



Ethnic Conflict and the Limits of Nonviolent Resistance

Costantino Pischedda

ABSTRACT

Recent research shows that campaigns of nonviolent resistance are much more successful in producing radical political change than armed rebellion. I argue that the study of nonviolent resistance has paid insufficient attention to a key condition for success—a shared ethnic identity between challengers and government. When challengers and incumbent belong to different ethnic groups, the prospects of campaign success are drastically curtailed, as this situation of “ethnic conflict” inhibits the mechanisms through which nonviolent resistance enables success: emergence of a critical mass of challengers, defection of segments of the security apparatus and the regime inner circle, and development of feelings of sympathy for the opposition cause among key government decision makers. Statistical analysis of all nonviolent campaigns from 1945 to 2006 supports my argument. Nonviolent ethnic campaigns are significantly and substantially less likely to succeed and draw both fewer participants and government defectors than their nonethnic counterparts.

In 1986 massive peaceful demonstrations against fraudulent elections brought the twenty-year-long dictatorial rule of Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos to an abrupt end. In 2000 a protest movement toppled Serbia’s president Slobodan Milošević, who had solidly held onto power in the 1990s through the dissolution of multiethnic Yugoslavia, the ensuing civil wars, and Western military interventions. More recently, in the context of the Arab Spring, unarmed protestors paved the way to the fall of presidents-for-life Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan have shown that these and other well-known episodes are part of a broader pattern of successful unarmed campaigns—large-scale, sustained efforts to challenge fundamentally the political status quo with nonviolent tactics beyond institutional politics and parliamentary process, such as boycotts, strikes, protests, and organized

Costantino Pischedda is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Miami. His forthcoming book is *Conflict Among Rebels: Why Insurgent Groups Fight Each Other*.

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noncooperation.¹ In their study of the relative effectiveness of violent and nonviolent campaigns between 1900 and 2006, Chenoweth and Stephan find that nonviolence succeeds at a much higher rate—over 50 percent of the cases compared to about 25 percent for violent challenges.²

These findings have debunked the conventional wisdom equating nonviolence with weakness and writing off unarmed resistance as doomed to fail against ruthless regimes. The analysis of nonviolent resistance, however, has largely neglected a key condition for success: a shared ethnic identity between challengers and the government. Though a study by Isak Svensson and Mathilda Lindgren represents an important exception, as I discuss below, it has significant theoretical, data, and methodological limitations, which I address in this article.³

I argue that nonviolent campaigns are unlikely to succeed when the challengers and the incumbent belong to different ethnic groups. This situation of “ethnic conflict” inhibits the main mechanisms by which nonviolent resistance can succeed: the emergence of a critical mass of challengers, the defection of segments of the security apparatus and the regime inner circle, and the development of feelings of sympathy for the opposition’s cause among key government decision makers. Ordinary people belonging to the ethnic group that controls the state (henceforth the “state-controlling group”) are unlikely to side with an ethnic-other movement, thus constraining its growth potential and the corresponding ability to impose costs on the incumbent. Moreover, security forces and regime insiders are unlikely to sympathize and identify with ethnic-other challengers, which reduces the probability of concessions and defections, raising instead the risk of crushing repression. The cumulative effect of these dynamics is to make ethnic unarmed campaigns much less likely to succeed than their nonethnic counterparts.

I test my ethnic conflict argument by analyzing an original dataset based on the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) 2.0 data.⁴ My findings indicate that ethnic nonviolent challenges are indeed significantly and substantively less likely to succeed than nonethnic unarmed challenges. I also find supporting evidence for two mechanisms linking ethnic conflict to the outcome of nonviolent campaigns, as ethnic

¹Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” *International Security* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 7–44; Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). As in much of the literature, I use qualifiers “unarmed,” “nonviolent,” and “civil” for “resistance” and “campaign” interchangeably.

²Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 9.

³Isak Svensson and Mathilda Lindgren, “Community and Consent: Unarmed Insurrections in Non-Democracies,” *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 97–120.

⁴Erica Chenoweth and Orion A. Lewis, “Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns: Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 415–23.

challenges are less likely to prompt defections from the government side and to attract massive numbers of participants.

By lumping together ethnic and nonethnic campaigns, previous studies on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance have missed the fact that unarmed challenges rarely succeed when facing an ethnic-other opponent. Policymakers who consider supporting a nonviolent movement abroad should carefully assess its potential for attracting participants among the local state-controlling ethnic group as a powerful predictor of campaign outcome. The importance of a given cause in specific instances may well warrant international support even in the face of limited odds of success, but responsible policymakers should also weigh in the implications of failed unarmed resistance—the risk of intensified government repression and/or escalation to civil war.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that my argument applies only to large-scale campaigns of nonviolent collective action with maximalist goals, such as ending foreign occupation, overthrowing an existing government, or secession/self-determination, on which most of the political science literature on unarmed resistance has focused. Nonviolent collective action along ethnic lines may well be effective under circumstances beyond the scope conditions of the present study, for instance, when it occurs through institutional channels, it has more limited aims (for example, greater cultural, political, or economic rights for disadvantaged minorities), or it achieves its goals without escalating to a large-scale campaign (that is, in cases not included in NAVCO's database of large-scale campaigns with maximalist aims).⁵

The Existing Literature

Chenoweth and Stephan influentially argued that sustained, large-scale nonviolent challenges to state authority are more likely to succeed than armed ones.⁶ This article departs from their seminal work in that it eschews a comparison of armed and unarmed campaigns and focuses instead on the

⁵Therefore, Renat Shaykhutdinov's finding that nonviolent ethnic movements are more likely than violent ones to achieve self-determination (short of independence) is not directly comparable with those of the present study. Shaykhutdinov's definition of collective action is much broader than the large-scale campaigns of nonviolent resistance I focus on, encompassing not only boycotts and demonstrations but also mere public demands for autonomy. Renat Shaykhutdinov, "Give Peace a Chance: Nonviolent Protest and the Creation of Territorial Autonomy Arrangements," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (March 2010): 179–91.

⁶Chenoweth and Stephan's work builds on earlier studies of nonviolent resistance. See, in particular, Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 3 vols. (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 1973) and Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Other studies analyze the effect of nonviolent campaigns on a different outcome—transition to democracy; see Adrian Karatnack and Peter Ackerman, eds., *How Freedom is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2005); Mauricio Rivera Celestino and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Fresh Carnations or All Thorn, No Rose? Nonviolent Campaigns and Transitions in Autocracies," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 385–400; Markus Bayer, Felix S. Bethke, and Daniel Lambach, "The Democratic Dividend of Nonviolent Resistance," *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 6 (November 2016): 758–71. For a critique of Chenoweth and Stephan's work, see Fabrice Lehoucq, "Does Nonviolence Work?" *Comparative Politics* 48, no. 2 (January 2016): 269–87.

determinants of success for the latter category. There are two related reasons for this move. First, would-be challengers may take into consideration the likely responses of other actors and strategically select between violent and nonviolent approaches based on an assessment of the respective costs and odds of success.⁷ If challengers opt for nonviolence when facing incumbents perceived as weak or irresolute, a comparison of relative effectiveness that does not take into account this dynamic may yield biased results.⁸ Second, assessing the relative effectiveness of the two methods of resistance may amount to an apples-and-oranges comparison. Violence and nonviolence are likely to operate through distinct pathways, and thus controlling for potential confounders might not enable *ceteris paribus* evaluations.⁹ In fact, Chenoweth and Orion A. Lewis find that standard predictors of violent rebellion such as mountainous terrain and low income have either no impact or an opposite suppressing effect on nonviolent resistance.¹⁰ I posit that a promising way to advance our understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of nonviolent resistance is to focus on a set of homogenous cases—that is, only nonviolent campaigns—as civil wars scholars have been doing for decades for violent campaigns.¹¹

The literature on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance has not focused on the ethnic identities of contending parties,¹² emphasizing instead the number and diversity of participants;¹³ the tactical flexibility of the challengers;¹⁴ the occurrence of security forces' defections;¹⁵ the

⁷Kathleen 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; Peter B. White et al., "Nonviolence as a Weapon of the Resourceful: From Claims to Tactics in Mobilization," *Mobilization* 20, no. 4 (December 2015): 471–91; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Marianne Dahl, and Anne Frugé, "Strategies of Resistance: Diversification and Diffusion," *American Political Science Journal* 61, no. 3 (July 2017): 591–605.

⁸To tackle this issue, Chenoweth and Stephan adopt an instrumental-variable approach, in addition to controlling for a number of factors that could be affecting the choice of resistance method. However, as they acknowledge, the selection issue may remain unresolved. Of particular concern is that Chenoweth and Stephan's predictors of the probability of the violent character of resistance campaigns (for example, secessionist goals, target state's military capabilities, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, and regime type), which is then used as an instrument in a two-stage model, may be correlated with campaign success, suggesting a violation of the exclusion restriction. Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 79–82.

⁹Marianne Dahl et al., "Apples and Oranges? Actor Profiles and the Choice of Violent and Non-Violent Tactics" (working paper, 10 July 2014).

¹⁰Chenoweth and Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns."

¹¹This approach heeds Christopher H. Achen's injunction that "data should be divided into categories in which theory or experience or data analysis suggests that the coefficients are similar" to tackle potential nonlinearities. Christopher H. Achen, "Let's Put Garbage-Can Regressions and Garbage-Can Probits Where They Belong," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 22, no. 4 (September 2005): 337.

¹²This stands in stark contrast with the long-standing emphasis on ethnic conflict in the civil war termination literature. See, for example, Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 136–75.

¹³Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

¹⁴Schock, *Unarmed Insurrection*.

