

# Diversification and Diffusion

## *The Interdependence of Nonviolent Strategies in Separatist Disputes*

Why do organizations choose to use specific nonviolent strategies? In our study of self-determination movements between 1960 and 2005, we find that competition between organizations within the same movement affects the choice of specific nonviolent strategies. Indeed, nonviolent strategies have varying resource requirements and organizations adapt to competition within their movement by copying each other (diffusion), and by *diversifying* their strategy choices.

### Brief Points

- Although very few self-determination movements engage in mass nonviolent campaigns, more than 75% of self-determination movements apply nonviolent tactics.
- Tactical choices are interdependent: the nonviolent tactics an organization applies are contingent on the tactical choices of other organizations within the same movement.
- Within a movement, organizations compete for support and adapt to the resource demands of each tactic by not only imitating one another, but also by diversifying the strategies they use.

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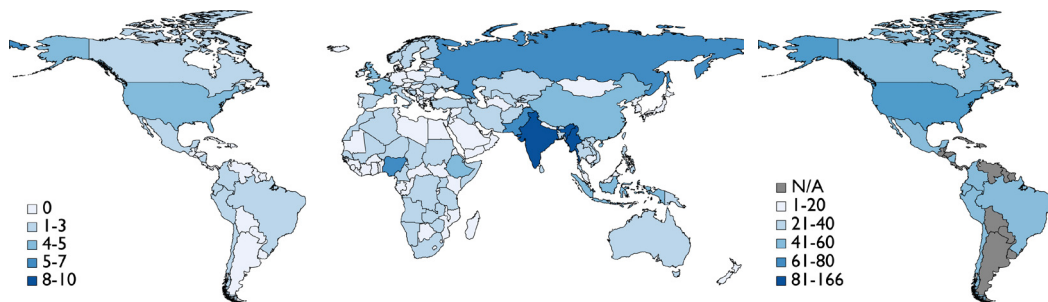


Figure 1: Number of SD groups

The recent use of mass nonviolent campaigns as a tool of political dissent in the Middle East has increased scholarly and popular attention to nonviolent movements. Examples of nonviolent resistance range from the protests during the Arab Spring where millions of people took to the streets, to the hunger strikes and “dirty” protests of political prisoners during The Troubles in Northern Ireland in which a few hundred participated. Most research thus far has focused on when and why *mass* nonviolent campaigns occur and when these are likely to be successful.

Nonviolent resistance is more than mass nonviolent campaigns. While large events tend to draw a great deal of attention, many people and organizations engage in small-scale resistance. In fact, nonviolent strategies differ with respect to how many participants must be mobilized for them to be effective. While protests with very few participants can often be ignored (deNardo 1985), strategies such as social non-cooperation and nonviolent interventions do not require a multitude of participants to successfully garner attention. Take for example the massive international attention focused on the unknown protester who stood in front of a column of tanks the morning after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. The somewhat narrow focus on mass nonviolent campaigns stands in contrast not only to the fact that non-population-intensive strategies are common, but also that they have often been the catalyst of great change.

Few studies have addressed questions beyond mass campaigns, such as why organizations choose specific nonviolent tactics, or how the strategy choice of one organization impacts the strategy choices of another organization striving for the same goal. By unpacking the different types of nonviolent strategies, we are better able to understand the micromechanisms at

play as groups express political discontent.

The term “nonviolence” encompasses a range of tactics, including rallies, demonstrations, strikes, hunger strikes, sit-ins, blockades, boycotts of elections, and withdrawals from political office. We leverage new data on violent and nonviolent strategies used by over 1,100 organizations that have been active in movements for greater national self-determination from 1960 to 2005. For each organization, we document whether the actor used a particular strategy in a given year. Table 1 offers details about each strategy that we consider.

Our sample includes 138 different self-determination (SD) movements in 77 countries, ranging from the Sami in Sweden to the Moros

Strategy Type	Examples
Economic non-cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strikes</li> <li>• Tax refusals</li> <li>• Consumer boycotts</li> </ul>
Protest and demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rallies</li> <li>• Protests</li> <li>• Demonstrations</li> </ul>
Nonviolent intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit-ins</li> <li>• Occupations</li> <li>• Blockades</li> </ul>
Social non-cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunger Strikes</li> <li>• Self-immolation</li> <li>• Self-harm</li> </ul>
Political non-cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational boycotts of elections</li> <li>• Withdrawal from political office</li> <li>• Withdrawal from a government coalition</li> </ul>

Table 1: Nonviolent strategies

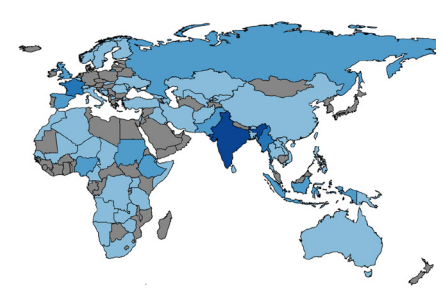


Figure 2: Number of SD organisations

in the Philippines and the Chechens in Russia. Figure 1 shows the number of ethnic groups vying for greater self-determination during the period of the study. There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which organizations have mobilized in these disputes. Some SD movements, such as the Zulus in South Africa and Tajiks in Uzbekistan, are represented by one single organization. In contrast, 61 organizations represent the Kashmiri Muslims in India, and 39 represent the Corsicans in France over the time period of the study. The full dataset features 1,124 organizations. The original identification of organizations comes from Cunningham (2014). Figure 2 shows the distribution of SD organizations across the globe.

