nepali Congress was able to extend its reach into additional professional fields, especially the bureaucracy.⁵⁴

In 1979, student organizations launched a protest outside of the Pakistani Embassy in Kathmandu. While the protesters claimed to be objecting to the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan, their real motivation was to test the limits of political mobilization within Nepal. The protests were met with severe repression. Students were beaten in front of the Pakistani embassy and thrown off the roof of the university science campus in Lainchaur, Kathmandu.⁵⁵

However, the student movement of 1979 also revealed the strength of the student movements built by Nepali Congress over the previous decades. While no estimates are

⁵²John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 94.

⁵³Pancha N Maharjan, “*The Nepali Congress: Party Agency and Nation Building*,” in *Political Parties in South Asia*, ed. Subatra Mitra, Mike Enskat, and Clemens Spiess (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 153.

⁵⁴John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 65.

⁵⁵Pancha N Maharjan, “*The Nepali Congress: Party Agency and Nation Building*,” in *Political Parties in South Asia*, ed. Subatra Mitra, Mike Enskat, and Clemens Spiess (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 284

available of the number of protesters in the street, the demonstrations were large enough to have overwhelmed the ability of local police to subdue them. The journalist Louise Brown writes, “The size and timing of the movement took the government by surprise and stretched its law enforcement capabilities to the limit. The situation was so volatile that, in order to quell the disorder outside the Kathmandu Valley, the capital was left woefully short of police.”⁵⁶ Eventually the army had to be called into the streets to quiet the protests.

Furthermore, the king responded to the protests by announcing that there would be a national referendum on whether to abandon the panchayat system in favor of multiparty democracy. The referendum provided another opportunity for Nepali Congress to assess its ability to generate mass mobilization. While they lost the referendum by a 55 to 45 percent margin, their ability to generate two million votes despite heavy efforts by the regime to manipulate the results⁵⁷ provided another powerful indication of their organizational strength.

Buoyed by this performance (although disappointed in the outcome) Nepali Congress continued with its electoral experimentation by running sympathetic candidates in panchayat elections in the 1980s. While candidates were not legally allowed to be members of a political party, individuals known to have strong ties to Nepali Congress won two seats in the 1981 elections. While this electoral performance may not have been overwhelming, it nevertheless provided a signal of the party’s growing capacity to generate mobilization in the context of an un-level playing field.

The process of preparing for and competing in the elections also served as an organizational tool. Nepali Congress was able to establish offices, post signs, and hold public meetings as long as it maintained the pretense that it was not actually a political party.⁵⁸ Ex-

⁵⁶T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, A Political History (Burns & Oates, 1996), 90.

⁵⁷John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 109.

⁵⁸John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 111.

panding beyond student groups, it built occupational organizations among teachers, professors, doctors, nurses, and engineers, as well as issue-based forums around human and civic rights.

In an effort to push the envelope even further, NC leader Ganesh Man Singh⁵⁹ launched a nonviolent demonstration demanding that political parties be formally allowed to participate in elections. The goal at this point was not yet wholesale regime change, but was described in limited terms as “only a pressure tactic designed in consideration of the party’s quest for participation in the 1986 general elections.”⁶⁰

It became clear, however, that Nepali Congress still did not have sufficient support at the grassroots level to generate enough mobilization to seriously challenge the regime. The protests were eventually called off when a few rogue members engaged in bombing attacks. Movement leaders feared that the acts of renegade violence would provide the regime with the pretext necessary to engage in brutal repression.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the experience of 1985 provided movement leaders with valuable information. It revealed a key weakness in the NC movement: acting alone, NC did not have sufficient popular support to amount an effective civil resistance campaign. While strong among university students and certain professional classes, Nepali Congress had few social ties among the working classes of Kathmandu or the peasants of the rural villages. In order to present an existential challenge to the regime, the party would have to forge alliances with other organizations who had ties with these social groups. In the context of Nepal in the late 1980s, this meant working with the communists.

In January 1990, leaders of Nepal’s various political movements engaged in a series of

⁵⁹B.P. Koirala died in 1982.

