Riots as Civil Resistance: Rethinking the Dynamics of 'Nonviolent' Struggle

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Abstract

How do we understand violent actions in social movements? Civil resistance research has made strides in demonstrating the comparative efficacy of 'nonviolent' campaigns, and has become a major force in shaping social movement strategy today, calling for nonviolent discipline. But dominant arguments narrowly interpret the data and uphold a violence/nonviolence dichotomy that does not reflect the tactical repertoires of social movements on the ground. This paper argues that unarmed collective violence is common in civilian-based social movements and can be analyzed in the same terms that civil resistance scholars use to analyze nonviolent actions. The paper makes use of prominent datasets on contentious political actions and on nonviolent struggle to demonstrate the common occurrence of riots alongside nonviolent civil resistance campaigns, and advances a theoretical argument using the example of the anti-Mubarak Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Ultimately, this paper argues that civil resistance studies must move beyond the violence/nonviolence paradigm so that standard analyses of unarmed movements include a broader range of collective actions that more accurately reflect existing movement repertoires.

Introduction

In the past decade, social movement uprisings have shaken the world. Globally, there have been massive, unarmed civilian rebellions from Greece to Egypt to Thailand, as well as countless issue-based movements that have changed national conversations and influenced political developments. The questions of how movements form, organize

and achieve success are enormously important, with both domestic and international implications. This 21st century wave of movements has often been characterized as *nonviolent*, and the influential field of civil resistance studies has sought to analyze and explicate these struggles using the logic of nonviolent action (Engler and Engler 2016, Chenoweth and Stephan 2016, Nepstad 2015a). At the same time, while the majority of these movements have taken the form of civilian resistance, as opposed to armed resistance, they have also involved rioting and other acts of unarmed collective political violence. Civil resistance theory has been largely resistant to incorporating property destruction and other low-level violent actions into its analytical framework, but it is not clear that movements can be accurately studied without them.

The disputes surrounding violence and nonviolence have long been among the most contentious for social movement practitioners. In the current political moment, amid the rise of Trump and far right political parties around the world, they have taken on renewed fervor. But in contemporary debates over the use of violence and nonviolence in movements, there is significant conceptual slippage between the operational meanings of violence. While activists often debate the use of violence in terms of unarmed civilian-based actions, much of the literature ostensibly addressing the same debate discusses violence as warfare. Surprisingly few studies investigate the impact of the types of violence that are most relevant to social movement actors today— unarmed collective political violence like property destruction, sabotage, arson, and physical altercations with police or political opponents—not in contrast to but *within* the context of the types of movements that scholars call nonviolent.[1] The shortage of research in this area indicates that opinions related to one of the most significant arguments for social movements are largely based on assumption. The point of this paper is not to argue that riots are better than nonviolent tactics, nor to claim that violence is more efficacious than nonviolence. The point is to confront head on the reality that unarmed violence occurs in the context of 'nonviolent' movements. It is not sufficient to dismiss violent collective

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[1] Prominent exceptions include Ketchley 2017, Bray 2017, Meckfessel 2016, Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner, ed. 2014, Seferiades and Johnston ed. 2012, and Piven 2006.

actions as random aberrations, or to assume that they are necessarily detrimental to movements.

In order to address this problem, I argue that violent collective actions: 1) are common occurrences in the types of social movements that scholars classify as civil resistance; 2) can be productively assessed as part of the repertoire of civilian-based mobilizations. I address the first point by combining data from two prominent datasets on contentious political actions with the most advanced dataset on nonviolent revolutions to show that the vast majority of civil resistance campaigns are accompanied by riots. I then address the second point by advancing a theoretical argument for the application of civil resistance analyses to these riots and other violent civilian actions in conjunction with nonviolent actions, and flesh this argument out using the example of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Ultimately, I argue that civil resistance studies could fruitfully adopt a more sociological conception of movements in its treatment of the violence question, and expand its analysis to include a broader range of collective actions that more accurately reflect existing social movement repertoires.

What Are Riots, Anyway? A Discussion of Terms

This paper mobilizes analytical frameworks from both social movement studies and civil resistance studies—two fields that, as Sharon Erikson Nepstad puts it, 'in many ways… have developed in parallel with few points of crossover' (2015b:415)—and addresses a topic that is deeply contentious for activists. As such, it is important to preface the discussion by clarifying terms. In social movement studies, social movements can be defined as contentious politics that involve collective claims and sustained campaigns, typically aimed at authorities, and employing public displays and repertoires of contention in pursuit of those claims (Staggenborg 2007; Tilly 2004; Tilly 2006). Social movements can also be understood as relational, and their actions do not always target authorities (see Seferiades and Johnston 2012). A great deal of civil resistance research, including Chenoweth and Stephan's quantitative work (2008; 2011), which is a prominent source for this paper, focuses on maximalist campaigns (Schock 2013:285). However, classifying movements into distinct categories of maximalist and sub-maximalist is

easier on paper than on the ground, as many sub-maximalist movements have revolutionary components or participants, and *vice versa*. Either way, the components of social movements, riots, and revolutions all fit into what McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly call *dynamics of contention* (2001), or *contentious politics* (Tilly and Tarrow 2007), and can be discussed together as connected social phenomena.

The focus of this paper is the existence and salience of violent actions within civilian social movements, which is to say, violent collective actions as common features of movements' *repertoires of contention* (Tilly 1995; 2006). Violence itself is an extraordinarily difficult concept to pin down, as discussed below, but as a baseline violent actions in social movements refer to actions related to the social-political goals of a movement that damage or physically threaten to damage people or property. In civil resistance studies, nonviolent actions[2] refer to a category of political actions outside prescribed political channels that do *not* physically injure or threaten people or property (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:13-17; Sharp 2012:193-194). Some nonviolent actionists are flexible on property destruction, but generally actions that damage property are not considered to be within the repertoire of civil resistance (see Sharp 1973; 2012). Others dislike a negative definition of nonviolence, i.e., defining it based on what it is not, because it downplays 'constructive nonviolence' and hides 'the multidimensional character of nonviolent struggle' (Vinthagen 2015:101). Nevertheless, nonviolent action is widely understood as a repertoire of actions that specifically does not involve harming or threating persons or property, and therefore this paper follows Sharp's classic definition (1973; 2012). Crucially, as Chenoweth and Stephan correctly point out, 'it is possible to distinguish between different resistance types based on the actors involved (civilians or armed militants) and the methods used (nonviolent or violent)' (2011:16). At the same time, identifying the actors involved in collective resistance and identifying their method of resistance are two different questions. Armed

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[2] See Sharp (1973) for a comprehensive explication and list of nonviolent civil resistance tactics

militants are actors that are: a.) armed[3], and b.) organized into a martial social formation, pursuing a martial strategy, which is to say, engaged in armed struggle as a method of resistance. Both the armaments and the warfare-oriented organization of armed militants distinguish them from civilian riots (see Sarkees 2010).