¹⁵D. E. H. Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force: A Comparative Study of Fifteen Countries with Special Emphasis on Cuba and South Africa* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*; Sharon Erickson Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence in the Arab

economic dependence of targeted governments on the West;¹⁶ and challengers' access to parallel media institutions beyond government control.¹⁷ Chenoweth and Stephan note in passing that nonviolent secessionist campaigns may have a low likelihood of success (all four instances in their data failed) but do not put forth a theoretical explanation.¹⁸ My argument envisions nonviolent secessionist campaigns as a subset of the broader category of nonviolent ethnic challenges, which I posit are unlikely to succeed even if they do not have secessionist goals (as was true for the primarily black movement against South African's apartheid regime and the Kikuyo-dominated protests against the Kalenjin-controlled government of Daniel arap Moi, for example).

A study by Svensson and Lindgren, finding nonviolent campaigns less likely to succeed when an ethnic cleavage separates the challengers and nondemocratic governments, stands out as an exception to the general neglect of ethnicity as a determinant of the outcome of nonviolent resistance.¹⁹ Significant theoretical, methodological, empirical, and data differences, however, set it apart from the present article. Theoretically, Svensson and Lindgren assert ethnic campaigns fail because they tend to challenge the "horizontal legitimacy" of the state (that is, its representativeness of the communities that live in it) rather than its "vertical legitimacy" (existing institutional arrangements); this leads to social polarization, which prevents the formation of broad-based resistance movements. By contrast, bringing to bear insights from the study of ethnic politics and coercion theory, I argue that ethnic conflict undermines the coercive effectiveness of nonviolent resistance by hindering the emergence of a critical mass of challengers and reducing the potential for the opposition cause to win over regime insiders and security forces. Though the two theoretical logics are not necessarily incompatible, my ethnic conflict argument has the advantage of identifying causal mechanisms—the size of nonviolent campaigns and the occurrence of defections—that are more easily testable than those postulated by Svensson and Lindgren—decreased horizontal legitimacy and intensified social polarization.

Spring: Exploring Military Defections and Loyalty in Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 337–49; Zoltan Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹⁶Daniel P. Ritter, *The Iron Cage of Liberalism: International Politics and the Unarmed Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁷Jonathan Sutton, Charles R. Butcher, and Isak Svensson, "Explaining Political Jiu-Jitsu: Institution-Building and the Outcomes of Regime Violence against Unarmed Protests," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 5 (September 2014): 559–73.

¹⁸Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 73.

¹⁹Svensson and Lindgren, "Community and Consent." Ches Thurber develops an important argument emphasizing the role of ethnic politics, but he studies the onset of nonviolent campaigns rather than their outcomes. Ches Thurber, "Ethnic Barriers to Civil Resistance," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 3, no. 3 (July 2018): 255–70.

Methodologically, Svensson and Lindgren's treatment of ongoing years of nonviolent resistance as failures rather than "intermediate" outcomes between success and failure is problematic. Instead, this article alternatively drops ongoing years or treats them as the absence of an outcome with competing-risks models. This is not an issue of mere methodological zeal, given that arbitrarily treating ongoing campaigns as failures may crucially influence a study's findings by inflating failure rates for long-lasting campaigns.²⁰ Empirically, my analysis covers all regime types, rather than being limited to nondemocracies. In terms of data, this article introduces a novel variable on the ethnic character of nonviolent campaigns, with replicable operationalization and detailed case-by-case coding documentation reported in the online codebook.²¹

Nonviolence and Ethnic Conflict

To paraphrase the title of one of the early studies on the topic, nonviolent resistance is coercion without weapons.²² Civil resistance can achieve its objectives by threatening unacceptably high costs on the incumbent through the disruption of normal socioeconomic activities while thwarting the government's efforts to reestablish order.²³ Coercive success should be achieved when the incumbent concludes that the expected costs of continued civil resistance exceed the expected costs of complying with the challengers' demands.

Unlike in guerrilla warfare and terrorism, small groups of individuals cannot inflict sufficient costs to influence the incumbent's calculus, hence the oft-noted importance of size for nonviolent campaigns. Large-scale participation can impose enormous costs on the incumbent by grinding to a halt economic and governance activities through strikes, noncooperation, and disobedience.

Nonviolent resistance seems to have an advantage in inducing mass participation. An estimated 10 percent of Iran's population joined the movement that overthrew the Shah in 1979,²⁴ and hundreds of thousands

²⁰Peter Krause, "The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (April–June 2013): 268–69; Virginia Page Fortna, "Do Terrorists Win? Rebels' Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes," *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 524.

²¹An online appendix containing the codebook can be found at <https://costantinopischedda.wordpress.com/data-replication-materials-and-additional-materials/>.

²²Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-Violence in National Defence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975) See also Thomas C. Schelling, "Some Questions on Civilian Defence" in *Civilian Resistance as National Defense: Nonviolent Action against Aggression*, ed. Adam Roberts (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1967).

²³Nonviolent coercion, therefore, blends punishment and denial strategies. See Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁴Steve R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 150.

gathered in Tahrir Square in the final days of Mubarak's regime. More generally, Chenoweth and Stephan have shown that nonviolent campaigns tend to attract much larger numbers of participants than violent ones.²⁵ Unarmed resistance often generates mass participation because nonviolent methods are palatable to the average citizen, unlike violence, which may trigger moral revulsion. The low individual costs and risks of nonviolent action help attract participants too; ordinary people without special physical skills (for example, agility and endurance) may join nonviolent movements (even part time) without having to go through the painstaking and dangerous training necessary for armed resistance. Nonviolent campaigns have the potential to rapidly mobilize large segments of the population through tipping-point dynamics: as the number of participants increases, the individual risk of participation goes down and the probability of success goes up, prompting more people to join, thus further increasing incentives to participate and so on. Even individuals unsympathetic to the opposition movement will be tempted to bandwagon when its size appears to be growing sufficiently large.²⁶

Eschewing violent means also reduces the risk of alienating security forces and regime insiders while sharpening government's internecine divisions and even prompting defections to the challengers' side. In the language of coercion theory, nonviolent resistance offers individuals affiliated with the regime "assurances" that the challengers' goals are likely to be limited and reasonable and "denies" government's efforts to quell unrest by indicating a low likelihood of successful repression. While individuals and organizations affiliated with the regime are likely to perceive violent rebellion as an existential threat triggering a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, unarmed resistance can persuade them of the legitimacy of the cause or at least convince them that the challengers can be negotiated with. As a result, civil resistance has the potential of provoking security forces' defections, creating fissures among elites and even empowering regime soft-liners, thus reducing the effectiveness or feasibility of repressive measures, while increasing the incumbent's willingness to make concessions.²⁷ For example, in 1989 the Chilean army disobeyed Pinochet's orders to impose martial

²⁵Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 32–34.

²⁶Thomas C. Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); James DeNardo, *Power in Numbers: The Political Strategy of Protest and Rebellion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (October 1991): 7–48; Rasma Karklins and Roger Petersen, "Decision Calculus of Protesters and Regimes: Eastern Europe 1989," *Journal of Politics* 55, no. 3 (August 1993): 588–614.

²⁷The intensity of this dynamic is likely to depend on the size of the campaign: the larger the pool of participants, the higher the probability that security forces and regime affiliates will have relatives and friends among the challengers and thus the more likely that they may sympathize with or take the side of the opposition.

law in the face of popular protests, paving the way to his decision to step down.²⁸

Violent repression against unarmed civilians may be widely perceived as unjust, which may prompt further loyalty shifts (besides increasing domestic and international support for the campaign)—a dynamic known as “backfiring” or “political jiu-jitsu.”²⁹ The wave of Iranian military defections and rapid growth of the protest movement in the wake of an episode in which security forces shot on a crowd of anti-Shah protesters in September 1978 (“Black Friday”) illustrates this dynamic well.³⁰ As with mass mobilization, defections of regime affiliates can display tipping-point dynamics: when elites and security forces personnel perceive an increasing sense of immunity in switching sides as the number of defectors grows, while remaining loyal entails the risk of future reprisal in case of campaign success, cascades of defection may ensue.³¹

Ethnic campaigns—that is, those dominated by ethnic groups other than the state-controlling group—are different. Ethnic challenges tend to lack the features that enable success of nonviolent resistance just discussed: strong potential for attracting a critical mass of participants and for eliciting sympathy and even active support among regime affiliates.

An ethnic challenge has an inherently constrained pool of potential participants, which could result in a smaller number of actual participants, thus limiting the challengers’ ability to impose costs on the target government.³² This point has been made for secessionist challenges,³³ but I contend, more broadly, that members of the state-controlling ethnic group are unlikely to join the ethnic-other challengers regardless of their specific political goals. This dynamic should be especially detrimental to campaign success in the case of large state-controlling ethnic groups.

Even individuals belonging to the state-controlling ethnic group who are not reaping significant material benefits from their ethnic brethren’s rule would be reluctant to side with ethnic-other challengers, as they may be concerned about

²⁸Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 279–302; Carlos Huneeus, “Political Mass Mobilization against Authoritarian Rule: Pinochet’s Chile, 1983–88,” in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁹Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*; Brian Martin, *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

³⁰Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*, 56–69.

³¹Karklins and Petersen, “Decision Calculus of Protesters and Regimes”; Theodore McLaughlin, “Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion,” *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 3 (April 2010): 333–50.

³²Following similar reasoning, Thurber argues that only relatively large ethnic groups tend to engage in nonviolent campaigns, as their size helps compensate for their limited participant pool. Thurber, “Ethnic Barriers to Civil Resistance.” It should be noted that, even though the literature assumes that a constrained pool of potential participants results in a smaller number of actual participants, ethnic campaigns could in principle offset this disadvantage and still reach massive size if they mobilized individuals in the pool at particularly high rates. Thus even a campaign dominated by a relatively small ethnic minority could inflict debilitating costs on the government by attracting a large percentage of the minority population.