⁶⁰Krishna Hachhethu, *Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership and People*, A Comparative Study of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (Kathmandu, Nepal: Mandala Book Point, 2002), 56

⁶¹Author interview with P.L. Singh, former mayor of Kathmandu and relative and confidant of Ganesh Man Singh. Interview conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, July 4, 2013.

meetings to form a unified “Movement for the Restoration of Democracy” that could generate the mass support necessary to defeat the King. Ganesh Man Singh knew that the NC would need to join with the communist groups in order for a civil resistance movement to be successful. But that would first require consensus among the many communist factions, including but not limited to CPN-ML, to join in the movement and maintain a commitment to nonviolence. Through Indian diplomats, he conveyed a message to the various communist leaders that “As long as you are divided, we don’t know who to talk to. Come united as one force and only then will we be able to work together.”⁶²

On January 14th, twelve communist leaders met at the house of Padma Ratna Tuladhar. Of them, seven agreed to join together to form a United Left Front (ULF) that would join with NC in launching the movement. The remaining five groups, committed to the idea of a radical social revolution along the lines of Mao’s China, refused to join the movement directly, but agreed to form a separate organization, the United National People’s Movement, that would participate “separately but alongside” the other movements.⁶³

With unity among the majority of communist groups, Ganesh Man Singh then hosted a series of planning meetings at his house in Thamel, Kathmandu from the 18th through the 20th of January. By bringing together both the NC and the communists, the movement was able to vastly increase its capability to generate mass popular support. Not only did it bring together the combined organizational and mobilization capabilities of multiple political parties, but it actually created a potential for mass participation that exceeded the sum of its parts. As Tuladhar describes, “when the communist parties and the NC came together to fight the communist system, the general people were convinced that our leaders and our parties are seriously going to fight against the partyless system and are going to

⁶²Kiyoko Ogura, *Kathmandu Spring: The People’s Movement of 1990* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Himal Books, 2001), 3 and confirmed in interview with Tuladhar.

⁶³T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal, A Political History* (Burns & Oates, 1996), 115

restore multiparty democracy. So the movement, when it was started, it was supported by the masses and it was a big success within a few days, not months.”⁶⁴

By uniting with the communists, Nepali Congress was able to build ties that crossed groups that had traditionally been separated by geography, language, and ethnicity. Each movement was stronger with different social segments of Nepali society. Nepali Congress, held the advantage in organizations among elite professions such as professors, doctors, and lawyers, while the communists focused on lower-middle-class professions such as grade school teachers, service employees, and nurses.⁶⁵ Even among the communist factions, each was strongest within different social groups in different areas of the country. The Jhapolis were based in the eastern hill region, the Fourth Convention was strongest in the mid-western hills, and the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party organized most heavily in the southern plains.⁶⁶ Some parties developed grassroots support among farmers and workers, while other parties (particularly the parties of the leading communist intellectuals) drew members primarily from the “petit bourgeoisie.”⁶⁷

The Jana Andolan, or “People’s Movement,” began with public demonstrations on February 4th, 1990 and a general strike that began on February 19th. In addition to party cadres, university students, intellectuals, lawyers, and other professionals played particularly active roles, often forming “solidarity groups” amongst their peers to help maintain the pace of protest activity.⁶⁸

Over the course of the campaign, the regime engaged in some repression. Movement

⁶⁴Author interview with Padma Ratna Tuladhar, conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, June 21, 2013.

⁶⁵Krishna Hachhethu, *Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership and People*, A Comparative Study of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (Kathmandu, Nepal: Mandala Book Point, 2002), 68.

⁶⁶For a detailed comparison of the communist factions, see Krishna Hachhethu, *Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership and People*, A Comparative Study of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (Kathmandu, Nepal: Mandala Book Point, 2002), 50–51.

⁶⁷Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* (Lalitpur, Nepal: Himal Books, 2006), 101.

⁶⁸T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, A Political History (Burns & Oates, 1996), 121

leaders were arrested and deadly force was even used in response to mass demonstrations on February 25th, March 31, and April 6th.⁶⁹ But in total, only 63 Nepalis were killed over the course of the campaign⁷⁰.