The word 'riot' is both ambiguous and controversial, but the types of collective actions associated with the term are surely instances of contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly 1995; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). I argue that riotous actions should be considered part of movements' repertoires of contention, especially when related to recognizable collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000). To Charles Tilly, the word 'riot' has been so thoroughly leveraged for rhetorical meaning that it has become nullified as an analytic term (Tilly 2006:46), and he prefers to exclude the word—though importantly not the actions associated with the word—from his discussion of *Collective Violence* (2003:18). Specifically, at least since the 'ghetto riots' of the 1960s, the term riot can take on racialized connotations in the US context (Abu-Lughod 2007, McLaughlin 2014). For similar reasons, some favor more clinical terms such as 'civil violence' (e.g. Katz 2008), though this alternative blurs the distinction between unarmed civilian violence and civil war. However, as Tilly acknowledges, the word 'riot' is both popular and significant (2006:46), and he lists the sorts of actions that get called riots alongside nonviolent methods in explaining the concept of repertoires of contention:

> Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle. People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organize special-interest associations. (Tilly 1995:42)

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[3] The term 'armed' in relation to political struggle denotes opposition forces deploying weapons reasonably akin to those carried by the state's forces—at least firearms. In today's world, a crowd throwing rocks or Molotov cocktails does not constitute armed struggle, while a militia firing assault rifles does. See Kadivar and Ketchley 2017:5.

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Gilje chooses to define riots as 'any group of twelve or more people attempting to assert their will immediately through the use of force outside the normal bounds of the law,' but he admits this definition is imperfect and somewhat arbitrary (1996:5-6). The choice of the number 12 is likely a reference to the Riot Act—the 1714 British law that originally banned all public demonstrations of 12 or more people, and was later rewritten to specifically forbid property destruction in demonstrations while granting the right to peaceful protest (see Clover 2016:6-8; Tilly 2006:190). Many scholars who choose to deploy the word 'riot' do not define it based on abstract criteria but rather based on constituent examples of collective behavior such as smashing windows, attacking buildings associated with political foes, throwing projectiles at police, burning cars, and so forth (e.g. Jasper and Thompson 2016; Wacquant 1993). This approach makes particular sense considering the patterned behavior rioters often exhibit, involving repeated rituals and unspoken rules (Gilje 1987:17; Horowitz 2001:1). Crucially, violent protests are far from uncommon events in the context of social movement mobilizations, and the word riot is highly recognizable in this context. While the use of this term to subsume unarmed collective political violence is fraught and perhaps lacking in precision, it is nevertheless important to grapple with based on its presence in the popular consciousness as well as scholarly usage. I therefore use the term 'riot' to indicate collective, unarmed political action by a group of civilians involving destruction of property and/or harm to people.

Civil Resistance and the Violence/ Nonviolence Dichotomy

Riots as a particular type of crowd formation have been both demonized and romanticized across cultural forms, from newspaper reports and films, to popular art and music (Bell and Porter 2008:x), with their images now widely and rapidly spread via social media and YouTube. Already present throughout popular culture, riots have received a resurgence of attention following the contested presence of unarmed protester violence associated with the global wave of anti-regime and anti-austerity protests and revolutions in 2011, and in the US in Oakland, Ferguson, Baltimore, Washington DC, and elsewhere associated with

the Occupy Movement, the Movement for Black Lives, opposition to the Trump regime, and anti-fascist actions. However, unarmed collective violence has received remarkably little scholarly attention from the perspectives of social movements and civil resistance studies.

Social movement strategy has long been divided into distinct and opposing conceptual categories of 'violent' and 'nonviolent' (Tilly 2006; Gurr 2000; Schock 2013; Sharp 1973). Historically, proponents of political violence in revolutionary social movements have argued that radical change requires armed struggle (e.g. Fanon 1963; Guevara 1963; Mao 1937), while advocates of nonviolence believe true change can only be achieved without the application of violence by claimants (e.g. Day 1936; Gandhi 1927; King 1963). For practitioners across movements, the question of the use of violence remains deeply contentious. Of all the disagreements between activists today, the debate over the use of violence is among the most persistent and fractious; entire movements have self-destructed in the wake of these arguments (see Epstein 1993; Varon 2004).

Diametrically opposing the theoretical categories of 'violent' and 'nonviolent' is a central problem; these concepts do not readily lend themselves to dichotomous thinking. What constitutes violence is deeply contested to begin with. Various thinkers and fields have conceived of violence as a moral wrong (e.g. Gandhi 1927; Gregg 1944), as necessary for social progress (e.g. Sorel 1950; Fanon 1963), as structurally or symbolically imbedded in the systems or interactions of the status quo (e.g. Bourdieu 2002; Nordstrom and Martin 1992), as a form of interpersonal communication (e.g. Rosenberg 2003), and so on. Meanwhile, nonviolence as a concept has suffered from the widespread notion that it is defined based on the absence of something, presupposing both a consensus on and a rejection of what that thing actually is (Vinthagen 2015). Others have pointed out how seemingly nonviolent actions can end up reproducing violent structures and governments (Chabot and Sharifi 2013).