³³For example, Dahl et al., “Apples and Oranges?”

the risk of a loss of status brought about by a new ethnic hierarchy topped by another group.³⁴ Moreover, the members of the state-controlling group have no reason to believe they will get better treatment in a state dominated by ethnic-others.³⁵ In fact, they may fear retaliation for association (albeit indirect) with the outgoing ruling ethnic group.³⁶ The incumbent may stoke these fears by staging ethnic incidents and spreading propaganda of ethnic violence, as the Syrian regime skillfully did to ensure the loyalty of the Alawite population at the outset of the antiregime protests in 2011.³⁷

A fortiori, in-groups handsomely benefitting from the existing ethnic regime (for example, experiencing positive material discrimination through taxation, jobs, and public goods provision) are unlikely to sympathize with the challengers and even less likely to switch sides.³⁸ The risk of purges in the event of success of the out-group challenge provides an especially powerful incentive for regime insiders to oppose it. Even if not motivated by revenge and ethnic hatred, the new regime may have incentives to remove elements loyal to the previous regime to ensure its survival. Thus the ruling elite would typically have little inclination to offer significant concessions and few qualms about ordering massive repression in the face of ethnic challenges. The violent, uncompromising approach of Syria's Alawite-dominated regime to the primarily Sunni protest movement exemplifies this scenario.

On their part, security forces manned by the state-controlling ethnic group would tend to implement repressive orders, rather than defect, as they face similar incentives as the ruling elites.³⁹ Moreover, the ethnic

³⁴On the importance of status in ethnic politics, see Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁵On the difficulty of making credible economic promises across ethnic lines, see, for example, Daniel Corstange, *The Price of a Vote in the Middle East: Clientelism and Communal Politics in Lebanon and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

³⁶Theodore McLaughlin dubs the "loyalty trap" a similar dynamic in civil wars, whereby members of a politically dominant ethnic group end up remaining loyal to the regime even though they do not personally obtain meaningful benefits from it for fear of rebels persecuting them even if they surrender or defect due to their ethnic affiliation with the regime. Theodore McLaughlin, "The Loyalty Trap: Regime Ethnic Exclusion, Commitment Problems, and Civil War Duration in Syria and Beyond," *Security Studies* 27, no. 2 (April–June 2018): 296–317.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 307–8.

³⁸Lindsay Heger and Idean Salehyan, "Ruthless Rulers: Coalition Size and the Severity of Civil Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 2007): 385–403; Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (August 2011): 478–95. This is not to say that all members of ethnic groups other than the state-controlling one will flock to the opposition movement. The incumbent may have co-opted segments of these ethnic groups, thus limiting their willingness to join the antigovernment challenge. For evidence of variation in participation in Syria's 2011 Arab Sunni-dominated uprising among Sunni Arab communities based on access to state patronage, see Kevin Mazur, "State Networks and Intra-Ethnic Group Variation in the 2011 Syrian Uprising," *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 7 (June 2019): 995–1027.

³⁹Consistently, Christian Davenport and coauthors find that African American protests are likely to draw a police presence and trigger repressive measures. Christian Davenport, Sarah A. Soule, and David A. Armstrong II, "Protesting while Black? The Differential Policing of American Activism, 1960 to 1990," *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 1 (February 2011): 152–78.

distance between challengers and regime affiliates would operate as a barrier stopping cascades of security forces' defection.⁴⁰ The result would typically be suppression of ethnic unarmed campaigns or their containment at a scale not warranting significant government concessions. The case of Bahrain's overwhelmingly Sunni security forces remaining loyal to the Sunni regime and crushing the Shia uprising of early 2011 illustrates this dynamic. The early phase of the Syrian uprising suggests a different path to campaign failure, where the ethnic cleavage separating the regime and its challengers ran through the state armed forces; in this case, as the security apparatus broke down along ethnic lines, unarmed contestation gave way to armed struggle between the security forces loyal to the regime and the elements siding with the challengers.⁴¹ The Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt stand in contrast to those in Bahrain and Syria, as their militaries' refusal to shoot on coethnic protestors prompted Ben Ali and Mubarak to step down, thus bringing about campaign success.⁴²

The foregoing discussion suggests my hypothesis about how the ethnic character of nonviolent campaigns affects their outcomes:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Ethnic nonviolent campaigns are less likely to succeed than nonethnic campaigns.

The ethnic conflict argument posits several causal mechanisms for the ineffectiveness of ethnic nonviolent challenges compared to their nonethnic counterparts: (1) ethnic campaigns' limited ability to induce defections of security forces and regime insiders; (2) their tendency to attract smaller numbers of participants; (3) governments' readiness to resort to large-scale and sustained repression against ethnic challengers; and (4) governments' unwillingness to satisfy demands of ethnic challengers, due to distrust toward ethnic-others or the perception that concessions would be too onerous. The available data allow a quantitative assessment of (1) and (2) through the following hypotheses:⁴³

⁴⁰McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion."

⁴¹Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence in the Arab Spring; Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*, 150–57.

⁴²Nepstad, "Mutiny and Nonviolence in the Arab Spring; Risa Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2 (2013): 205–20; Risa A. Brooks, "Military Defection and the Arab Spring," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴³NAVCO 2.0 includes a variable indicating the intensity of repression, ranging from no repression to nonphysical repression, nonlethal repression, and lethal repression. However, this variable is not suitable to test the repression mechanism (3), as it does not capture the theoretically relevant notion of large-scale and sustained repression. Repressive violence applied on a small scale and inconsistently is likely to fuel rather than quell opposition activities, as Mark R. Beissinger showed in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both China's crackdown on the Tiananmen movement (the archetype of ruthless repression) and the vacillating Soviet response to ethnonational mobilization in the late 1980s–early 1990s belong to NAVCO 2.0's highest category of repression, as they entailed some lethal violence. A test of (4)—incumbents' varying willingness to satisfy challengers' demands—would be best conducted with process tracing of the decision making of governments facing the two types of nonviolent campaigns. See Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). Ethnic nonviolent campaigns are less likely to experience civilian defections than nonethnic campaigns.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b). Ethnic nonviolent campaigns are less likely to experience security forces' defections than nonethnic campaigns.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Ethnic nonviolent campaigns tend to attract smaller numbers of participants than nonethnic campaigns.

Data

I use a modified version of the NAVCO 2.0 dataset to test the ethnic conflict argument. NAVCO 2.0 reports annual information on large-scale nonviolent and violent campaigns with maximalist goals of regime change, anti-occupation, and self-determination/secession from 1945 to 2006.⁴⁴ Large-scale campaigns are “series of observable, continuous, purposive mass tactics or events in pursuit of a political objective” with at least one thousand observed participants.⁴⁵ Besides restricting my analysis to nonviolent campaign-years,⁴⁶ I made the following changes to NAVCO 2.0: (1) I coded the independent variable of interest—ethnic conflict—based on research on each nonviolent campaign in the dataset (see detailed case notes in the codebook); (2) I generated the dependent variable—outcome of nonviolent campaigns—based on information on the progress of campaigns reported in NAVCO 2.0; (3) I dropped campaign-years for which I could not find any evidence confirming the actual occurrence of a campaign as defined by NAVCO 2.0 and campaign-years in which the challengers were also engaged in armed conflict against the state according to the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset,⁴⁷ as I am interested in studying the outcome of nonviolent campaigns rather than some hybrid form of resistance;⁴⁸ (4) I dropped nonviolent campaign-years at the very end of a campaign (that is, the last year) that had previously been waged violently, if negotiations on the final settlement between the warring parties had

⁴⁴Nonviolent campaigns for mere policy change or in support of a candidate during a democratic election do not meet these criteria.

⁴⁵Chenoweth and Lewis, “Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns,” 416.

⁴⁶NAVCO 2.0 codes a campaign-year as nonviolent if primarily “prosecuted by unarmed civilians who did not directly threaten or harm the physical well-being of their opponent,” using “nonviolent resistance tactics such as sit-ins, protests, boycotts, civil disobedience, mass noncooperation, and strikes.” Chenoweth and Lewis, “Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns,” 418. The commission of some violent acts by the challengers does not disqualify the campaign-year from being nonviolent, as long as the violence remains isolated and thus constitutes a secondary element of the contentious effort.

⁴⁷Erik Melander, Therése Pettersson and Lotta Themnér, “Organized Violence, 1989–2015,” *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 5 (September 2016): 727–42.

⁴⁸See codebook for details on all the campaign-years dropped. My core findings are robust to including campaign-years that I could not confirm met NAVCO 2.0's definitional standards (see [Tables A11–A13, online appendix](#)). I do include the First Palestinian Intifada, 1987–93, and the years 1989–98 of the East Timor liberation movement even though the Armed Conflict Dataset codes the occurrence of armed conflict in the relevant years, as these are commonly discussed cases in the literature on nonviolent resistance; my findings are substantively robust to dropping these two cases ([Tables A14–A18, online appendix](#)).

been ongoing before the switch to nonviolence, so as to assuage concerns about reverse causality, as the turn to nonviolence in this context would likely be a result of the impending settlement rather than its cause;⁴⁹ (5) I added one case (anticoup movement in Venezuela, 2002), which, according to NAVCO 2.0's codebook, was accidentally omitted;⁵⁰ (6) I dropped cases of anticolonial resistance due to their plausible distinctiveness from other campaigns and systematic problems of missing data;⁵¹ and (7) I added a battery of control variables, discussed below.