By April, government employees began to defect and support the revolutionary movement. Foreign Minister Upadhyay resigned on April 2nd, citing the King's mishandling of relations with India.⁷¹ Meanwhile, international pressure against the regime began to build. By late April, these donor nations, including the United States, Germany, and Switzerland, were not just urging restraint, but actively pressing the King to pursue a negotiated settlement.⁷²

With members of his own cabinet defecting and his international allies withdrawing their support, King Birendra's options became limited. As Brown describes: "He could either press on with repression of the movement and risk becoming an international pariah, or he could reach an accommodation with the Jana Andolan."⁷³ On April 9th, the King agreed to lift the ban on political parties, beginning a process of negotiations with more conservative elements of the Jana Andolan that led to parliamentary elections the following year.

⁶⁹Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 124

⁷⁰John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 115

⁷¹Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 136

⁷²T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal, A Political History* (Burns & Oates, 1996), 139

⁷³T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal, A Political History* (Burns & Oates, 1996), 139.

3 MAOIST “PEOPLE’S WAR”

While the Jana Andolan resulted in free elections and a parliamentary government, it fell far short of meeting the hopes of all who took to the streets to demand change. In an effort to consolidate power and reduce the risk of a counter-revolution, Congress worked closely with Panchayat nobles, even allowing some to run as candidates for parliament on the party ticket.⁷⁴ The result of this centrist-conservative partnership was that the new democratically elected government did little to change the deeper political, economic, and social structures of Nepali society.

In particular, no reforms were made to the country’s land tenure system and the nobility retained control of the extensive land holdings they had acquired over decades of the Panchayat system. The same ethnic and caste groups that had dominated Nepal under the monarchy continued to do so in the new democracy. As late as 1999, the three most powerful groups—the Bahuns, the Chetris, and the Newars—comprised just over a third of Nepal’s population but held over 80 percent of high-level positions in government, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary. Only 6 percent of those elected to parliament were women and only one single representative of the lowest Dalit caste was elected during the “democratic” period from 1990–2002.⁷⁵ While Nepal had in theory undergone a dramatic political transformation, according to some, “all that had changed were the names on the ministers’ doors.”⁷⁶

From early in the party’s history, the Maoists had focused their recruitment efforts among the lower castes and indigenous groups in Nepal’s rural areas. Mohan Bikram Singh, the “father” of what would become the Maoist movement, began organizing in the 1950s

⁷⁴T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal, A Political History* (Burns & Oates, 1996), 156

⁷⁵Paul Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (May 2010): 1283

⁷⁶T Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal, A Political History* (Burns & Oates, 1996), 177

among the Magar ethnic group in Pyuthan, Rokum, and Rolpa provinces.⁷⁷ The rise of the Maoist movement in these areas in fact paralleled a rise in Magar nationalism that included the creation of cultural, research, and professional organizations dedicated to the advancement of indigenous identity and opportunities.⁷⁸ The two movements may have been mutually reinforcing not only in their identification of class and ethnic discrimination as the driver of social and economic deprivation but also in their prescribed solution. As the anthropologist Marie Lecomte-Tilouine writes, “. . . in the ideological side, there are common aspects in both movements, including the belief that violence is the only possible means of liberation for oppressed groups.”⁷⁹

But the Maoists struggled to expand their support beyond this geographically and linguistically isolated base of support. While the senior-most leaders were high-caste Hindus, both the rank-and-file as well as the mid-level leadership of the Maoists differed from regime elites in terms of social, caste, and ethnic identity. Forty-six percent of the members of the United Revolutionary People’s Council (a mid-level organizational body within the Maoist organization) came from indigenous groups and 5.6 percent were Dalit. Of 23 Maoist district chairs, 17 were indigenous, one was Dalit, and seven were from upper castes.⁸⁰

The concentrated yet isolated nature of Maoist support can be seen in the party’s electoral results. While the Maoists maintained a commitment to revolution in Nepal through a “People’s War”, however, they had historically been willing to engage in institutionalized politics as well. In the 1959 parliamentary elections, for example, 700 out of 703 voters

⁷⁷For a detailed description of Maoist organization building in the 1950s, see Benoit Cailmail, “A History of Nepalese Maoism Since Its Foundation by Mohan Bikram Singh,” *European Bulletin Of Himalayan Research* 33-34 (2008): 11–38.

