Desisting from Violence:
The selection of non-violent vs. violent strategies

Marianne Dahl

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the Arab Spring spread through the Middle East, differences in the use of violence became apparent. While protesters in Libya and Syria relied heavily on the use of violence, protesters in Tunisia made almost exclusively use of non-violent methods. The Tunisians succeeded, while Syria is now in a state of civil war. This begs the question: What leads an opposition group to choose a non-violent or a violent strategy? Scholars have assumed that violence is the most effective strategy when waging political struggle. Groups that use non-violence, have been thought to do so primarily because they lack the resources to mount a successful violent campaign. However, between 1900 and 2006 nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). Thus we are left with a puzzle: If non-violent campaigns are not only less costly, but also more likely to succeed; why would anyone choose a violent strategy?

In this proposal I argue that in order to understand the choice of strategy it is not sufficient to look at the interaction between the government and the opposition group. When more than one fraction exists; it is necessary to include the struggle that takes place between the different fractions competing for political relevance. An analysis including this perspective will provide a better understanding of the strategic choices made by opposition groups, and why groups despite the many advantages of non-violence often turn to violence. This can bring valuable theoretical insight to the fields of conflict studies and collective action, but it can also provide us with knowledge that enables us to increase the likelihood that a group chooses a non-violent rather than a violent strategy. In this proposal I start by going through the existing literature, and based on the existing research gaps propose several research questions. These questions are then put into a theoretical framework before I develop some testable hypothesis. In the last section I discuss research method and data issues.

2. EXISTING LITERATURE ON NON-VIOLENT AND VIOLENT STRATEGIES

Several studies have looked at the causes and consequences of non-violent and violent campaigns, few however, have included both strategies in the same study. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), Gamson (1990) and Stephan and Chenoweth (2008) are among the exceptions that include non-violent and violent movements in the same large-n analysis. Gamson (1990) studies American opposition groups and finds that groups that made use of violence
were more successful than groups that did not. However, as pointed out by [Chenoweth and Stephan (2011, 16)], whether or not his findings are generalizable to other locations and time periods, is questionable. [Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) and Stephan and Chenoweth (2008) study all secessionist, anti-occupation and regime change movements between 1900 and 2006, and find that non-violent campaigns enjoy a higher success rate than their violent counterparts. Explaining why non-violent resistance works they focus on the mobilization advantage non-violent campaigns enjoy over violent campaigns. Campaigns that make it costly for opponents to maintain status quo are the ones most likely to succeed. The more people that participate, and the broader the campaign, the more likely it is that either the government themselves decide to meet at least some of their demands, or that loyalty shifts among regime supporters alters the balance of power. Such a relationship, between the number of participants and the likelihood of success, does not seem to exist for violent campaigns.

There is a rich literature studying the outbreak of violent conflicts, but we still only have limited knowledge of why some groups use non-violent while others use violent strategies. Partly, this can be explained by the fact that the use of a non-violent strategies have been viewed not as a strategic choice, but rather as a principled or a moral choice. Differentiating between principled and strategic non-violence, [Stephan and Chenoweth (2008, 10)] point out that while many people are committed to principled non-violence, the vast majority of participants have not been devoted to principled non-violence. Consequently, the question of why groups with similar objectives choose different strategies becomes important. Looking at structural factors, [Chenoweth and Stephan (2011)] test whether non-violence is a more common strategy in weak states or in democracies. They cannot identify a clear pattern for either: A somewhat larger share of non-violent, than violent campaigns, took place in the stronger or more powerful states. Likewise, a higher percentage of non-violent, than violent campaigns, took place in more authoritarian regimes. However, none of these patterns are clear, and to the extent they exist they seem to be insignificant.