My key independent variable is *ethnic conflict*, a dummy taking on 1 if the politically most powerful (that is, state-controlling) ethnic group in the country is not among the groups "dominating" the nonviolent movement, and 0 otherwise. An explicit ethnic goal, such as secession or change in the ethnic hierarchy of power, is not necessary for a campaign to qualify as ethnic. In fact, ethnic challengers may frame their political goals (genuinely or strategically) in ethnically neutral terms such as toppling a repressive regime and establishing democratic rule. However, members of the state-controlling ethnic group should easily grasp the potentially negative implications for their status, security, and economic well-being of a successful ethnic challenge. Besides, state-controlling group members may fear that even if ethnic challengers initially embrace a pluralistic agenda, moderates may be outbid by more radical elements pursuing ethnic domination.⁵² The primarily Sunni protest movement against the Alawite-controlled Syrian regime in 2011 exemplifies an instance of ethnic conflict.

I use the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data on access to executive power to code the state-controlling group at the outset of each campaign.⁵³ This dataset conceptualizes ethnic groups as distinct social collectives of individuals sharing a subjective belief in a common culture and descent, whose markers include somatic similarities, shared religion, and a common language.⁵⁴ I consider an ethnic group as state controlling if it has

⁴⁹In practice, this coding rule leads to dropping only one country-year—Guatemala vs. Marxist insurgents, 1996.

⁵⁰Erica Chenoweth and Orion A. Lewis, "Codebook NAVCO 2.0," 2013, <http://www.navcodata.org>.

⁵¹Anticolonial campaigns are different from other ethnic challenges because of the distinctively hostile international political and normative environment colonial powers faced in the post-1945 era. For example, Ryan D. Griffiths and Louis M. Wasser document a particularly high success rate for anticolonial movements, regardless of whether they employed violent or nonviolent methods. In robustness checks, I include anticolonial cases (coded as ethnic conflicts) both with and without a dummy variable flagging anticolonial struggles. My findings are substantively unaltered, and the anticolonial dummy variable never approaches statistical significance (Tables A19–A20, online appendix). See Ryan D. Griffiths and Louis M. Wasser, "Does Violent Secessionism Work?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 5 (May 2019): 1310–36.

⁵²McLauchlin makes this point about ethnic civil wars. McLauchlin, "The Loyalty Trap."

⁵³Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (January 2010): 87–119.

⁵⁴This definition, inspired by Max Weber's seminal work, is consistent with two key constructivist tenets, which my argument embraces—the constrained malleability and the multidimensional nature of identities. Ethnic groups' boundaries, the relative salience of various identity dimensions for individuals, and sometimes even their identity attributes can change over time. Yet processes of change are rarely instantaneous, uncontested, and costless. The powerful constraints on identity malleability posed by political exclusion along ethnic lines are likely to be strengthened by contentious efforts to change the status quo. Thus it makes theoretical sense

monopoly or dominant access to executive power, or if it is the senior partner in a power-sharing system. Following Nils-Christian Bormann, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Manuel Vogt, if there are multiple senior power-sharing members (as, for example, in the former Yugoslavia), I code the demographically largest group (the Serbs in the Yugoslav case) as state controlling.⁵⁵ Thus, in any country-year there is only one state-controlling group, which implies that any other ethnic group in the country could launch an ethnic challenge. For example, the 1970–71 nonviolent campaign in Yugoslavia was ethnic, as it was dominated by Croats, a senior power-sharing partner, but not the state-controlling group due to its relatively small population size. In countries under foreign occupation or in which the bulk of the repressive forces deployed against the challengers are from abroad, the foreign country is considered as state controlling and thus ethnic conflict takes on 1.

I code a movement as “dominated” by an ethnic group (or multiple ethnic groups) if a clear majority of its participants (that is, individuals involved in campaign activities like protests, strikes, sit-ins, and members of the main organizations taking part in the movement) belong to that (those) ethnic group(s). Case-specific sources typically do not provide precise numerical estimates of movement participants by ethnic background, but it is relatively straightforward to infer whether members of an ethnic group played a dominant role in a nonviolent campaign. For instance, I treat consistent references in newspapers and secondary literature such as, say, “the Black protests,” “the Sunni group organizing the strikes,” “most of the participants were of X and Y ethnicity,” or “the stronghold of the movement was in the Z community” as indicating a dominant role in the movement for the corresponding ethnic group(s). Absence of references of these kinds or explicit discussions of the limited/merely symbolic role played by members of certain ethnic groups indicate they did not dominate the movement. For example, although whites did participate in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, case-study evidence leaves little doubt about the fact that it was overwhelmingly black, as reflected by reporting of major acts of contention as “black protests,” the fact that the main organizations involved had a primarily black membership (the African National Congress, the United Democratic Front, and black labor unions), and the occurrence of much of the resistance activities in black-inhabited

to speak of ethnic groups dominating opposition movements against a state controlled by another group. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978 [1922]).

⁵⁵Nils-Christian Bormann, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Manuel Vogt, “Language, Religion, and Ethnic Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 4 (April 2017): 744–71.

“townships.” As Afrikaners were the state-controlling group according to EPR, I code the anti-apartheid movement as ethnic.

I consider a campaign as nonethnic if (1) there is evidence of a dominant role for the state-controlling group or (2) there are indications that the movement bridges the country’s ethnic divides, such as references to the fact that its members “belonged to all walks of life;” that they “spanned ethnic lines”; that the movement mobilized broad social groups like student and teacher organizations, government employees, or trade unions (unless evidence exists that only certain ethnicities tended to belong to those social groups); or that a key organization in the movement is a political party whose constituency spans ethnic lines, including the state-controlling ethnic group. For example, the anticommunist campaign in Czechoslovakia in 1989 was nonethnic, as both Czech and Slovak organizations challenged the Czech-controlled state.

The main dependent variable is the outcome of nonviolent campaigns, conceptualized in terms of how closely the political conditions prevailing in the country in the immediate aftermath of the campaign match the challengers’ declared goals. I operationalize outcome from the point of view of the challengers, based on the variable *progress* in NAVCO 2.0. For the final year of each campaign, outcome takes on one of two possible values: “success” and “failure.” “Success” indicates situations in which the campaign ends with significant government concessions (*progress* = 3) or achieves its ends in full (*progress* = 4).⁵⁶ “Failure” corresponds to cases of campaigns ending without any departure from the status quo (*progress* = 0), with some gains short of government concessions (*progress* = 1) or only minor concessions (*progress* = 2). The coding of failure does not depend on why a campaign ended. Campaigns may end in failure because of the inability of challengers to sustain their activities in the face of government repression or their assessment that continued defiance is hopeless, as happened in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre in China. A turn to violence may also mark the failure of a campaign of civil resistance, as challengers resort to arms in reaction to the limited progress or out of anger at government repression, as occurred in Syria after months of primarily nonviolent action. In yet other cases, a shift from nonviolence to armed struggle may reflect the ascendance of a faction favoring violence over its rivals in the opposition movement, as in the case of Kosovo with the rise of the Kosovo Liberation Army.⁵⁷ In all other years of a campaign,

⁵⁶Note that NAVCO 2.0’s focuses on short-term success. Thus, both Tunisia and Egypt in the Arab Spring (which occurred after the period covered in the dataset) would be coded as successful campaigns for regime change, even if only the former arguably yielded a democratic outcome in the medium term. Nathan J. Brown, “Tracking the ‘Arab Spring: Egypt’s Failed Transition,’” *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (October 2013): 45–58.

⁵⁷Therefore, the outcome of a nonviolent campaign-year followed by a violent campaign-year is coded as “failure” if the nonviolent phase did not achieve at least significant government concessions. However, if

outcome is equal to “ongoing” (regardless of the value of the variable progress).⁵⁸

For campaigns aiming at establishing multiparty democracy, I add a criterion to NAVCO 2.0’s coding rules for progress to distinguish meaningful success from largely cosmetic change. If elections are held after a campaign and the authoritarian incumbent is defeated, I code the campaign as successful; if the incumbent wins, I code the campaign as successful only if the elections were relatively free and fair.⁵⁹

Analysis

I use a combination of logit and competing-risks models to test my hypothesis about the negative impact of ethnic conflict on the probability of success of nonviolent campaigns (H1).⁶⁰ Logit analysis uses a dichotomous measure of campaign success, dropping ongoing campaign-years. Competing risks analysis—a duration model with multiple types of “events”—allows me to assess how the ethnic nature of a nonviolent challenge affects the probability that at any point in time the campaign will end in success or failure, given that it has been ongoing up to then.⁶¹

After testing the observable implications of my ethnic conflict argument about nonviolent campaign outcomes, I turn to preliminary tests of two underlying mechanisms—that nonviolent campaigns should be less likely to prompt regime defections (H2a and H2b) and to attract massive numbers of participants (H3)—using logit models.

NAVCO 2.0 codes the turn to violence as limited to only one year, followed by the resumption of nonviolence (that is, there is a one-year violent hiatus in an otherwise nonviolent campaign, as in the anti-Pinochet movement in Chile in 1984), I consider the nonviolent campaign as “ongoing” in that year rather than a “failure.”

⁵⁸As the variable *progress* in NAVCO 2.0 takes on four values, it is possible to create a more nuanced measure of campaign success ranging from “full failure” and “partial failure” to “partial success” and “full success,” with “ongoing” as the baseline category. However, I use the trichotomous *outcome* variable, as suggested by Chenoweth and Lewis, due to problems of inter-coder reliability in telling apart instances of significant concessions and full success (that is, when *progress* equals 3 and 4, respectively). See Chenoweth and Lewis, “Codebook NAVCO 2.0.”