⁷⁸Pratyoush Onta, “The Growth of the Adivasi Janajati Movement in Nepal after 1990: The Non-Political Institutional Agents,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 11, no. 2 (2006): 323–324

⁷⁹Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, “Ethnic Demands Within Maoism: Magar Territorial Autonomy, Nationality, and Class,” in *Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael J Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 120.

⁸⁰Mukta Lama, “Culture, Caste, and Ethnicity in the Maoist Movement,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 11, no. 2 (2006): 286.

in Rolpa supported the Maoist party, but the party received few votes elsewhere in the country.⁸¹

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Maoists operated as a minority communist faction in Nepal, often in the shadow of the larger CPN-ML. Faced with a new era of party politics after the Jana Andolan, the Maoists were split on how to proceed. While Singh opposed participation in parliamentary politics, a new generation of Maoists, led by Pushpa Kumar Dahal (usually referred to by his nom de guerre “Prachanda”), Baboram Bhattarai, and Nirmal Lama formed an underground political party, Unity Centre, as well as an above ground “front” party, the United People’s Front (UPF), to compete in the elections. The party won only 9 seats in the 1991 elections, mostly from the country’s Mid-Western hill districts, showing once again its sequestered base of social support.

Beyond the elections, the Maoists engaged in extra-institutional acts of political contention, such as launching demonstrations and strikes when parliament acted contrary to their wishes. These efforts failed to generate significant mass mobilization, and to the degree that they succeeded in creating disruption, it was largely because the Maoists backed them with violence, looting shops and throwing Molotov cocktails at buses and taxis that failed to obey their strike orders.⁸² Both the party’s electoral and resistance activities offered clear signals about the limited nature of the Maoist’s networks of support.

Furthermore, the Maoists had few potential political allies in their effort to seek dramatic constitutional-level changes to the country’s governing structure. Nepali Congress had played an active role in negotiating the language of the constitution with the king only a few years earlier and was largely satisfied with the status quo. The Marxist Leninists shared many of the political goals with the Maoists in terms of social inclusion and land reform, but they had come to the conclusion that they could achieve their political objec-

⁸¹John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, Feb. 2005), 203

⁸²“Bandh: Sajha Bus Stoned,” *The Rising Nepal* (May 1994): 8

tives through the political process.⁸³ This left the Maoists as the only group believing that constitution-level political change was necessary and with only a small base of support for such a revolutionary effort.

As both parliamentary politics as well as acts of nonviolent (and sometimes violent) contention failed to yield political results, the leadership began to fragment again over whether to employ violent or nonviolent strategies going forward. At a meeting in the spring of 1994, Unity Centre leaders met to debate the next course of action.⁸⁴ Inspired by the successes of Sendero Luminoso in Peru and with the encouragement of the Revolutionary International Movement, a transnational organization of communist groups, Prachanda argued that the conditions were ripe in Nepal for a Maoist peasants' revolution. While the Maoists did not command broad national support, their small, concentrated base of devout supporters in Nepal's hilly midwestern district of Rolpa would be well suited to the tactics of guerrilla warfare. Furthermore, Prachanda sensed that as the King and the political parties jockeyed for power in the new parliamentary system, the state would be too weak and indecisive to effectively repress a guerilla insurgency.⁸⁵

Nirval Lama and his followers, however, felt differently. Noting the success of other communist groups after the Jhapa uprising as well as the success of the 1990 Jana Andolan movement, they argued in favor of continuing to organize the party and raise awareness through nonviolent means.⁸⁶ The Lama faction, however, was a minority within the Unity Centre coalition and were outvoted.⁸⁷ Ash Bahadur Pun, a Maoist cadre and current mem-

⁸³K.P. Oli, former Jhapali leader who later joined the Unified Marxist Leninist political party. Interview with author conducted in Balkot, Nepal, June 18, 2013.

⁸⁴Shyam Shrestha, a leader within Nirval Lama's faction of Unity Centre. Interview with author, conducted in Kirtipur, Nepal, July 6, 2013.