Recently, more focus has been put on within and between group competition in explaining the use and escalation of violence. These studies have abandoned the more conventional view that conflict is a two-sided contest between the state and non-state actors. Instead they argue that the perspectives of within and between group competition are necessary when

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1 Principled non-violence is based on ethically and religious grounded arguments against the use of violence (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008, 10).
2 See e.g.: Bloom (2005); Cunningham (2006); Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012); Lawrence (2010); Pearlman (2009).
explaining the use, escalation and timing of violence. Their findings all point in one direction: within and between group competition tend to increase the use of violence. Violence is a much used method to gain recognition as a potential leader (Lawrence, 2010) and to ensure that your campaign remains or becomes relevant, vis-à-vis other campaigns (Bloom, 2005; Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour, 2012; Pearlman, 2009). Accordingly this explains both why violence increases over time, and why non-violent organizations adopt violence once other actors have begun employing it (Lawrence, 2010). None of these studies, however, explicitly address the question of what leads groups to chose a non-violent vs. a violent strategy. Non-violent activities are not included in any of the studies. Hence, why they might indicate that opposition groups will be less likely to choose a non-violent strategy when competition is fierce, this is yet to be tested.

3. COMPETITION AND STRATEGIES

In its first two years, the First Palestinian Intifada was primarily non-violent. Despite incidences of stone throwing, the Israeli Defense Force reported that during the first 18 months, 97 percent of the activities were non-violent. In stark contrast to former and later violent campaigns, the first Intifada achieved a number of important political goals (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, 138). Chenoweth and Stephan (2011, 120) argue that the shift in strategy was mainly due to weaknesses within the intifada, especially the divisions between secular and Islamist strands and incidents of internecine violence. Explaining Palestinian Hamas’ turn to violence, Shaul and Sela (2006, 56) emphasize that it was “a matter of necessity in view of its competition with the nationalist Palestinian groups—including the Islamic Jihad—which had led the armed struggle against Israel”. Violence has been perceived as Hamas’ ultimate source of legitimacy and as a shield against any attempt by the Palestinian Authorities to restrict the movement’s activities or eliminate it altogether. This was exemplified in the months following the Oslo agreement, when Hamas’ faced a real possibility of becoming irrelevant, and consequently escalated its use of violence.

Several scholars have argued that if the Palestinians had continued with a non-violent strategy, they would probably have been considerably more successful than they have been so far. If one only studies the Palestinians as one group, one might argue that they shifted strategy either because (a) they had to, or (b) they believed a violent strategy would be more successful. The former explanation might bare some truth. Israel aggressively handled the popular uprisings: Israeli law at the time included everything from painting slogans and
graffiti to singing national songs, to making the victory sign, displaying the Palestinian flag, throwing stones, burning tires, demonstrating, and forming political gatherings as terrorist activities. Prior to or during the First Intifada, authorities arrested or detained close to half a million Palestinians for these reasons (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 120–121). This increased the cost, and in all likelihood, made it harder to carry on with a non-violent campaign. However, in 1988, when PLO called for the death of one Israeli for each Palestinian killed, the grassroots refused to respond (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 126). It might also be that Palestinian leaders believed that violence would yield a more successful campaign. Two observations, however, challenge such an explanation: Firstly, the shift took place after a relatively successful non-violent campaign. And secondly, despite several decades of unsuccessful violent campaigns, we have not seen a shift back to a non-violent campaign.

If instead of treating the Palestinians as one unitary movement you disaggregate it into different groups/factions, it becomes possible to explain the shift in strategy by focusing on within group competition. By between group competition I understand the competition that takes place between different groups/factions/campaigns fighting for the similar cause. Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012) shows that when more than one faction exists, each faction participates simultaneously in two competitions: one against the state they challenge, and one against other factions. While the former contest focuses primarily on public goods that benefit the group as a whole, the latter (focusing on private or club goods) is primarily about power and material goods that benefit the individual faction, and is not shared with the group as a whole. Thus, if the aim of the latter contest is seen as more important or just as important as the goal of the former contest, one should expect between faction competition to have a profound effect on the choice of strategy. Based on this, several questions regarding the relationship between competition and strategy becomes relevant:

1. What is the effect of between-fraction competition on the choice of a non-violent vs. violent strategy?

2. Does competition under some circumstances favor a non-violent strategy?

3. Is competition under some circumstances irrelevant?
3.1. Between Group Competition: The Quest for Political Relevance

While all members of a group benefit from the public goods emerging from a settlement or a victory, only factions that have a prominent positions within the group stand to gain what Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012) refers to as private or club goods. Private or club goods consist of political power, monetary payoffs and material gains. These are only available to those at the table when the spoils of the collective struggle are distributed. In addition to the gains achieved at the ‘end’ of the struggle, movements often obtain other gains during the struggle. These include, amongst others, monetary aid from both external and internal actors. In order to take part in these gains one has to be politically relevant. A faction is seen as politically relevant when other actors in the dispute must engage with it, either military or politically. Political relevance refers to its position "vis à vis the state, rival factions, and the population it claim to represent” (Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour, 2012, 72–73). Hence the choice of strategy should reflect a groups’ need to become or remain politically relevant. This implies that whether or not competing fractions exists, will determine whether a given conflict is a one level contest between the government and opposition group, or a two level contest that also includes a contest between the different factions.