⁵⁹This additional criterion results only in one coding change: NAVCO 2.0 codes the campaign leading to Kenya’s multiparty elections in 1992 as successful, whereas I consider it a failure, given that the elections won by the incumbent party are widely considered as not meeting minimum standards of freedom and fairness. See, for example, David Throup and Charles Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya: The Kenyatta and Moi States and the Triumph of the System in the 1992 Elections* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998). The results are substantively robust to recoding the campaign outcome as success (Tables A21–A23, online appendix).

⁶⁰cluster standard errors by location country in all models.

⁶¹Competing-risks models are widely used in the study of outcomes of civil wars. See Seden Akcinaroglu, “Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (October 2012): 879–903; Fortna, “Do Terrorists Win?”; Tiffany S. Chu and Alex Braithwaite, “The Impact of Foreign Fighters on Civil Conflict Outcomes,” *Research and Politics* (July–September 2017 [online]): 1–7.

Table 1. Successful ethnic nonviolent challenges (1945–2006).

Campaign	Goal/Aim
Belarus, 1988–91	Anti-Soviet
Latvia, 1989–91	Anti-Soviet
Lithuanian, 1989–91	Anti-Soviet
Estonia, 1987–91	Anti-Soviet
Kirgizstan, 1990–91	Anti-Soviet
Lebanon, 2005	Against Syrian occupation
Nigeria, 1993–98	Antimilitary regime
Slovakia, 1989–92	Secession
Slovenia, 1989	Against communist rule
South Africa, 1990–94	Anti-apartheid
Taiwan, 1979–85	Prodemocracy
East Timor, 1989–99	Secession

Table 2. Logistic analysis of nonviolent campaign success (ongoing campaign-years dropped).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ethnic conflict	−1.803*** (−3.29)	−2.257*** (−4.76)	−2.373*** (−4.91)	−2.116*** (−4.29)
Late USSR		2.487*** (8.48)	2.635*** (7.19)	2.646*** (7.29)
Liberal democracy			1.397 (0.95)	1.414 (0.98)
Ethnic exclusion				−1.907* (−1.95)
<i>N</i>	99	99	99	99

Inference: $p < .01$ ***, $p < .05$ **, $p < .1$ * (Z statistic). Clustered standard errors by location country.

The Ineffectiveness of Ethnic Challenges

As [Table 1](#) reports, only 12 ethnic nonviolent campaigns succeeded in the years 1945–2006. It is notable that 5 of these targeted the Soviet Union in its last years of existence, bringing the number of successful ethnic campaigns in other contexts down to 7. By contrast, there were 53 successful nonethnic campaigns over the same period. Success does seem distinctively elusive for ethnic nonviolent challenges. I now turn to multivariate statistical analysis to see if this apparent pattern holds up to systematic scrutiny.

[Table 2](#) below reports the results of the logit analysis of the determinants of campaign success, dropping ongoing campaign-years. Following David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, in all specifications I include a control for the log of the duration of campaign to date (*duration*) to account for the impact of time and duration dependence;⁶² the variable is not significant and is not reported for reasons of space. I also control for several factors that existing theories suggest should have a powerful effect on the outcome of nonviolent campaigns.

⁶²David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, “It Takes Two: A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (August 2009): 570–97.

Column 1 includes only *ethnic conflict* as explanatory variable, while column 2 adds a dummy variable indicating whether the campaign occurred in the Soviet Union in the years 1987–91 (*late USSR*). The ethnic uprisings rocking the Soviet Union toward the end of the Cold War were especially likely to succeed due to their clustering in a short period, the deep crisis of the Soviet federal state during glasnost, the unwillingness of Soviet leaders to resort to and sustain massive repressive measures, and the lukewarm attitude of the Russian public toward preserving the multiethnic empire of which it sat at the center.⁶³

In columns 3–4 I add a control for regime type. Democracy has a theoretically ambiguous relationship with the occurrence of nonviolent resistance. On one hand, the absence of effective institutional channels may spur large-scale antiregime mobilization to find redress for grievances, which the lack of democratic accountability may exacerbate.⁶⁴ On the other, citizens may have fewer opportunities to mobilize under an authoritarian regime.⁶⁵ In any case, when nonviolent challenges do occur in democratic settings, the probability of success should be relatively high, given democratic governments' receptiveness to popular grievances and limited repressive tendencies.⁶⁶ I measure regime type with V-Dem's liberal democracy index, lagged one year.⁶⁷

In column 4 I also include *ethnic exclusion*, a dummy variable from the EPR dataset indicating whether any politically relevant group was excluded from the country's executive, as in ethnically exclusionary regimes members of privileged groups may be especially unwilling to support, or make concessions to, opposition movements, while approving of repressive measures.⁶⁸

The logistic analysis strongly supports H1: *ethnic conflict* has a significant negative effect on the probability of nonviolent campaign success both in the bivariate specification and when other factors are taken into account.

⁶³Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*.

⁶⁴Cunningham, "Understanding Strategic Choice"; Dahl, Gates, Gleditsch and González, "Apples and Oranges?"

⁶⁵Erica Chenoweth and Jay Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 2 (February 2017): 298–324.

⁶⁶Barbara F. Walter, "Building Reputation: Why Governments Fight Some Separatists but Not Others," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (April 2006): 313–30; Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works"; Shaykhutdinov, "Give Peace a Chance."

⁶⁷Michael Coppedge et al., "Measuring High Level Democratic Principles Using the V-Dem Data," *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (November 2016): 580–93. In robustness checks, I also use the standard *polity2* variable, its quadratic term, a trichotomous variable based on *polity2* indicating democratic (6 to 10), autocratic (–10 to –6), and mixed regimes (–5 to 5), and a binary variable based on *polity2*'s component variables, indicating cases in which a regime holds competitive elections (*exec* > 7) and there is effective political participation (*parcomp* = 0 or > 2), as suggested by Jack A. Goldstone and coauthors. The main results are substantially unaltered (Table A10, online appendix). Monty G. Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2010* (Detroit, MI: Center for Systemic Peace, 2013); Jack A. Goldstone et al., "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability," *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 1 (January 2010): 190–208.

⁶⁸McLauchlin, "The Loyalty Trap."

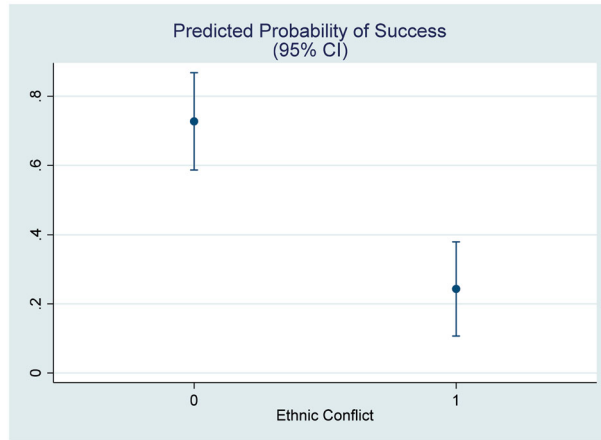


Figure 1. Marginal effect of ethnic conflict on campaign success (Table 2, column 4).

Late USSR and *ethnic exclusion* have the expected positive and negative impacts on the probability of campaign success, respectively. By contrast, the indicator of liberal democracy does not reach statistical significance. As Figure 1 shows, the effect of ethnic conflict is substantively large: based on the results reported in column 4 of Table 2 (holding *late USSR* and *ethnic exclusion* at their median, that is 0 and 1, respectively, and *liberal democracy* at its mean), ethnic nonviolent campaigns are nearly three times less likely to succeed than their nonethnic counterparts.

In Tables 3 and 4, I report the results of the competing risks analysis.⁶⁹ This statistical approach allows for a more nuanced examination of the effects of ethnic conflict on campaign outcomes over time, taking into account the fact that at any given point during its course a nonviolent challenge could succeed, fail, or simply continue. Moreover, given that it uses campaign-year rather than cross-sectional data, competing risks analysis takes into consideration the time-variant nature of the control variables.

The first four columns of Table 3 report the same specifications as in Table 2. In the other columns of Table 3 and in Table 4, I take the model controlling for *late USSR*, *liberal democracy*, and *ethnic exclusion* (column 4 in Table 2) as my core specification and include one additional control variable at a time for various demographic, socioeconomic, and political factors.⁷⁰ I control for the percentage of urban population, as several studies suggest that nonviolent resistance is more effective in urban settings (and in particular in the capital city), where it is easier to mobilize large

⁶⁹Table A26, online appendix reports tests of the proportional sub-hazards assumption.

⁷⁰The key finding on the ineffectiveness of ethnic nonviolent campaigns is robust to the inclusion of these additional controls in the logit analysis. See Tables A1–A2, online appendix.