⁸⁵Deepak Thapa, "The Making of the Maoist Insurgency," in *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace*, ed. Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M Malone, and Suman Pradhan (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 49

⁸⁶Shyam Shrestha, interview with author, conducted in Kirtipur, Nepal, July 6, 2013.

⁸⁷Shyam Shrestha, interview with author, conducted in Kirtipur, Nepal, July 6, 2013.

ber of the Constituent Assembly, described:

“We had two options. Samyukta Janamorcha [the Maoist political front] had nine seats in Parliament. Although the government did not listen our voices, we tried in a peaceful way, but the government suppressed us. So then we chose People’s War. Most of the thought was on the people’s revolution side, it had the majority, so we decided to go in war. We discussed in a group, in a circle, and we concluded that we had to fight for our rights and for development. There is Nepalese culture; they didn’t listen without action, so we moved in war.”⁸⁸

Lama and his followers left Unity Centre and purged Baburam Bhattarai and other followers of Prachanda from the UPF parliamentary front. The following year Prachanda changed the name of his party to the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) and made explicit the party’s intent to launch an armed insurgency.⁸⁹ On February 13th, 2006, the Maoists launched their first guerrilla attacks on police stations and government offices, beginning what would be a decade-long civil war. Prachanda proved to be correct in his assessment of the strategic conditions and the insurgency achieved incredible early success. By the end of the decade, nearly 25 percent of the county’s population was living under Maoist control. Spatially, their territory represented an even larger percentage as the regime exerted little authority outside of the Kathmandu Valley.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Ash Bahadur Pun, interview with author, conducted in Sulichaur, Rolpa, Nepal on May 20, 2014. Members of both factions interviewed for this study remember the events of this meeting similarly.

⁸⁹Deepak Thapa, “Radicalism and the Emergence of the Maoists,” in *Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael J Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 36

⁹⁰Ganga B Thapa and Jan Sharma, “From Insurgency to Democracy: The Challenges of Peace and Democracy-Building in Nepal,” *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 2 (Mar. 2009): 209

4 THE SECOND JANA ANDOLAN

While Nepal's Maoists had made impressive territorial gains over nine years of guerrilla warfare, by 2005 the conflict had reached a stalemate. Their control of the countryside was strong enough that even the King's efforts to deploy the Royal Nepalese Army were insufficient to roll back the insurgency. But the Maoists faced considerable obstacles if they attempted to press their campaign further. They had essentially succeeded in achieving the first two stages of Mao's "playbook" for insurgency: they had successfully weakened regime forces through guerilla warfare and had achieved a strategic stalemate whereby they controlled the rural areas and had essentially surrounded the major cities. The final phase of "strategic offensive"—entering the Kathmandu valley and overthrowing the regime—would be far more difficult. It would involve confronting the state security forces in their own area of strength and where popular support for the Maoists was weakest.

However, the Maoists' base of support had changed considerably over the course of nearly a decade of conflict. While it had been the weakness of their support that led them to believe that the use of armed force was necessary, violence became a means through which the Maoists were in fact able to expand that network. They started by targeting police stations where they could capture guns and munitions necessary for further attacks. They then captured villages where they would evict or kill landlords and destroy land deeds and loan documents. As Joshi and Mason describe:

“When Maoist insurgents moved into a district, they first targeted landlords and their allies in the local government. Once they had eliminated the landlords, they redistributed their land, destroyed bondage papers, canceled debts, compelled local government officials to resign, and constituted “people's governments” in the villages. By driving out landlords, the rebels effectively released peasants from the clientelist obligations that had bound them,

allowing them to more freely support the insurgent communists.”⁹¹

In so doing, the Maoists both won over the sympathy of many of the villagers and in severing the ties of economic dependency freed them to engage in contentious political action. They also implemented institutions of governance that were often superior to what the state previously provided. They built infrastructure, such as roads and bridges and established “People’s Courts” that could resolve local disputes more quickly and often in the eyes of local inhabitants more justly than the state justice system that was often distant and corrupt.⁹²