In order to achieve political relevance, a non-violent strategy might be a reasonable choice. However, the use of violence has some immediate advantages: Firstly, as pointed out by Lawrence (2010) violence is a fast way to gain notoriety, particularly for lesser known actors. Secondly, violence can be used to impose costs on the state. For ignored groups this can be a way to be included in the negotiations (Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour, 2012; Fearon, 1995; Powell, 1999). Thirdly, violence might increase a faction’s recognition among hard-line members of the community. This can cause a dynamic of escalatory outbidding, ”in which factions use violence to establish their nationalist credentials, leading other factions to resort to violence” Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012, 74). Lastly, violence can be used to eliminate or weaken competing factions. Based on this I develop the following hypothesis:

- $H_1$: The existence of competing factions should reduce the likelihood of a faction using a non-violent strategy.
3.2. *Legitimacy, Size and Strategy*

Studying the use of violence during peace negotiations [Pearlman (2009)] find that fractions, negative to the process themselves, would restrain themselves from using violence when the public was optimistic about the peace process. If not they could risk losing popularity and much needed legitimacy in the population they represent. This explanation fits well into the framework of political relevance, were factions also depend on their relationship to the population. Aiming for popularity and legitimacy we should expect competition to be more likely to cause violence if the relevant population perceive violence as an acceptable strategy.

When violence is perceived as an acceptable means, competition can increase the use of violence. However, I believe that the effect is contingent on whether the campaign already enjoys political relevance. Shifting to violence might harm their support base and relationship to the state. Thus, while shifting to a violent strategy might be efficient in order to gain political relevance, it is not necessarily a good strategy for maintaining political relevance. Accordingly, I expect large non-violent campaigns to be less affected by competition. We should differentiate between whether the other fractions are using violence or not. While competition might make it attractive for a smaller fraction to use violence, we are, due to escalatory outbidding, even more likely to see an effect of competition on violence when other groups are already using violence. Based on this discussion I develop the following four hypothesis:

- $H_2$: Groups are more likely to shift to violence when violence is perceived as an acceptable strategy, at least among a considerable part of the population.
- $H_3$: Sizable non-violent groups are less likely to shift to violence due to competition.
- $H_4$: New groups will be less likely to use non-violent strategies.
- $H_5$: Competition is more likely to lead to a violent strategy when other factions are also using violence.

4. HOW TO STUDY THIS

Following [Gleditsch et al. (2011)] the core actors in this model are the dissidents seeking political change over some incompatibility, the state, and external actors. The dissidents will be included as long as they apply violent and/or non-violent methods. By a non-violent
strategy I mean a strategy that involves some form of non-routine political behavior directed toward achieving some policy change without physical violence (Gleditsch et al., 2011, 1). This may include tactics such as strikes, protests, sit-ins. Institutionalized forms of political behavior, such as voting, interest-group organizing, or lobbying, are not included. Historically most campaigns have participated in both non-violent and violent actions. This is both worth exploring, and influences how we measure the dependent variable. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) argues that most campaigns have been predominantly violent or non-violent, and measures strategy as a dummy. Another possibility is to measure it as a continuous variable, reflecting the ratio between violent and non-violent campaigns. However, such an approach might require data collection beyond the scope of this project. For a few case studies it might nonetheless be possible. A third alternative is to measure it as a discrete variable, with three values: (predominantly) violent, mixed or (predominantly) non-violent.

4.1. Methods

I will study these issues through a combination of cross-national statistical studies, game-theory and one in-depth comparative study. I will utilize the strategic-choice approach developed by Lake and Powell (1999). The strategic-choice approach builds on the following three principal components: (1) The unit of analysis is not the actor, but rather the interaction of two or more actors. (2) The approach distinguishes between actors and their environments, actors are defined by beliefs and preferences, while the environment is disaggregated into actions taken by actors and available information. (3) The strategic-choice approach is agnostic and pragmatic as to which level of analysis is appropriate.