The violence/nonviolence dichotomy was developed in a context where the archetype for revolutionary movements was armed struggle (see Goodwin 2001). The modern concept of civil resistance was born from the distinction between armed struggle and civilian-based revolution

(Case 2018). The study of civil resistance, a term used synonymously with 'strategic nonviolence' and 'nonviolent direct action' (Sharp 2012), has become an influential field and practice for social movement actors. The thrust of the field is that there are certain identifiable strategic factors that unarmed movements generate and contend with that have particular material impacts on movement success or failure. Several main areas of emphasis for civil resistance studies include the importance of mass *mobilization* of civilian forces, *resilience* in the face of repression through discipline and tactical diversity, and the ability to create *leverage* against regimes through disruptive collective action and strategic withdrawal of support (Schock 2013). While many had assumed that armed struggle was ultimately necessary for political revolution, civil resistance scholars have focused on the mechanisms and processes which unarmed movements have used to successfully mobilize and generate leverage even against the most repressive regimes. Civil resistance theory emerges from a moral-spiritual conception of nonviolence, and though the field has intentionally shifted focus to the material strategies of nonviolent action, many of its scholars maintain the foundational argument that violent action is inherently damaging to the processes that make civil resistance struggle successful (Nepstad 2015a; Sharp 2012).

However, the model for revolutionary political struggle is no longer the guerrilla unit in the mountains; today it is the crowd in the streets (see Case 2018). Within the paradigm of the violence/nonviolence dichotomy, this difference is interpreted as a shift from violent to nonviolent struggle. While civilian struggle does tend to involve less acute violence than warfare, the typological shift has been a shift in the *social formation of movements*—military to civilian—not a shift from violence to nonviolence in an abstract sense (ibid). Civil resistance as an ideal type might involve the understanding that in reality violence is often present in a nonviolent movement (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:16), but the violence in civilian-based movements is not simply a limited version of the violence in armed struggle. Riots are historically part and parcel of civilian movements (Clover 2016). Unarmed mass movements frequently involve violent actions like arson, vandalism, physical altercations with police or political opponents, and so on. From a morally or spiritually nonviolent standpoint, which is to say, if one believes that any and all

violent action is universally immoral, conflating riots with warfare might make sense. From social scientific or strategic standpoints, however, riots and other unarmed civilian-based collective actions involving violence are far more similar to nonviolent repertoires of contention than they are to armed struggle, and as such are crucial to incorporate into holistic analyses of civil resistance movements.

The Violence in 'Nonviolent Struggle'

Civil resistance scholars Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan claim to have empirically validated the superior efficacy of nonviolent campaigns with a comparative statistical analysis. The large-N, global Nonviolent And Violent Conflicts and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset was introduced in 2008 and upgraded (NAVCO 1.1) for publication in the widely-acclaimed 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*.[4] NAVCO catalogues and compares violent (armed) and nonviolent (unarmed) intrastate conflict between 1900 and 2006. The unit of analysis is the campaign itself; in order to be included in NAVCO, a campaign must have 'maximalist' political goals, in this case meaning the overthrow of a regime, the ouster of a foreign occupation, or secession from a state. Each campaign is designated one data point based on its 'peak' year, assigned based on the year of highest campaign participation, or in the case of missing data, based on the year prior to the campaign outcome.[5] Despite limitations of the data construction and methodology (see Lehoucq 2016), Chenoweth and Stephan's work remains the most expansive and rigorous quantitative civil resistance research to date.

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[4] Despite introducing the time-recurring NAVCO 2.0 dataset in 2013 (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013), and working toward an event-level NAVCO 3.0 dataset, NAVCO 1.1 continues to be the main source for both academic (e.g. Chenoweth and Schock 2015, Chenoweth and Stephan 2014) and popular audience (e.g. Chenoweth 2017b, Chenoweth and Stephan 2016) publications on this data.

[5] See 'Online Methodological Appendix Accompanying Why Civil Resistance Works' (Chenoweth 2011).

Importantly, Chenoweth and Stephan do not compare violence to nonviolence in the way many activists discuss these terms on the ground; they compare armed struggle to civilian struggle. The 'violent' category in NAVCO is derived from existing data on intrastate conflict, primarily the Correlates of War dataset, which catalogues wars between two armed parties suffering at least 1,000 battle-related casualties (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:13; Sarkees 2010).[6] In other words, 'violent' in NAVCO means warfare. However, when it comes to the 'nonviolent' category, NAVCO contains no variables for the presence of riots or any type of unarmed violence.

While it is difficult to quantitatively measure low-level violent acts within protests, some data on major riots are captured in at least two prominent global datasets on contentious political action. The Arthur S. Banks' Cross-National Time Series Archive (CNTS) dataset contains a variable for riots, spanning the years between 1815 and 2003 and covering all but the most recent years in NAVCO 1.1 (Banks and Wilson 2013). In CNTS, a riot is defined as: 'Any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force,' and primarily derives its data from analysis of articles published in *The New York Times* (Wilson 2013:12). The World Handbook of Political Indicators Series IV (WHIV), which has a timespan of 1990 to 2004, also contains a riot variable. WHIV derives its data on riots from computer-coded analysis of the *Reuters* newsfeed (Jenkins et al. 2012). I used a combination of these two datasets to add a binary variable for the presence of riots in a given year, and combined this data with the civil resistance campaigns in NAVCO. I primarily drew from CNTS, and used WHIV to fill in missing data between 1990 and 2004.[7] The simple question this method is designed to

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[6] Chenoweth and Lewis (2013) have discussed reducing this threshold from 1,000 to 25 battle related casualties—a significant difference—but nevertheless, 25 battle related deaths between two armed parties can be clearly distinguished from the types of property destruction and bodily injury typically resulting from civilian violence.

[7] While news sources might fail to report on a riot that happened, they are highly unlikely to report on a riot that did not occur. If one dataset records a riot in a given country in a given year while the other does not, it is reasonable to conclude that the riot occurred, justifying the construction of a binary variable for the presence of at least one riot.

answer is: Did at least one riot occur in each campaign between the year prior to campaign onset and the year of campaign conclusion?

Out of the comparable 'nonviolent' cases in NAVCO, 73 out of 86 experienced at least one riot during the course of the campaign.[8] In other words, *riots occurred alongside almost 85% of maximalist 'nonviolent' movements*. Furthermore, riots occurred in 80% (37 out of 46) of successful cases. This is a slightly lower ratio than cases that were coded

Table 1.