The Maoists were not shy about articulating to the villagers in gruesome detail the means that they employed and that that they believed necessary to bring revolutionary change. In fact, they used their embrace of brutal violence to help further win the support of the people. Maoist cadres would often stage ceremonies or plays in which they would re-enact the killing of the local landlords. Anthropologist Tatsuro Fujikuro describes that after killing a “class enemy” in Salyan district, “the Maoists summoned the local people to a cultural program in which they re-enacted how they dragged him outside of his house and cut off his limbs, little by little. They repeated this program in several different villages.”⁹³

Anthropologists working in different areas of Nepal observed similar performances and noted the seemingly positive impact they had on local inhabitants. One interviewee recounted to Sara Schneiderman: “We heard that Maoists were starting to break into the houses of wealthy people, tax collectors and moneylenders, stealing their money and property and distributing it to the poor. What amazing news, we had never heard anything like

⁹¹Madhav Joshi and T David Mason, “Land Tenure, Democracy, and Insurgency in Nepal: Peasant Support for Insurgency Versus Democracy,” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 3 (2007): 411.

⁹²Mahendra Lawoti, “Evolution and Growth of the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal,” in *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Anup K Pahari (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.

⁹³Tatsuro Fujikura, “The Role of Collective Imagination in the Maoist Conflict in Nepal,” *Himalaya* 23, no. 1 (2003): 24.

that before!... we heard that the Maoists were breaking the arms and legs of moneylenders and tax collectors in the west of the country and were taking control of the villages. How amazing!”⁹⁴

The Maoists deliberately used ethnic and religious cleavages between their potential supporters and the elites of Nepali society in order to win loyalty and mobilize action. They initiated boycotts of the Hindu holiday of Dasain, decrying it as a celebration of the high-caste Hindu’s conquest of the indigenous communities of Nepal.⁹⁵ Additionally, they hosted village-wide “beef feasts” in which cows, considered sacred in the Hindu faith, were slaughtered, cooked, and served.⁹⁶ These activities were obviously highly symbolic but served a utilitarian purpose in exploiting social cleavages to justify the use of violence on both moral and utilitarian grounds.

The Maoists were not always welcomed with open arms, nor could they rely entirely on the good will of the local population in order to build and sustain their movement. Unsettled by the Maoists’ calls for violence or fearful of becoming victimized, many villagers fled to other districts.⁹⁷ The Maoists also recruited child soldiers, demanding that families provide a teenage son to join the “People’s Army.”⁹⁸ A young Nepali man recounted to the author how he fled his village in eastern Nepal in the middle of the night when the Maoists made clear to his family that they expected him to join the movement the next day.⁹⁹

⁹⁴Sara Schneiderman and Mark Turin, “The Path to Jan Starker in Dolakha District: Towards an Ethnography of the Maoist Movement,” in *Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael J Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 89.

⁹⁵Susan Hagen, “Boycotting Dasain: History, Memory, and Ethnic Politics in Nepal,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hagen (London: Routledge, 2013), 121–144.

⁹⁶David Holmberg, “Violence, Nonviolence, Sacrifice, Rebellion, and the State,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 11, no. 1 (June 2006): 31–64.

⁹⁷Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, “Ethnic Demands Within Maoism: Magar Territorial Autonomy, Nationality, and Class,” in *Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael J Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 114–115.

⁹⁸Human Rights Watch, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal*, technical report (Feb. 2007)

⁹⁹Author interview with 18 year old Nepali man. Interview conducted May 2013 in Kathmandu Nepal. The interview subject wishes to remain anonymous.

Nevertheless, the Maoists' activities in the villages show that the use of violence was not just an alternative when nonviolent means were ineffective, but was actually a mechanism through which they were able to build greater popular support and generate mobilization. By physically controlling territory, they could turn those on the sidelines into sympathizers and sympathizers into participants. It gave them a previously unavailable opportunity to win hearts and minds or, failing in that, to mobilize via coercion and intimidation.