The exact kind of research design, both with regard to which statistical models to apply and how to design the comparative studies will, naturally, ultimately be determined by the structure of the data and the theoretical models. Signorino (1999) suggests that typical applications of logit and probits models to strategic questions can be problematic, as they do not capture the structure of the strategic interdependence. Instead he suggests a logit quantal response equilibrium (LQRE) model. The LQRE solution is a statistical model in which one writes down a discrete-choice formal model, derives a quantal response equilibrium, and then directly derives the maximum likelihood estimators from the statistical formal model (Yuen and Carrubba, 2007, 467). Since this project is especially interested in the strategic choices actors make, I plan to make use of such methods. It is also highly likely that the strategies

\footnote{For a critique of this approach, see Yuen and Carrubba (2007).}
groups chose will be influenced by the how other groups in the same region have acted. In other words, there is likely to be some spatial diffusion of strategies that may influence the choices groups make. To study this, I will utilize spatial regressions and GIS methods. Additionally, since I will potentially be dealing with a magnitude of groups operation in diverse settings, unit heterogeneity might be an issue. One way to control for the differences between groups would be to apply matching methods (see e.g.: Ho et al. (2007)). I believe such methods could prove very useful in this project.

4.2. Data

There already exists datasets relevant for these studies[^4]. Not all of these data have been made publicly available. These analysis therefore depends on either accessing some of these data, finding alternative sources or collecting new ones. Even if all of these data were made available, new data would have to be collected. We are yet to develop an event dataset including all non-violent and violent organizations fighting for either (1) territory or (2) government. Such data has only been developed for some of the territorial conflicts (Gleditsch et al. 2011, 6). Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) identify a set of resistance campaigns that include both territorial and governmental disputes. However, as pointed out by Gleditsch et al. (2011, 6) these are limited to mass movements with narrow criteria related to organization and behavior. Collecting such data for the entire world, even only for a limited time period, is extremely time demanding. As proposed by Gleditsch et al. (2011) an alternative is to begin with a subset of conflicts in some regions[^5]. The first step her would be to identify all relevant political conflicts, and then to choose a method to select a subset of conflicts. We then need to identify all relevant actors, which years they are active, and the non-violent and violent actions they participate in. Ideally such a dataset should also include other types of information such as group size and location. Using newspaper articles to collect such data, it should be noted, is potentially problematic. Newspaper reports are likely to be biased by smaller non-violent events not being systematically reported. However, in most situations, it is our best source of information.


[^5]: See Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012) for an example
5. CONCLUSION

In this proposal I ask why groups despite the many advantages of non-violence, often turn to violent actions. I claim that this is not only caused by which strategy they believe will benefit their cause in their struggle against the government. Instead I argue that between group competition tend to increase the likelihood of a shift from non-violent to violent strategies. One of the two main questions asked in the non-violent project is why groups select a non-violent or violent strategy, hence my proposed thesis should be highly relevant. In recent years there has been a growing interest in disaggregating actors and geographical units in the literature on civil war. By abandoning the traditional view of seeing all groups/factions fighting against the government as a unitary group, this project will contribute to this broader research program. In addition to developing a new dataset these studies should enhance our knowledge of what determines strategic decisions within opposition groups.

6. PROGRESS PLAN

Table 1: Progress Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–6</td>
<td>Coding data, write a literature review and begin article on the relationship between the number of groups and choice of strategy.</td>
<td>Dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>Get methods training at Essex or Ann Arbor Summer School. Start a comparative case study article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–18</td>
<td>Present the first article at APSA 2013, and finish it. Start third article on the whether sizable non-violent groups are less likely to shift to violence due competition</td>
<td>First article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>Present the second article at ISA 2014, and finish it. Start the fourth article on spatial diffusion of strategies</td>
<td>Second article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–30</td>
<td>Present third and fourth article at APSA and PSS meetings. Finish both articles</td>
<td>Third and Fourth article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–36</td>
<td>Write introductory chapter. Hand in dissertation Defend and succeed...</td>
<td>PhD dissertation completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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REFERENCES