Civil Resistance Campaigns (NAVCO)	No riot		At least one riot		Total	
Unsuccessful	**4**	(10%)	**36**	(90%)	**40**	(100%)
	(30.77%)		(49.31%)		(46.51%)	
Successful	**9**	(19.56%)	**37**	(80.44%)	**46**	(100%)
	(69.23%)		(50.69%)		(53.49%)	
Total	**13**	(15.12%)	**73**	(84.88%)	**86**	(100%)
	(100%)		(100%)		(100%)	

in NAVCO as unsuccessful, of which 90% (36 out of 40) were associated with at least one riot, but nevertheless an overwhelming majority. The civil resistance that NAVCO juxtaposes to armed struggle is in fact not

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[8] Of the 106 cases of nonviolent campaigns listed in NAVCO 1.1, 20 cases had to be dropped due to missing data in both CNTS and WHIV or due to coding differences between the datasets. NAVCO codes by non-state territory names such as the Palestinian Territories and East Timor, and also uses the names of states prior to their independence such as Kyrgyzstan and Latvia in 1989. CNTS and WHIV code by country name, so political events in the previously-mentioned countries would be coded under Israel, Indonesia, and the USSR, respectively. Because it is not immediately clear in the data if, for example, the riots in Indonesia in 1989 were associated with East Timor, I omitted these cases. Qualitative, case-by-case analysis is required to expand on this study.

nonviolent in any strict sense, but more often than not involves rioting, if not as part of the campaigns than at least alongside them.

It is worth noting that out of the 13 comparable cases in NAVCO without a riot in either CNTS or WHIV data, 69% (9 out of 13) were coded as successful, compared with cases that included at least one riot, of which 51% (37/73) were coded as successful. This finding appears to add weight to the assertion that violent action can hurt movement success rates. However, the number of truly nonviolent examples may be even smaller than 13. Qualitative sources point to evidence of riots or riotous actions in many instances that are unrepresented in either the CNTS or WHIV data. The data only include major riots (e.g. those involving more than 100 participants and being destructive enough to merit attention as riots in international media) while other types of actions that might be classified as violent, such as smaller riotous actions within otherwise nonviolent protests, equipment sabotage, and targeted vandalism remain unaccounted for. Furthermore, both CNTS and WHIV draw their riot data from single English language news sources, a limited data collection method that likely involves underreporting errors and selection bias (Wilson 2013:18). Importantly, there are very unlikely to be over-reporting errors. *The New York Times* and *Reuters* could easily fail to report on riots that happen, but they are unlikely to report on riots that did not occur, so while the actual number of riotous events might be significantly higher than is recorded in the data, it will almost certainly not be lower. Overall, the cross-national data on riots over the course of NAVCO's timespan is not robust enough for a thorough quantitative analysis. However, it is sufficient to clearly demonstrate that riots are present alongside the vast majority of civil resistance campaigns.

What this data shows should not be surprising. Prominent nonviolence theorists have recognized that there is 'virtually no case' of a purely nonviolent struggle (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994:9). Chenoweth and Stephan acknowledge as much, and qualify their categories as being between 'primarily' nonviolent and 'primarily' violent campaigns (2011:16). However, they go on to use 'nonviolent' synonymously with 'primarily nonviolent,' which negates the potential salience of the violent actions that oblige the qualification. Furthermore, in the literature the acknowledgement of the non-purity of nonviolence tends to be processed

through a violence/nonviolence paradigm that interprets violence as armed struggle. By continuing to focus on violence-as-war, civil resistance scholars like Chenoweth and Stephan have evaded engagement with unarmed violent actions that are not only commonplace in civil resistance movements, but are precisely the types of actions debated by movement actors today. When unarmed violence is added into the equation, interpretations of NAVCO data change significantly. For example, one of Chenoweth and Stephan's major findings is that nonviolent campaigns lead to democratic outcomes more reliably than violent campaigns. However, Kadivar and Ketchley (2017) use WHIV data to demonstrate that riots have a positive effect on post-conflict political liberalization in nondemocracies.

The historical association of civil resistance studies with nonviolence has limited the attention paid to violent tactics, no matter how conspicuous they are in movements. In many cases, the tactics that do not fit the label 'nonviolent' are simply ignored. Chenoweth and Stephan justify omitting riots from their data based on their unit of analysis: 'Campaigns have discernable leadership and often have names, distinguishing them from random riots or spontaneous mass acts' (2011:14). But research on violent protest has long indicated that riots are 'not a random phenomenon' but rather 'highly patterned event(s)' (Horowitz 2001:1), and that rioters are often collectively discerning and selective in their targets (Tierney 1994). While some argue that riots should be analytically distinguished from social movements, the categories are not mutually exclusive, and the forms at least interact as practices of resistance (Simiti 2012). Even when explicitly nonviolent, a campaign can no more accurately be analyzed in isolation from repressive actions taken against it by the state than it can be analyzed in isolation from coexisting forms of resistance in the same country against the same authorities. It is for this very reason that NAVCO contains a variable for the (armed) radical flank effect—precisely because this factor is likely to impact the outcomes of civil resistance movements. In considering the radical flank effect, however, Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) and Chenoweth and Schock (2015) have maintained the focus on violence as armed struggle. In some cases rioting is internal to and can play a central role in a civil resistance campaign, for example when protesters used a bulldozer to smash through police lines and burned

government buildings during the climactic protests of the anti-Milosevic movement in Serbia in 2000 (Mitchell 2012; Paulson 2012)—a case that is frequently cited as a poster example of successful civil resistance struggle (e.g. Engler and Engler 2016). In other cases, rioting is at least likely to impact (or spark) a campaign, as well as the collective action
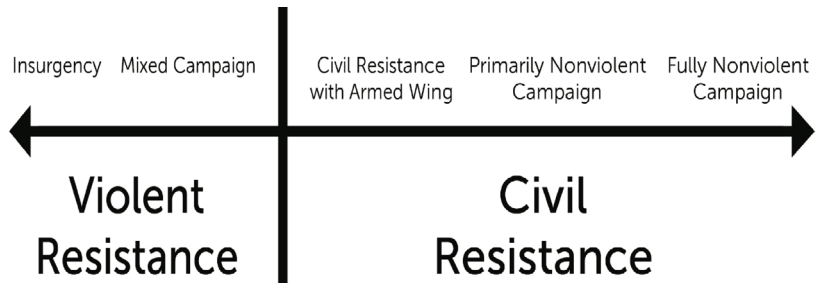

Fig 1 Source: Pinckney (2016:17)

Fig 2

Fig 3

frames (Benford and Snow 2000) which the campaign influences and is influenced by.