Increased mobilization capabilities allowed the Maoists to supplement their guerrilla operations with nonviolent tactics. When launching new attacks was not feasible, the Maoists used their student organizations, trade unions, and ethnic fronts to start street protests, strikes, or blockades. "These activities filled gaps when the party and PLA were facing setbacks and generated huge psychological dividends by bewildering the state and boosting the morale of cadres."¹⁰⁰

The Maoists' utilization of nonviolent tactics should not be misinterpreted as the strategy of civil resistance or even an attempt at a hybridized or mixed strategy. Armed confrontation was still the means through which the movement would defeat the regime and demonstrations were simply intended to supplement the use of force. Nevertheless, the Maoists' ability to employ these techniques served as a strong indicator of their improved mobilizational capabilities and made it possible for Maoist leadership to begin to reconsider their assessment of the relative utility of armed insurgency versus civil resistance.

In fact, the Maoists began making subtle changes to their ideological doctrine in their annual conferences. Rather than rely exclusively on the line of Mao, in 2001 the party embraced a new doctrine that became known as "Prachandapath" (named after the leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal's nom de guerre "Comrade Prachanda"). Cloaked in ideological lan-

¹⁰⁰Mahendra Lawoti, "Evolution and Growth of the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal," in *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Anup K Pahari (London: Routledge, 2010), 13.

guage, Prachandapath claimed to mix Maoist and Leninist strategy, calling for the rural-based People's War to be supplemented by a mass uprising from within the cities. But it was unclear at the concrete level exactly what form this urban insurrection would take. Historically, urban movements in Nepal had predominantly taken the form of nonviolent civil resistance, from the 1990 Jana Andolan to Nirval Lama's argument in 1994, using the same Leninist language, that the Maoists should maintain adherence to nonviolent tactics. In fact, the very text of the documents of the Maoist conference emphasizes the need to dedicate resources to propaganda, demonstrations, and strikes.¹⁰¹

The Maoists' expansion in their network of popular support since the beginning of the war made the employment of the nonviolent action repertoire more feasible. Their ranks had grown considerable and they had successfully patched together numerous networks of different ethnic, caste, and geographical groups. Meanwhile, they had changed the structural conditions in the areas that they had conquered. Citizens were no longer beholden to landlords and moneylenders and had the freedom to participate in contentious political acts. The Maoists could even coerce participation through intimidation and force. Through an analysis of land holding patterns, areas of Maoist control, and election participation and outcomes over the course of the 1990s, Madhav Joshi and T. David Mason find that the Maoists were successful in breaking clientelist bonds between landholders and peasants and convincing (or perhaps coercing) electoral behavior consistent with the party's views.¹⁰²

Thus by the mid to latter stages of the civil war, the Maoists had developed networks of social ties that linked together a diverse patchwork of marginalized communities from across the rural areas of Nepal. However, they still lacked the type of social ties with regime elites that would be crucial for generating loyalty-shifts and deterring repression in the

¹⁰¹For greater detail see Arjun Karki and David Seddon, eds., *The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives* (Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2003), 257–260.

¹⁰²Madhav Joshi and T David Mason, "Between Democracy and Revolution: Peasant Support for Insurgency versus Democracy in Nepal," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6 (Nov. 2008): 765–782

context of a true civil resistance campaign. The Maoists drew primarily from lower castes, indigenous nationalities, and the “Madhesis” who lived in the plains along the border with India. The regime, in contrast, drew from the high Hindu castes and Newar population of the Kathmandu valley.

The Maoists were therefore caught in a strategic predicament. They had reached the limits of what they could achieve through guerrilla combat, and while they had the capability to generate mass mobilization through their vast network among the poor in Nepal’s rural areas, attempts at nonviolent action would almost assuredly be met with repression.

However, a massacre within the royal family followed by a "royal coup" changed the alignment of political interests within Nepal. In 2001, the crown prince Dipendra, reportedly fueled by alcohol and drugs, opened fire within the palace, killing his father, King Birendra, along with 9 other members of his family, including himself. In the aftermath, Birendra’s brother, Gyanendra, became king, and gradually assumed increasingly dictatorial powers, dismissing parliament and banning political parties in 2005

The result of these events was to drive the traditional political parties away from the king and into alliance with the Maoists. The Maoists and the political parties entered into a series of negotiations in New Delhi and on November 22nd, both sides issued a 12 Point Understanding that called for an end to the monarchy, the creation of an electoral system with a constituent assembly, and the integration of Maoist fighters into the Royal Nepal Army under the watch of the United Nations.¹⁰³ They further agreed to engage in a second “People’s Movement” to coerce the regime into meeting their demands.