Table 3. Competing risks analysis of nonviolent campaign outcomes (I).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Outcome = success						
Ethnic conflict	0.329*** (-3.43)	0.251*** (-5.85)	0.217*** (-5.48)	0.243*** (-4.86)	0.222*** (-4.72)	0.219*** (-4.69)
Late USSR		3.155*** (6.82)	3.931*** (6.48)	4.440*** (6.48)	4.689*** (5.25)	2.809*** (3.46)
Liberal democracy			6.199** (2.10)	6.858** (2.35)	7.439*** (2.58)	5.052* (1.94)
Ethnic exclusion				0.426*** (-3.22)	0.545** (-2.40)	0.461*** (-2.94)
Urban population					0.995 (-0.75)	
Youth bulge						0.928 (-1.56)
Outcome = failure						
Ethnic conflict	3.138*** (3.10)	3.967*** (4.20)	4.008*** (4.25)	3.172*** (3.48)	3.956*** (3.74)	3.959*** (3.75)
Late USSR		0.161*** (-11.65)	0.156*** (-9.52)	0.154*** (-9.62)	0.178*** (-5.28)	0.180*** (-4.91)
Liberal democracy			0.767 (-0.29)	0.761 (-0.30)	1.001 (0.00)	0.960 (-0.05)
Ethnic exclusion				5.274* (1.78)	3.550 (1.33)	3.550 (1.38)
Urban population					0.998 (-0.26)	
Youth bulge						1.014 (0.21)
<i>N</i>	275	275	275	275	246	246

Inference: $p < .01$ ***, $p < .05$ **, $p < .1$ * (Z statistic). Clustered standard errors by location country.

numbers of participants (Table 3, column 5).⁷¹ Furthermore, I control for youth bulges (that is, the percentage of the population aged 15–24), as the modal protester is often described as a young person (Table 3, column 6).⁷² Youth may also act as first movers in mass mobilization, perhaps due to relatively low opportunity costs or high risk-taking.⁷³ I also control for a country's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (in log form, with a one-year lag) as a proxy for state capacity to police the population, repress dissent, or co-opt protest leaders (Table 4, column 1);⁷⁴ for regime durability (the number of years since the most recent regime change, in log form, with a one-year lag) as a proxy for government resilience, under the assumption that the longer the regime has been in place, the more likely that it will withstand a nonviolent challenge, in part due to a self-fulfilling expectation of regime resilience (Table 4, column 2);⁷⁵ and for respect for human rights (lagged one year) as a proxy for government willingness to

⁷¹Dahl et al., "Apples and Oranges?"; White et al., "Nonviolence as a Weapon of the Resourceful"; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"; Charles Butcher, "Geography and the Outcomes of Civil Resistance and Civil War," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (2017): 1454–72. Data from the World Bank, "World Development Indicators" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).

⁷²World Bank, "World Development Indicators."

⁷³Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"

⁷⁴GDP data (in constant 2010 USD) is from World Bank, "World Development Indicators."

⁷⁵Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"

adopt repressive measures against nonviolent campaigns (Table 4, column 3).⁷⁶

Determinants of campaign outcome are likely not limited to domestic factors, so I control for international and regional influences as well. A government's economic dependence on the West may make it more likely to offer concessions to nonviolent challengers and less likely to resort to large-scale repression lest Western support be withdrawn, thus increasing the probability of campaign success.⁷⁷ I proxy Western influence with aid provided by the United States, the World Bank, the European Union, and other major Western donors as a percent of GDP (lagged one year) with the variable *Western aid* (Table 4, column 4).⁷⁸ Many have noted the tendency of nonviolent campaigns to rapidly spread across borders and engulf entire regions, as with the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring.⁷⁹ The temporal and geographical clustering of nonviolent resistance could affect the prospects of campaign success through various mechanisms. Clustering may reflect common underlying conditions facilitating nonviolent resistance (for example, weak governments and high levels of youth unemployment, the disengagement from a region of a powerful state that had hitherto propped up local regimes). Contagion dynamics may also be at play: activists may learn new skills or approaches to nonviolent resistance from the experiences of their counterparts in neighboring countries, or they may update their beliefs about the feasibility and effectiveness of civil resistance, which in turn should reduce barriers to mobilization and collective action.⁸⁰ However, governments too may learn appropriate countermeasures (including preemptive repression) from events in neighboring countries, thus lowering the chances of campaign success.⁸¹ To capture these regional dynamics, I include the count of active nonviolent campaigns in the same world region (*regional campaigns*) in the previous year (Table 4, column 5).

⁷⁶Ralph Summy, "Nonviolence and the Case of the Extremely Ruthless Opponent," *Pacifica Review* 6, no. 1 (1994): 1–29; Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 68–69. Following Chenoweth and Ulfelder, I use the Cingranelli–Richards indicator of state practices regarding physical integrity rights as a proxy of state repressiveness. In robustness checks, I use Christopher J. Fariss's latent measure of human rights respect (Table A10, online appendix). David L. Cingranelli, David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay, "The CIRI Human Rights Dataset" (2014), <http://www.humanrightsdata.com>; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"; Christopher J. Fariss, "Respect for Human Rights Has Improved over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 2 (May 2014): 297–18.

⁷⁷Ritter, *The Iron Cage of Liberalism*.

⁷⁸Aid data (in constant 2011 USD) is from Michael J. Tierney et al., "More Dollars than Sense: Refining Our Knowledge of Development Finance Using AidData," *World Development* 39, no. 11 (November 2011): 1891–1906.

⁷⁹Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*; Kurt Weyland, "The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (December 2012): 917–34.

⁸⁰Kristian S. Gleditsch and Mauricio Rivera, "The Diffusion of Nonviolent Campaigns," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 5 (May 2017): 1120–45.

⁸¹Weyland, "The Arab Spring"; George Lawson, "Revolution, Non-Violence, and the Arab Uprisings," *Mobilization* 20, no. 4 (December 2015): 453–70; Nathan Danneman and Emily Hencken Ritter, "Contagious Rebellion and Preemptive Repression," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 2 (March 2014): 254–79.

Table 4. Competing risks analysis of nonviolent campaign outcomes (II).

	(1)	(2)	(3) ⁸³	(4)	(5)	(6)
Outcome=success						
Ethnic conflict	0.191*** (-4.35)	0.302*** (-4.05)	0.283*** (-4.25)	0.214*** (-4.90)	0.226*** (-4.21)	0.454*** (-2.65)
Soviet	6.654*** (6.00)	3.118*** (4.51)	2.089*** (2.70)	1.905*** (2.88)	6.163*** (6.53)	4.698*** (6.77)
Liberal democracy	7.849** (2.41)	6.013** (2.15)	2.513 (0.96)	8.633*** (2.81)	7.558** (2.05)	9.805** (2.56)
Ethnic exclusion	0.580* (-1.85)	0.431*** (-2.91)		0.442*** (-3.27)	0.653 (-1.55)	0.419*** (-3.23)
GDP per capita	0.927 (-0.60)					
Regime durability		0.985* (-1.79)				
Human rights			1.197** (1.97)			
Regional campaigns				1.103*** (4.15)		
Western aid					1.052** (2.13)	
Self-determination						0.34** (-2.39)
Outcome = failure						
Ethnic conflict	5.845*** (3.83)	3.254*** (3.22)	3.963*** (3.19)	3.529*** (3.64)	4.999*** (3.27)	2.171 (1.60)
Soviet	0.247*** (-2.78)	0.164*** (-7.95)	0.344*** (-2.74)	0.307*** (-2.96)	0.174*** (-5.17)	0.145*** (-9.60)
Liberal democracy	0.978 (-0.02)	0.856 (-0.18)	1.335 (0.25)	0.650 (-0.50)	0.536 (-0.56)	0.562 (-0.66)
Ethnic exclusion	2.545 (0.87)	4.713* (1.65)		5.180* (1.82)	1.811 (0.61)	5.283* (1.79)
GDP per capita	0.872 (-0.67)					
Regime durability		1.005 (0.56)				
Human rights			0.812* (-1.81)			
Regional campaigns				0.890** (-2.20)		
Western aid					0.893 (-1.13)	
Self-determination						1.814 (1.38)
<i>N</i>	207	263	202	275	201	275

Inference: $p < .01$ ***, $p < .05$ **, $p < .1$ * (Z statistic). Clustered standard errors by location country.

Finally, I control for campaign goals with a dummy variable indicating whether challengers aimed at regional autonomy, secession, or ending foreign occupation (*self-determination* = 1) or regime change (*self-determination* = 0) to ensure that the ethnic conflict argument travels beyond territorial disputes (Table 4, column 6).⁸²

⁸²The data on campaign goals is from NAVCO 2.0.

⁸³Note: column 3 does not include ethnic exclusion due to separation, as the corresponding sample does not contain any observation of campaign failure for cases without ethnic exclusion. See Scott J. Cook, John Niehaus, and Samantha Zuhke, "A Warning on Separation in Multinomial Logistic Models," *Research and Politics* (April–June 2018): 1–5.

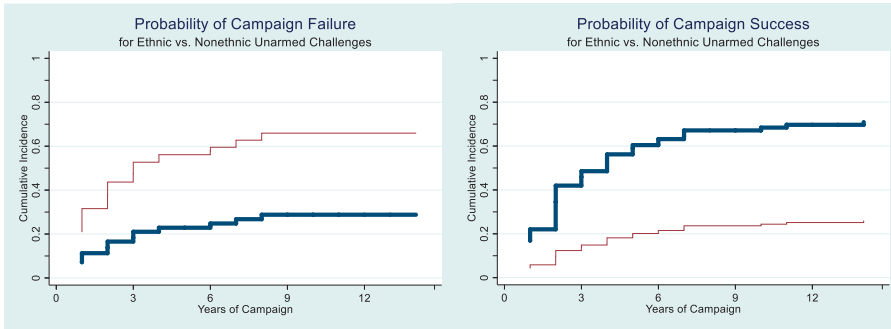


Figure 2. Effects of ethnic conflict with competing risks (Table 3, column 4).
 Legend: Thick step-line = nonethnic campaigns, thin step-line = ethnic campaigns.

The coefficients in Tables 3 and 4 are sub-hazard ratios to be interpreted relative to 1. A significant value less than 1 indicates variables associated with a lower risk of the campaign outcome being analyzed; a significant value greater than 1 indicates a higher risk. The ethnic conflict dummy has the expected negative impact on the probability of campaign success in all models, thus lending further support to H1. In the core specification (Table 3, column 4), an ethnic campaign is four times less likely to end successfully, as opposed to continuing, than a nonethnic campaign. Similarly, the probability that a campaign will fail, rather than continue, is about three times higher for ethnic challenges.