There is broad acknowledgement among civil resistance scholars that violent actions coexist with nonviolent struggle. Pinckney uses a diagram (see Figure 1) to visually demonstrate the overlap between civil resistance campaigns and armed struggle. However, as Figure 1 shows, this acknowledgement is still processed through the violence/nonviolence paradigm, which interprets violence as armed struggle. The line between civil resistance and 'violent resistance' is drawn between 'mixed struggles' of armed and unarmed struggle and 'civil resistance with an armed wing,' meaning movements that are driven by civilian mobilizations in a context where there is an armed struggle being waged in the same country, i.e., the 'radical flank effect' (Chenoweth and Schock 2015). However, civil resistance literature as it stands only applies its analysis to actions that conform to strict nonviolence, so while civil resistance campaigns might include the spectrum in Figure 1, Figure 2 represents the types of actions that are considered legitimate for civil resistance campaigns, i.e., strict nonviolence. If unarmed violence is taken into account, then this 'purely' nonviolent struggle accounts for at most 15% of civil resistance movements. In other words, real world cases of civil resistance struggle typically involve some mix of violent with nonviolent actions—not just nonviolent civil resistance alongside armed flanks, but civil resistance including unarmed collective political violence (see Figure 3). In the context of civilian social movements, the difference between nonviolent demonstrations and rioting is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the difference between street demonstrations and warfare.

Some studies that do acknowledge the presence of civilian violence in civil resistance movements awkwardly attempt to situate low-level violent actions like throwing stones under the umbrella of nonviolence without engaging with the contradiction (e.g. Høigilt 2015:5, Vejvoda 2009:313), while others attempt to theorize around the problem. For example, Pinckney's (2016) excellent event-level quantitative analysis of nonviolent discipline in three of the 'color revolutions' finds that government concessions are often associated with violent protests. Rather than considering whether limited violence in protests may have had a positive relationship with concessions or with the maximalist goals of

these campaigns, the conclusion he draws is that nonviolent protests lead to concessions, which in turn lead to a breakdown in nonviolent discipline. The breakdown in nonviolent discipline is then assumed to have a negative impact on the overall campaign, despite the fact that all three cases in the study were ultimately successful in ousting their respective heads of state (ibid).

Ignoring civilian violence or assuming that it is always and necessarily harmful to movements limits the analytic reach of civil resistance research. As Paul Gilje puts it: we need to discuss riots because riots are there (1996:1). Riots might occur in parallel to an ongoing movement, or might create an atmosphere in which a movement congeals, but either way, examining protester violence as collective political action within, alongside, or in combination with movements is vital to understanding the trajectory of real-world civil resistance campaigns.

Riots in Civil Resistance Theory

In the context of unarmed social movements, riots are not only common, but they can be accurately and effectively analyzed in the same strategic framework as nonviolent repertoires. It is not simply a matter of riots being 'in between' nonviolent action and warfare on a two-dimensional spectrum of collective political violence. Riots as protest actions fit into the civil resistance framework in every way except for their physical destructiveness. While the material and experiential conditions differ for more and less violent forms of unarmed demonstration, a protest that turns violent does not convert an instance of civil resistance into an instance of armed struggle. If we remove the blanket delegitimation of any violent act on the part of activists, then the rich analyses that civil resistance studies employs to understand nonviolent actions can be fruitfully applied to unarmed violent protest actions as well. Contrary to the belief that violent actions undermine the logic of civil resistance, Schock's (2013) three main concepts in civil resistance theory—*mobilization, resilience*, and *leverage*—are all enhanced by making unarmed violence legible within movement repertoires.

Mobilization: One of Chenoweth and Stephan's foremost findings is the importance of mass participation for campaign wins. Though they acknowledge that the quality and diversity of participation is important

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(2011:39-40), according to their research, numbers are the primary indicator of success. No campaign that mobilized at least 3.5% of a national population failed to achieve its maximalist goals (Chenoweth 2017a)—a number that has been widely popularized among activists. Importantly, participation in a campaign is not the same as public opinion about a campaign. Chenoweth and Stephan measure 'active and observable engagement of individuals in collective action' (2011:30) not public opinion polls. Chenoweth and Stephan's arguments for why violence reduces active participation, such as the need for strenuous physical training, the hardships of commitment to violent struggle, and moral barriers to using violence (ibid:36-37), apply far more to armed insurgencies than to protester violence. Participation is not a monolithic feature of movements, however; there are multiple forms of participation and various, fluctuating structural and systemic constraints and opportunities that impact participation, the navigation of which requires great awareness and tactical flexibility on the part of activists (Polletta 2016). Riots might frighten some people away from participation in nonviolent actions, but they might also politicize people and rouse them to action.

The Iranian Revolution, which has been seen as an early forerunner to 21st century civil resistance revolutions (Foran 2003), involved at least 23 riots between 1977 and 1979 (CNTS data). Importantly, this violence was not a separate guerrilla insurgency or radical flank, but rather took the form of unarmed street violence as civil resistance (Kurzman 2004:69). According to Karen Rasler's event-level analysis of the Iranian Revolution, 44% of protest actions in 1977 and 1978 were violent (1996:137). Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution mobilized an unprecedented 10% or more of the country's population (Kurzman 2004:121). Neil Ketchley's work on the 2011 Revolution in Egypt, discussed further below, shows that participation in nonviolent mobilizations *increased* following the outbreak of riots (2017:47). While violence might indeed reduce movement participation in some circumstances, there are also reasons to believe riots could have negligible or even positive impacts on movement participation in other cases. Anecdotal evidence suggests this variation exists even in countries like the United States, where riots are roundly rejected in mainstream media as illegitimate forms of protest: the flames,

concussion grenades, and property destruction that greeted Donald Trump's 2016 inauguration did not appear to reduce participation in the Women's March the following day, which was perhaps the largest nonviolent march in US history (Chenoweth and Pressman 2016).