The alliance between the Maoists and the political parties would allowed the movements to combine their varied bases of support. The Maoists had the strength of large numbers of supporters in their base areas in the rural hills. In fact, the Maoists sent busses

¹⁰³Kanak Mani Dixit, “The Spring of Dissent: People’s Movement in Nepal,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2006): 116–117

from villages into Kathmandu filled with their supporters that provided a significant boost to the number of demonstrators in the capital. According to Routledge, these Maoist supporters provided “the major force of the Jana Andolan.”¹⁰⁴

The political parties meanwhile had strong links with professional organizations such as professors, doctors, teachers, engineers and nurses. They provided value not only in their added numbers but in the specialized skills they brought to the movement (medical professionals and lawyers being particularly valuable) and in the close ties they often shared with members of the regime.

While there were incidents of violence, suppression of the movement was limited. Over the course of 19 days of protests, and estimated 25 Nepalis were killed.¹⁰⁵ On April 23, the Royal Nepal Army informed the King that it would no longer follow his orders.¹⁰⁶ The King was forced to read a statement of concession drafted by political party leaders that called for the creation of a new democratic system. In elections held in 2008, the Maoists routed their political rivals, earning 30 percent of the overall vote and 220 assembly seats—double the number of the Nepali Congress party, their nearest competitor.¹⁰⁷ On August 18, 2008, the Maoists’ revolutionary leader, Comrade Prachanda became prime minister of Nepal.

¹⁰⁴Paul Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (May 2010): 1290.

¹⁰⁵Paul Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (May 2010): 1290

¹⁰⁶Kanak Mani Dixit, “The Spring of Dissent: People’s Movement in Nepal,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2006): 120

¹⁰⁷Ganga B Thapa and Jan Sharma, “From Insurgency to Democracy: The Challenges of Peace and Democracy-Building in Nepal,” *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 2 (Mar. 2009): 210

CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to improve our understanding of where and when civil war occurs by disaggregating the question into two parts: first, when do groups attempt to overthrow the political order, and second, how do they decide between violent and nonviolent strategies of achieving this end. Grievance theories of civil war can still help us answer the former, while the theoretical mechanisms explored through this study are intended to address the latter.

This study also seeks to advance the emerging literature on nonviolent civil resistance as an important political phenomenon in its own right. Extant work that addresses the choice between violence and nonviolence have either limited the scope of analysis to secessionist or anti-occupation campaigns, or have focused their analysis on state-level macro variables and consequently found few statistically significant patterns.¹⁰⁸ This study has instead investigated the larger set of movements that seek regime change and has found evidence that characteristics of the movements themselves have a generalizable impact on the strategies that they choose.

Understanding how movements choose between nonviolent and violent strategies is also a prerequisite to improving our understanding of when and why nonviolent campaigns succeed. If movements anticipate the conditions under which nonviolence may be more or less effective and alter their strategic behavior accordingly, it could potentially bias analyses of the relative effectiveness of civil resistance and armed insurgency. Extant work has harnessed models from the technology of insurgency literature that predict the likelihood of insurgency via variables that proxy conditions favorable to guerrilla tactics to control for

¹⁰⁸Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, Oct. 2011), Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Strategic Choice: The Determinants of Civil War and Nonviolent Campaign in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 291–304, and Erica Chenoweth and Orion A Lewis, "Unpacking nonviolent campaigns: Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 415–423.

these potential “selection effects.”¹⁰⁹ By examining the other half of the equation—factors that are favorable to civil resistance—this paper provides an opportunity to better control for these anticipatory decisions in future analyses of what makes nonviolence work.

Finally, this study produces new knowledge about the importance of social networks in civil resistance campaigns. The literature has long understood the power of numbers. But this research suggests that who participates may be as important as how many. Direct social ties between members of a revolutionary movement, other segments of society, and members of the regime are crucial for activating the mechanisms of defection and backfire that are at the center of nonviolent strategy.

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¹⁰⁹Erica Chenoweth and Orion A Lewis, “Unpacking nonviolent campaigns Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 79–82.

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