Figure 2 below shows the effects of ethnic conflict estimated in column 4 of Table 3, plotting the cumulative incidence rate of both campaign success and failure over time for ethnic and nonethnic campaigns, holding *late USSR* and *ethnic exclusion* at their median and *liberal democracy* at its mean.

Among control variables, the late USSR dummy has a significant positive effect on campaign success in all specifications. Unlike in the logit analysis, *liberal democracy* generally has a significant positive effect on the odds of campaign success; the coefficient, though, shrinks by more than half, and the variable loses statistical significance when we control for government's respect for human rights, which has the expected positive effect on campaign success. *Ethnic exclusion* displays a significant negative impact on campaign success in all but one specification. Also in line with theoretical expectations, the durability of the political regime being challenged has a negative effect on the odds of campaign success, while its dependence on foreign aid and the number of nonviolent challenges in the region in the previous year ~~negative~~ have a positive impact. By contrast, the shares of youth and urban population have no noticeable effect on campaign success. The fact that *ethnic conflict* retains a statistically significant effect on campaign success when the self-determination dummy (which has also a

negative impact) is included confirms that the hypothesized ethnic conflict dynamics extend beyond self-determination disputes.

Importantly, consistent with my argument, the observed ethnic conflict effect is specific to nonviolent resistance and does not extend to violent campaigns. Logit and competing risk analyses with NAVCO 2.0 data indicate that violent ethnic challenges do not differ from their nonethnic counterparts in terms of probability of success or failure (see [Tables A24–A25 in the online appendix](#)).⁸⁴

In sum, logistic and competing risks analyses strongly support the ethnic conflict thesis: ethnic nonviolent campaigns are significantly and substantively less likely to succeed than their nonethnic counterparts. As with any observational statistical study of the effectiveness of a given policy or strategy, selection is a potentially thorny issue. Are would-be ethnic challengers taking into account the dynamics envisioned by my argument in deciding whether to engage in nonviolent resistance as opposed to resorting to armed struggle or pushing their agenda through institutional channels? What are the implications of the selection process for my findings?

Ches Thurber provides evidence that activists strategically select civil resistance when they expect it to be most likely to succeed: small and politically excluded ethnic groups tend not to initiate civil resistance campaigns, as their size limits their ability to mobilize massive numbers of individuals and their political exclusion decreases the chance of loyalty shifts among regime insiders.⁸⁵ Would-be challengers could also be making decisions on the basis of more fine-grained indicators of likelihood of success that researchers may not be able to observe, such as the emergence of cracks in the regime ranks or evidence that discontent with the government among various ethnic groups is nearing the boiling point, suggesting the prospect of a particularly effective civil resistance campaign. These considerations would suggest a bias away from my argument, as the instances of ethnic challenges that we actually observe should be exceptionally likely to succeed, thus strengthening confidence in my findings. NAVCO 2.0 data would seem to bear this out, as 64 percent of violent campaigns have an ethnic character, whereas this figure is only 30 percent for nonviolent campaigns (excluding cases of resistance to colonial rule). On the other hand, it is possible that only activists who are especially ineffective at assessing their prospects of success embark on nonviolent ethnic challenges. This alternative dynamic would introduce a bias in favor of my argument if selection blunders reflected a more general lack of strategic acumen, which

⁸⁴I code the ethnic character of violent campaigns in NAVCO 2.0 based on data on rebel groups' recruitment from the ACD2EPR dataset. Julian Wucherpfennig et al., "Ethnicity, the State, and the Duration of Civil War," *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (January 2012): 79–115.

⁸⁵Thurber, "Ethnic Barriers to Civil Resistance."

could be correlated with the adoption of counterproductive tactics during campaigns.

In the absence of a good instrument, I cannot definitely adjudicate between competing accounts of selection on the basis of unobservables.⁸⁶ However, observable characteristics of campaigns cast significant doubt on the hypothesis that the ethnic challenges that do take place result from limited strategic acumen. In fact, ethnic nonviolent challenges are as likely to engage in media outreach and create their own parallel media institutions as their nonethnic counterparts, which existing research suggests increase the probability of campaign success;⁸⁷ ethnic challenges are also less likely to have a violent radical flank, which might be detrimental to campaign success.⁸⁸ In other words, ethnic campaigns compare favorably to their nonethnic counterparts in terms of some key aspects that their campaign leaders may influence, thus suggesting that ethnic challengers are not strategically inept.

Mechanisms: Why Are Ethnic Challenges Ineffective?

In order to conduct preliminary tests of the hypothesized mechanisms that success of ethnic challenges is unlikely because of the lower probability of large-scale civilian and military defections (H2a and H2b), I run logistic regressions on the dummies *civilian defections* and *security defections*. The variables, drawn from NAVCO 2.0, indicate whether in a campaign-year “major defections or loyalty shifts” occurred among civilian bureaucrats/public officials or security forces (including police and military), respectively. I include controls used in the core specification (Table 2, column 4).

The results reported in columns 1–2 of Table 5 corroborate H2a and H2b. Ethnic challenges are significantly less likely to experience civilian and military defections, at the 99% and 90% confidence levels, respectively.

To probe the campaign-size mechanism (H3), I run a logistic regression on a dummy flagging campaign-years with over 100,000 participants, based on information from NAVCO 2.0.⁸⁹ Column 3 in Table 5 reports the

⁸⁶The general difficulty of finding an instrument in this case is compounded by the fact that plausibly exogenous correlates of dissent in the literature (for example, rainfall) are unlikely to differentially affect potential campaign participants across ethnic lines. Emily Hencken Ritter and Courtenay R. Conrad, “Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression,” *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 1 (February 2016): 85–99.

⁸⁷Sutton, Butcher, and Svensson, “Explaining Political Jiu-Jitsu.”

⁸⁸Erica Chenoweth and Kurt Schock, “Do Contemporaneous Armed Challenges Affect the Outcomes of Mass Nonviolent Campaigns?” *Mobilization* 20, no. 4 (December 2015): 427–51. Among the ethnic nonviolent campaigns in my dataset, 76% engaged in media outreach compared to 74% of nonethnic campaigns (NAVCO 2.0’s *media_outreach* = 1) in their first year; 61% of ethnic campaigns had independent traditional or new, internet-based media institutions, compared to 63% of nonethnic campaigns (*pi_newmedia* = 1 or *pi_tradmedia* = 1); and 20% of ethnic campaigns had a radical flank, while 41% of nonethnic campaigns did (*rad_flank* = 2).

⁸⁹NAVCO 2.0 includes the ordinal variable *camp_size_est* (0 = small, that is, hundreds to thousands of participants; 1 = medium, that is, tens of thousands; 2 = large, that is, above 100,000; 3 = extremely large, that is, above 1 million).

findings, including controls for factors that may plausibly affect campaign size (besides *duration*): youth bulges, the urban share of the population, and the country's total population. Consistent with theoretical expectations, ethnic campaigns are less likely to attract massive numbers of participants.

The constraining effect of ethnic conflict on the size of the movement should be less stringent in cases where the state-controlling ethnic group is a minority, as, for example, in South Africa during apartheid and in Syria under Assad. In these cases, the challengers' potential pool of supporters includes the majority of the country's population, and thus nonviolent campaigns should have a higher chance of success than in instances with majority state-controlling groups. I test this additional implication of the campaign size mechanism with dummy variables distinguishing ethnic campaigns where the state-controlling group constitutes a majority of the population from ethnic campaigns with a minority state-controlling group. Column 4 in Table 5 reports the results of the core logit specification (Table 2, column 4), using *ethnic conflict with state-controlling minority* as baseline category. The ~~negative~~ significant coefficient of *no ethnic conflict* indicates that ethnic challenges are less likely to succeed. The fact that *ethnic conflict with state-controlling majority* does not reach statistical significance (though it displays the expected negative sign) suggests that whether or not the state-controlling ethnic group represents a majority of the population does not affect the odds of campaign success.⁹⁰ A conjectural explanation for this non-finding is that minority state-controlling groups, precisely because they are relatively vulnerable to nonviolent challenges, might be particularly resolute in their response, displaying significant cohesion and willingness to resort to intense and sustained repressive measures, which in turn may reduce the probability of campaign success.⁹¹

In sum, the evidence is consistent with the defection mechanism, as both civilian and security defections appear to be more likely during ethnic challenges. However, the evidence for the size mechanism is more ambiguous. On the one hand, ethnic campaigns are more likely to attract mass participation; on the other, there is no indication that a larger potential base of support (as indicated by a minority state-controlling ethnic group) makes ethnic challenges more likely to succeed. While further study is certainly needed, this initial analysis suggests that defection may be a more

⁹⁰This result is robust to the use of a dummy variable for ethnic campaigns with a large (that is, at least 20% of the population) state-controlling ethnic group instead of the dummy for ethnic campaigns with a majority state-controlling group.

⁹¹Consistently, Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan find that the smaller the demographic size of an ethnic ruling coalition, the higher the probability that African governments will engage in lethal repression in the face of nonviolent protests. Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, "Ethnicity, Nonviolent Protest, and Lethal Repression in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 4 (July 2019): 469–84.

Table 5. Testing mechanisms of ethnic conflict.