Resilience. Resilience refers to activists' ability to weather repression, recover, and adapt (Shock 2013). While a traditional social movement studies approach might hold that a movement's resilience is correlated with its ability to mobilize resources (McCarthy and Zald 1973) and exploit political opportunities (Tarrow 1998), civil resistance scholars have tied resilience to a movement's ability to innovate and vary actions in a way that outflanks authorities, undermines a government's control, and drains the regime's legitimacy (Nepstad 2015b; Shock 2005). Put another way, movements are more resilient when they employ a *diversity of tactics*. In the case of Egypt in 2011, tactical flexibility between more and less violent collective actions was able to generate a revolutionary situation within weeks in a country that had experienced little political change in decades (Ketchley 2017).

There are certainly reasons to believe that unarmed violence limits a campaign's resilience. Violent actions often carry heavier legal penalties, and engaging in them can expose activists to enhanced repression, protracted and expensive legal cases, and other such liabilities. Beyond the tactical cost/benefit analysis, however, there may be significant *emotional* benefits to riots, both for participants and onlookers, which strategically enhance a movement's overall resilience (see Johnston 2014). Emotion has often been starkly juxtaposed with rationality in scholarly discussion of social movements (and in the social sciences in general), but 'rational action involves underlying commitments that are best rendered through an emotional lens and vice versa' (Seferiades and Johnston 2012:7-8). The possibility that riots can have an empowering affect on movements, serving an iconographic function that could 'boost morale and enhance the heroism of radicals' (Ackerman, Bartkowski, and DuVall 2014) should not be discounted. The phenomenological impact of participation in, or observation of, physically confrontational protests is easily overlooked in studies that focus only on short-term political outcomes, but might be salient in the analysis of movement trajectories. For example, Javier Auyero (2003:170) quotes an activist in Argentina recounting how

participation in a riot had transformed her from a 'beaten down' woman who had taken 'thirty-six years of crap' into a 'commando woman' who was ready to take action.

Leverage: To many social movement studies and civil resistance scholars, a movement's leverage lies in people's collective ability to withdraw support from a regime and disrupt the status quo, imposing sanctions on the ruling class (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:18; Piven and Cloward 1978; Schock 2013). Put simply, the leverage of revolutions and social movements alike hinges on activists' disruptive capability. In the civil resistance framework, riots can be understood as a radical disruption of the civic norm, or 'withdrawal of cooperation in the routines of civil life' (Piven 2006:37). In and of itself, the assertion that riots are disruptive is likely an uncontroversial one, which is part of the point—it is clear to all that riots are disruptive. Of course, just because violent protests are disruptive does not mean that nonviolent tactics cannot be so. However, many standard tactics that are considered nonviolent by government and mass media, that is to say, the most affirmed forms of protest, are very often not disruptive. These 'performances of *potential* disruption—like peaceful protests, pre-arranged business-union 'scheduled strikes,' or even petitions and grievances—ultimately derive their leverage from the threat of actual, material disruption' (Meckfessel 2017:16-17, emphasis his).

Seferiades and Johnston (2012) argue that the interplay between violent collective actions and more conventional nonviolent approaches to social movement organizing has to do with the increasing difficulty movements face in disrupting oppressive systems. In order to be effective, social movements must be 'sufficiently pungent to disrupt the workings of the system' (ibid:5). However, protest organizations, especially in Western democracies, often deploy non-disruptive repertoires which might have the appearance of contention but which nevertheless fail to exert meaningful pressure on authorities, creating a *disruptive deficit* (ibid). The disruptive deficit of conventional protest, in tandem with the neoliberal capacity to 'manage the marginalized' (Katz 2008) and coopt dissent, produces a vacuum likely to be filled by political violence. In the face of decrees by professional activists and social movement organizations that all participants must adhere to strictly nonviolent forms of protest (see Schneider 2012), especially when it is clear to the

aggrieved that these forms are ineffectual, some turn to violent means, which, while less respectable and perhaps less strategically-oriented, are at least manifestly disruptive. As Seferiades and Johnston put it, 'in seeking conciliation through exclusively conventional protest, institutionalized claimants end up inadvertently fomenting the kind of political violence they most dread and despise' (2012:6). Even if rioters in a given instance do not see themselves or their actions as explicitly political, riots can be incorporated by consciously-political movement forces as a threat and a form of tactical escalation. In the words of Frances Fox Piven, riots can 'give muscle to the demands' of a movement.[9]

Central to many arguments that violent tactics hinder movement success, including arguments around mobilization, resilience, and leverage, is the logic of the *backfiring effect*. Civil resistance theories regarding the backfiring effect, or what Gene Sharp called 'political jiu jitsu' (1973:657), juxtapose violent repression against nonviolent protest, thereby shifting public opinion in favor of the protesters. Violence on the part of protesters, the argument goes, both increases repression and decreases public support. Problems for this narrative arise, however, in the presumption that movement success requires each action to lead to increased public sympathy, the reliance on media to represent protest actions accurately, and the systemic bias that likely plays into mass perception of protest (Meckfessel 2016:190-3). Indeed, the backfiring phenomenon might have more to do with preexisting opposition to the forces of repression, or with the appearance of disproportionate or illegitimate repression, than it does with absolute nonviolence on the part of the protesters. It is uncontroversial that protester violence can be expected to increase the likelihood and severity of repression, but while some have argued that repression demobilizes activists (e.g. Oberschall 1973; Olson 1965), other research demonstrates that repression can have an overall positive impact on mobilizations (e.g. Rasler 1996). A violent response from police can diffuse activists, harden their resolve, create disillusionment about the established order among onlookers, and set off 'micromobilization' processes that expand opposition to a regime (ibid). Riots can thus generate a similar backfiring effect to nonviolent protest.

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[9] Lecture in the Sociology Department of the University of Pittsburgh, March 26, 2015.

Chenoweth and Stephan note that one of the pivotal moments of the Iranian Revolution was sparked by a protester throwing a brick through a window, an action that triggered intensified repression, which in turn led to increased mobilization (2011:103). They suggest the involvement of an *agent provocateur*, but nevertheless describe the action in terms of its positive impact on movement growth. Likewise, riots in Ferguson and Baltimore did not appear to demobilize nonviolent Black Lives Matter actions, but rather added to the resurgent moral crisis of institutional racism in the US, as well as to popular discomfort with militarized police forces. When nonviolent actionists accuse violent protesters of undermining the backfiring effect, they imply that protester violence reduces the likelihood that the average onlooker will sympathize with the protest and/or that it drives popular opinion away from the movement. In fact, protester violence and subsequent repression can have impacts in both demobilizing and mobilizing directions. In other words, violent actions are *polarizing*.

Polarization—the 'widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode' (Tilly 2004:222)—might be interpreted as a reduction in mainstream public support for a time, but it is also closely linked to 'the possibilities of articulated rebellion' (Esteban and Ray 1994) and leads to higher levels of civil conflict (Østby 2008). This type of polarization is, in fact, central to the logic of direct action in civil resistance, powerfully explained in Dr. King's famous 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' (1963); direct action forces people to take sides. Indeed, a recent study found that riots decrease the amount of people who have no opinion on a political issue (Caren et al. 2017). For the population at large, riots are exciting and frightening and create an atmosphere of uncertainty (Jasper and Thomson 2016). In some circumstances this might have an overall demobilizing affect. In others, it can lead to the type of polarization that clarifies social-political cleavages, galvanizes supporters, and ultimately increases mobilization.

Writing of the French Revolution, Markoff describes how peasant insurrections posed no military threat to the vast French war machine, but rather represented a threat to the 'moral unity of army and nation,' making them distinctly efficacious (1995:379). The physical challenge to normalcy and authority involves different subjective and material

dynamics for a riotous crowd than it does for a less violent one, but nevertheless it typically does not present a straightforward military threat to armed police.[10] Riots might feel intimidating, but the police face a similar dilemma with most riots as they do with peaceful protests in how much force they are willing to apply in an attempt to end the disruption, or risk spreading it. The decisions police make regarding how they will engage rioters occur at all levels of the chain of command, including both rational and emotional considerations such as a fear of mobilizations escalating, fear of being physically hurt, desire to or fear of physically hurting others, commitment to following orders, etc. These considerations are common to both nonviolent and violent civilian actions, although emotions and consequences of decision-making are palpably higher during violent protests.

Movements are fluid, evolving and adapting tactical repertoires over time (Tilly 2006; Wada 2016), in different places, and between different groups connected to or operating alongside one another. Schneider (2014) describes how many activists in the US who were mobilized by the 'ghetto riots' in the 1960s later joined and led nonviolent social movements. In his work on local protests in northwestern Argentina, Auyero describes a process of increasingly violent mobilizations alongside nonviolent protest actions; one case culminated in a major riot, through which a group of claimants began to act as a 'we' and became 'the people' (2003:136), a liminal collective identity that constitutes the birth of a revolutionary subject (see Bamyeh 2013). Violent protest actions might thus serve an important role in civil resistance movements from strategic, symbolic, and subjective standpoints.

Based on his study of social protest in the US, Gamson (1975:81) argues that the use of violence frequently coincided with success, concluding: 'Violence should be viewed as an instrumental act, aimed at furthering the purposes of the group that uses it when they have some reason to think it will help their cause.' There is, of course, a wealth

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[10] This was not always the case. In previous eras, a riotous crowd could possess weapons approximating those held by soldiers and potentially pose a military threat to state forces, even when not organized in a martial formation. However, this possibility has faded as weapons technology and state control have expanded (see Robinson 2014).

of arguments to suggest that violent tactics can hurt movements, which have been well articulated by civil resistance scholars. Like any tactic, riots and unarmed violence are likely to have both potential benefits and potential costs for movements, depending on the context and on a variety of factors. In order to effectively analyze the impact these have in specific civil resistance movements, violent actions must be incorporated into the overarching analytical framework.

Unarmed Violence in the January 25 Revolution in Egypt: A Case Study

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution, one of the 'Arab Spring' revolts, is widely cited within civil resistance and nonviolence studies fields as an exemplary case of nonviolent civil resistance (e.g. Chenoweth and Stephan 2014; Engler and Engler 2016; Gan 2013; Lawson 2015). This episode is emblematic of civil resistance in that it was civilian-based, highly decentralized, and sought to overthrow an authoritarian government. The movement created and utilized popular slogans, drew massive popular support, occupied public space, sparked nationwide uprisings and labor strikes, incorporated a repertoire of creative and evolving tactics, and was successful in ousting the country's head of state. The movement also notably made widespread use of violent tactics.

Following the stunning overthrow of the Tunisian government by an apparently spontaneous civil revolt, Egyptian activists, who had been planning protests against police violence to occur on January 25, found the streets full of political newcomers, inspired by a new sense of possibility (Bayat 2017:9). Protesters emerged from all walks of life, focusing their ire on the Mubarak regime and echoing the popular slogan of the Tunisian uprising: 'The people want to overthrow the regime!' (El-Ghobashy 2012:31). In only seventeen days, 'the people' forced the removal of Mubarak. In addition to its swift success, civil resistance scholars extolled the Egyptian movement for creating a nonviolent 'global sensation' (Engler and Engler 2016:252) and 'accomplish[ing] what years of violent rebellion could not.' (Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013:272).

In fact, in the opening days of the revolution nearly 100 police stations were sacked and burned (Ismail 2012:446). Throughout the three-week uprising there were numerous confrontations with police and government-backed gangs involving massive street fights and the heavy exchange of projectiles (Ketchley 2017, Shokr 2012). To El-Ghobashy (2012:22), it was 'four continuous days of street fighting, January 25-28, that pitted people against police all over the country' which transformed an episode of protest into a 'revolutionary situation.' The January 25 Revolution involved spectacular acts of nonviolent resistance and contained widespread nonviolent sentiment, but to the extent that the seventeen days between the January 25th protest and Mubarak's ouster can be viewed as a bounded episode, that episode was far from nonviolent.

> [T]o gloss over the role of anti-regime violence in bringing about a revolutionary situation, or to portray it as incidental to the trajectory of the mobilization, is to obscure and distort the process by which Egyptians were able to oust a dictator of three decades.' (Ketchley 2017:47)

More than simply being present alongside peaceful demonstrations, rioting and other violent actions interacted dynamically with less-violent and non-violent mobilizations. While the riots were separate from the large demonstrations that made international news, the attacks on police stations were meant as retaliation for the use of lethal force used against nonviolent protesters—and for police brutality in general—as well as to open space for nonviolent protests to continue (Ismail 2012:446; Ketchley 2017:38). Neil Ketchley's (2017) research on the contentious politics of the January 25 Revolution illuminates the ways in which violent rioting and nonviolent protests appeared 'both synergetic and complementary' in their combined ability to create a revolutionary situation (ibid:21).