Outcome =	Civilian Defections	Military Defections	>100,000 Participants	Campaign Success ⁹²
Ethnic conflict	-1.491*** (-2.62)	-1.399* (-1.79)	-1.464** (-2.30)	
Late USSR	1.332*** (2.97)	-0.531 (-0.95)		3.868*** (3.32)
Liberal democracy	-1.352 (-1.02)	0.222 (0.13)		2.353 (1.18)
Ethnic exclusion	-0.093 (-0.17)	-0.651 (-1.09)		-1.92* (-1.95)
Population size			0.448** (2.47)	
Urban population			0.000 (0.02)	
Youth bulge			-0.127 (-1.34)	
State-controlling ethnic majority				-1.303 (-1.04)
No ethnic conflict				2.051*** (3.85)
<i>N</i>	217	216	232	96

Inference: $p < .01$ ***, $p < .05$ **, $p < .1$ * (Z statistic). Clustered standard errors by location country.

important mechanism underlying the ineffectiveness of ethnic challenges than campaign size.

Robustness Checks

This subsection details the robustness of my findings to the use of an alternative sample and an additional battery of controls.

Missing data is a pervasive problem in global analyses of political phenomena. As the varying sample size in Tables 3–4 indicates, this study is no exception; for example, the data on international aid is available only from 1973 onward. To ensure that the main findings are not affected by a pattern of nonrandom missing data, I rerun all models in Tables 2–4 with the same sample—164 observations for which no data is missing. Ethnic conflict continues to have a robust, negative effect on campaign success (Tables A3–A5, online appendix).

To address residual concerns about the spuriousness of the finding about the limited effectiveness of ethnic campaigns, I run alternative specifications controlling for additional factors that may affect campaign outcomes. I add to my core competing risks specification (Table 3, column 4) one at a time the following variables: (1) the size (logged) of the target country's armed forces as a proxy for state capacity to repress nonviolent campaigns; (2) the manufacturing share of GDP, as in industrialized settings governments may be especially vulnerable to disruptive activities such as tax

⁹²Note: the baseline category in the analysis of campaign success is *ethnic conflict with state-controlling minority*.

boycotts and strikes;⁹³ (3) a Cold War dummy, as the end of US-Soviet global competition might have disincentivized powerful states from propping up authoritarian clients facing nonviolent challengers and emboldened opposition movements; (4) the number of politically relevant ethnic groups in the country, both on its own and interacted with *ethnic conflict*, as the higher the number of ethnic groups, the less willing governments may be to make concessions lest they invite future challenges by hitherto docile ethnic groups;⁹⁴ (5) population size (logged) as proxy for the pool of potential movement participants; (6) the number of successful coups in the previous five years (logged) as proxy for regime stability;⁹⁵ (7) a squared term for respect for human rights to account for potential nonlinearity in its effect on campaign outcomes;⁹⁶ (8) a dummy variable from NAVCO 2.0—*ethnic diversity*—indicating whether more than one ethnic group participated in the nonviolent movement, as the involvement of multiple groups may lead to a higher number of participants, but potentially also coordination problems; (9) a dummy variable from NAVCO 2.0 indicating whether international sanctions were imposed on the regime for cracking down on the nonviolent campaign; (10) a dummy variable flagging campaigns with their own media institutions beyond government control—*parallel media*— as Jonathan Sutton, Charles R. Butcher, and Svensson find that this fuels backfire dynamics;⁹⁷ (11) ethnic polarization, as Svensson and Lindgren report that nonviolent campaigns are less likely to succeed in demographically polarized countries (that is, where there are a few, large ethnic groups);⁹⁸ (12) NAVCO 2.0's variable flagging the presence of a violent radical flank in the nonviolent movement, which existing research suggests might hinder campaign success;⁹⁹ (13) world region dummies, to capture potential region-specific effects on campaign outcomes; (14) a measure of mass media access (television, radio, and daily newspapers), as it has been argued that mass communication technologies enhance states' soft power, thus reducing the prospects of successful challenges;¹⁰⁰ and (15) dummies for personalist/sultanistic and military regimes, as some

⁹³Charles Butcher and Isak Svensson, "Manufacturing Dissent: Modernization and the Onset of Major Nonviolent Resistance Campaigns," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 2 (March 2016): 311–39; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"

⁹⁴Walter, "Building Reputation"; Shaykhutdinov, "Give Peace a Chance."

⁹⁵Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers, *Polity IV Project*.

⁹⁶Ronald A. Francisco, "The Dictator's Dilemma," in *Repression and Mobilization*, ed. Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol Mueller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Chenoweth and Ulfelder "Can Structural Conditions Explain the Onset of Nonviolent Uprisings?"

⁹⁷Sutton, Butcher, and Svensson, "Explaining Political Jiu-Jitsu." I also use a three-category measure, with 1 indicating campaigns with either traditional or new, internet-based media beyond government control and 2 indicating campaigns with both types of parallel media. Data from NAVCO 2.0.

⁹⁸Svensson and Lindgren, "Community and Consent."

⁹⁹Chenoweth and Schock, "Do Contemporaneous Armed Challenges Affect the Outcomes of Mass Nonviolent Campaigns?"

¹⁰⁰T. Camber Warren, "Not by the Sword Alone: Soft Power, Mass Media, and the Production of State Sovereignty," *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (January 2014): 111–41.

authors have suggested that either type of autocratic regime may be especially vulnerable to nonviolent campaigns.¹⁰¹

The main findings are substantially unaffected by the inclusion of these controls, with *ethnic conflict* displaying a robust negative effect on the probability of campaign success (Tables A6–A10, online appendix).

Summary and Implications

As Chenoweth and Stephan have shown, nonviolent resistance can successfully bring about major political change and has indeed done so at a higher rate than violent rebellion in the past century. This article does not dispute those findings but cautions against a “voluntaristic” interpretation, which Chenoweth and Stephan suggest themselves, that is, that nonviolent challenges tend to succeed regardless of the circumstances in which they take place, as long as the challengers have sufficient mobilization and organizational skills.¹⁰² By contrast, I put forth a more structural perspective arguing that the prospect of success is powerfully influenced by whether the nonviolent movement is dominated by members of ethnic groups other than that controlling the state. Ethnic challenges face an uphill battle due to their constrained pools of participants and their limited ability to induce sympathy, let alone support, from government affiliates.

My empirical analysis provides strong support for the ethnic conflict argument. Ethnic challenges are much less likely to succeed than nonethnic challenges across a range of models. Furthermore, ethnic challenges appear to be less successful for the reasons postulated by my argument, as they tend to attract smaller numbers of participants and to prompt less defections from the government camp.

Future research could identify conditions under which these ethnic conflict dynamics are less likely to operate by conducting in-depth case studies of both successful and unsuccessful ethnic challenges. A preliminary examination of the few instances of successful ethnic campaigns reported in Table 1 above suggests that in cases of ethnic secessionism a positive or at least indifferent attitude of state-controlling group members toward the goals of the challengers may be crucial. The collapse of multiethnic Soviet state was made possible by the fact that by the late 1980s Russians came to

¹⁰¹Zoltan Barany, “Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Role of the Military,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 4 (October 2011): 28–35; Jack A. Goldstone, “Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011): 8–16; Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2014): 313–31.

¹⁰²Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 18. For contrasting views on the relative importance of agency and structure in nonviolent resistance, see also Peter Ackerman, “Skills or Conditions? What Key Factors Shape the Success or Failure of Civil Resistance?” (paper presented at the Conference on Civil Resistance and Power Politics, Oxford, UK, 15–18 March 2007); Thurber, “Ethnic Barriers to Civil Resistance.”

see the crisis-ridden Soviet Union as antithetical to Russian nationalism and thus acquiesced to, or even embraced, centrifugal tendencies.¹⁰³ In Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, increasing numbers of Czechs reached the conclusion that letting Slovakia go was in their interest, due to its economic backwardness and its problems with the Hungarian ethnic minority.¹⁰⁴ In Indonesia, the anti-Suharto opposition movement dominated by state-controlling Javanese eventually espoused East Timorese secessionist aspirations, perhaps because the Indonesian takeover of the island had occurred relatively recently (in 1975) and its isolation through a de facto physical and media embargo made Indonesians less likely to see it as an integral part of the country.¹⁰⁵

From a policy perspective, this article should temper enthusiasm for launching and supporting nonviolent challenges to repressive regimes without careful consideration of the specific local circumstances. If conditions on the ground are not ripe for a nonethnic challenge, the evidence indicates that the prospects for success are limited. These findings should be useful as an antidote to the “representativeness heuristic,” which “induces people to be overly impressed by a short run of data and to jump to conclusions about its significance” as well as to “overrate the similarities between the forerunner and the situation they confront.”¹⁰⁶ Individuals often rely on this flawed cognitive shortcut to navigate situations characterized by striking novel developments and major uncertainty, such as the “wave” of Arab Spring uprisings. Contrary to statements of commentators and activists at the time, the ethnic conflict argument suggests that the relatively bloodless ousting of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt was unlikely to be replicated in Syria due to the ethnic character of the challenge facing the Assad regime.¹⁰⁷

When nonviolent resistance is likely to occur along ethnic lines, responsible international policymakers and activist leaders should weigh the potential benefits of a successful campaign against the high risk of the negative consequences associated with failure, including the eruption of civil war and intensified government repression. In some cases, it may be preferable to engage in difficult and time-consuming efforts to create organizations bridging ethnic boundaries as a foundation for future non-ethnic challenges rather than opting for the path of least resistance of

¹⁰³Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*.

¹⁰⁴George Lawson, *Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁰⁵Awet Tewelde Weldemichael, *Third World Colonialism and Strategies of Liberation: Eritrea and East Timor Compared* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁶Weyland, “The Arab Spring,” 921.

¹⁰⁷*ibid.*

mobilizing only aggrieved ethnic groups in the face of what appears to be a fleeting opportunity for action.

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