In the first days of the revolution, nonviolent protesters, many of them seasoned activists, achieved initial successes by evading authorities and massing in streets and public squares. However, as police regrouped, protesters were beaten back and temporarily demobilized by sheer force of repressive violence. There was also another group of 'early risers' in the revolution, which received much less media and scholarly attention. These were local crowds, often from poorer urban districts, who attacked

local police stations with increasing frequency and ferocity in the opening days of the revolt (Ketchley 2017:37). According to Ketchley, it was this group that forced the police to retreat from attacking protesters in city centers in order to defend their stations, creating unpatrolled streets for nonviolent protesters to re-take, and providing time for them to grow their occupations of public space, most notably in Tahrir Square. Overall participation in the revolution increased in the wake of these violent riots, with the largest mobilization taking place two weeks later, on February 11, the day Mubarak was ultimately deposed (ibid:19). Riots targeting police stations created immediate material sanctions against agents of the regime for their use of force against nonviolent protesters and compelled authorities to make decisions under duress about where, when, and how to deploy their forces. The backfiring effect did not function exactly as nonviolent actionists predict, since initial repression of nonviolent protests was somewhat effective. Instead, repression was followed by violent protests, which then suffered the highest casualties as a result of increased police repression, but which also cleared the way for nonviolent activists to recoup and grow. The backfiring effect in this case was twofold, relating both to increased repression generating an immediate response from some and the subsequent decreased security presence that provided a mobilizing opportunity for others. Massive nonviolent demonstrations ultimately led to the crisis of legitimacy that overthrew Mubarak, but it was anti-police riots that created space for the larger mobilizations to gather momentum and reach the tipping point.

What makes the 2011 Egyptian case eligible for characterization as 'nonviolent' is actually its *civil character*, that it took the form of civilian mobilizations as opposed to the martial mobilizations of armed struggle, and the *relative* difference in acute violence applied by protesters and authorities, not its participants' refusal to engage in any violent actions. In other words, the Egyptian uprising could only be considered nonviolent in comparison to the repressive force used by the state (El-Mahdi 2011:np). However, in order to justify the overarching label of 'nonviolent,' violent actions often get left out of the story or pushed to the margins. To claim that movements no longer deploy civil violence, but '[i]nstead, from Tunis to Tahrir Square, from Zuccotti Park to Ferguson, from Burkina Faso to Hong Kong, movements

worldwide have drawn on the lessons of Gandhi, King and [nonviolent] everyday activists' (Chenoweth and Stephan 2016:np) is to encourage a dangerously narrow view of movement repertoires. As the Egyptian case demonstrates, doing so severely obscures our view of civil resistance movements on the ground. That the field of civil resistance has been largely oriented toward activist application (Schock 2013) makes it all the more crucial that its scholars are accurate and honest in their analyses. Acknowledging violent protest tactics as legible actions within the civil resistance framework would enable researchers to more effectively explore the dynamics that participants in these movements experience and create, the trajectories that lead them to achieve their goals, and the dynamics that may influence subsequent setbacks.

Discussion and Conclusion

The vast majority of civil resistance campaigns in the NAVCO dataset were accompanied by riots. Violent actions are neither uncommon in, nor incompatible with civil resistance, and ignoring them undermines analyses of real world movements. In order to more accurately examine and theorize social movement dynamics, the concept of civil resistance should be disentangled from a strict codification as nonviolent and operationally redefined to encompass a broader scope of collective actions, including riots and targeted property destruction. In civil resistance analysis, violence should be treated as 'one of several forms of confrontation within a wider *repertoire of actions and strategies*' (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014, emphasis theirs).

This move to include unarmed violence in civil resistance analysis is consistent with the trajectory that the field of civil resistance studies set itself on. The modern study of nonviolence begins with Gandhi, for whom nonviolence was both a political strategy and a spiritual way of life (Cortright 2009). Sharp's attempt to separate Gandhian strategy from Gandhian moralism might have been faulty to begin with (Chabot and Sharifi 2013; Vinthagen 2015), and at the time even Sharp himself ultimately thought that a movement could not truly have one without the other (Sharp 1979:252). Nevertheless, there is something powerful and necessary in drawing a distinction between the belief in moral

nonviolence and an analysis of the processes that enable unarmed civilian social movements to achieve their political goals.

Many of Sharp's theoretical descendants claim to advocate nonviolent action purely as a superior strategy, i.e. *strategic nonviolence*, distinct from any moral clams. But if one is not willing to critically assess the efficacy of various approaches and combinations of available tactics based on evidence and conditions, then the term 'strategic' loses its meaning. Violent actions are common in civil resistance movements, and there are many reasons to believe that they are not purely and absolutely detrimental, but rather interact with campaigns in complex and varying ways depending on circumstances—like any other set of tactics. If the moral argument against the use of violent action is set aside, there is no remaining reason to omit unarmed violence from strategic analyses of civilian-based movements. Adding riots and other violent protest activities into the legible repertoire of civil resistance strategies and tactics does not necessarily alter the structure of civil resistance analysis; on the contrary, it allows that analysis to encompass a fuller range of actions that take place within movements.

Moving forward, there are a variety of factors that might be considered in analyzing the effects that riots and property destruction can have on civil resistance movements. For example, the location, target, duration, intensity, cultural context, level or type of violence, number, and composition of participants might all make a difference in the impact these types of actions have on movement dynamics and on campaign success or failure. One particularly salient topic for future research could be the examination of how an explicitly nonviolent campaign reacts to riots when they occur—what happens when the nonviolent campaign condemns riots, suspends protests because of them, ignores them, supports them, or escalates nonviolent actions in solidarity with them? In addition, examining the phenomenology of participation in riots and the interplay between more and less physically violent actions, irrespective of short-term outcomes, could potentially reveal a great deal about the social effects and trajectories of movements over time.

While the field of civil resistance has established the importance and efficacy of mass civilian resistance campaigns, it is no longer

feasible to ignore the violent actions that often take place within and alongside these movements. At times, violent actions might indeed hurt a movement's chances for success. In other cases, the use of violence may prove beneficial to civil resistance movements. To find out, we must make it part of the story.

Acknowledgements:

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