### Explaining Tactical Choices

There is wide variation in the strategies organizations choose. We find that in 70 percent of the SD movements, at least one organization used one or more nonviolent tactics. In total, over 36 percent of organizations engaged in nonviolent activity in at least one year in the study, revealing the popularity of nonviolent tactics. Figure 3 shows the percentage of all SD groups using each type of nonviolent strategy. It shows that *protest and demonstrations* are by

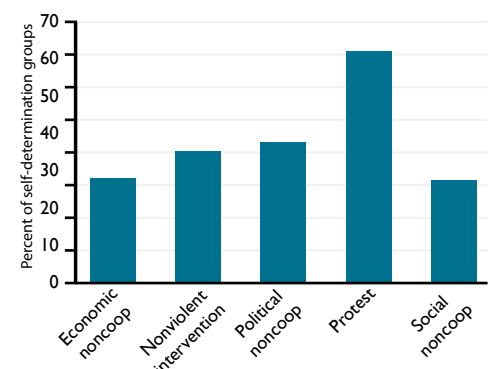


Figure 3: Tactical choices

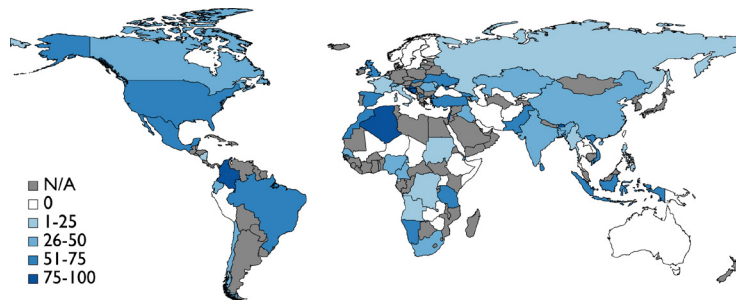


Figure 4: Share of SD organizations that engaged in nonviolent activity

far the most common tactical choice and *social noncooperation* the least common. Figure 4 shows the percentage of organizations in one country that engaged in a nonviolent activity.

### Diffusion and Diversification

Examining behavior in disputes over greater national self-determination (SD) allows us to look at organizational strategy choice in a broad context. SD organizations share the overarching goal of greater self-rule, and continue their struggle regardless of whether there is a spike in violent or mass nonviolent activities. However, each organization's tactical choices will not only be driven by their overarching, maximal goal, but also by more proximate goals. Proximate goals for organizations include attracting and retaining supporters, gaining international and domestic attention and support, and demonstrating mobilization capacity. As such, a strategy can be "successful" for an organization even though it does not directly or immediately lead to the maximal goal of greater self-rule because it contributes to reaching a proximate goal.

Nearly all studies on resistance strategies across organizations have centered on a *diffusion* logic, wherein the use of a strategy by an organization promotes its use by others (Bloom 2005; Cunningham et al. 2012). We find that interdependence can also manifest as *diversification*, wherein organizations choose strategies that differ from those used by other organizations. The alternative logics of direct diffusion and diversification are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both processes occur simultaneously in self-determination movements.

Existing arguments suggest that organizations are more likely to use nonviolence when other organizations use nonviolence. The prevailing assumption, however, is that organizations

make strategic choices independent from the activities of other organizations in the same movement. These assumptions have been essentially untested to date.

Existing empirical studies have not accounted for the different resource needs of particular strategies or the divergent capacities of organizations to mobilize people. We argue that competition for shared, typically limited, resources means that organizations must consider what other organizations are doing when picking a strategy (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). A key challenge for nonviolent activity is to mobilize a sufficient number of people. *High resource* tactics depend on mobilizing a large number of people to show the breadth of popular support for a movement or organization. *Low resource* tactics depend on mobilizing fewer deeply committed participants willing to be exposed to great personal risk. We categorize protest/demonstrations and economic noncooperation as high resource tactics. We classify nonviolent intervention and social noncooperation as low resource tactics. Political noncooperation may involve many or few individuals.

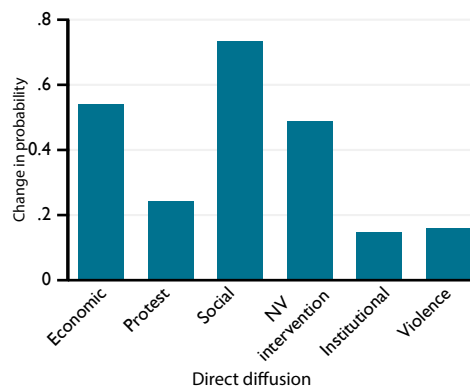


Figure 5: Direct diffusion of nonviolent strategies

As some organizations within the same movement apply high resource tactics, it becomes harder for the others to mobilize large numbers of people. Organizations should then adapt by choosing low resource strategies instead, essentially diversifying their strategy repertoire. In short, a high resource tactic makes low resource tactics more likely, leading to *diversification*. However, if an organization chooses a low resource tactic, we expect to see other organizations more likely to apply low resource tactics as well.

### The Interdependence of Tactics and Strategies

Our research shows that organizational strategic choices are interdependent, and that mechanisms of diffusion and diversification are both at work. Direct diffusion affects the use of almost all strategies. For every strategy except political noncooperation, increasing the number of other organizations using a strategy makes any particular organization more likely to use that strategy. The largest impact is observed with social noncooperation. The likelihood that an organization will use social noncooperation increases by over 75 percent with the addition of another organization using that strategy in the previous year.

Figure 5 shows the effect of each strategy on the use of that particular strategy (direct diffusion). We find that high resource strategies (e.g. economic noncooperation and protest) increase the use of low resource strategies (e.g. social noncooperation and nonviolent intervention), but not high resource strategies.

Figure 6 shows the percent change in the baseline probability of each strategy being used by an organization as an additional other organization uses that strategy. Protest by other organizations makes both social noncooperation

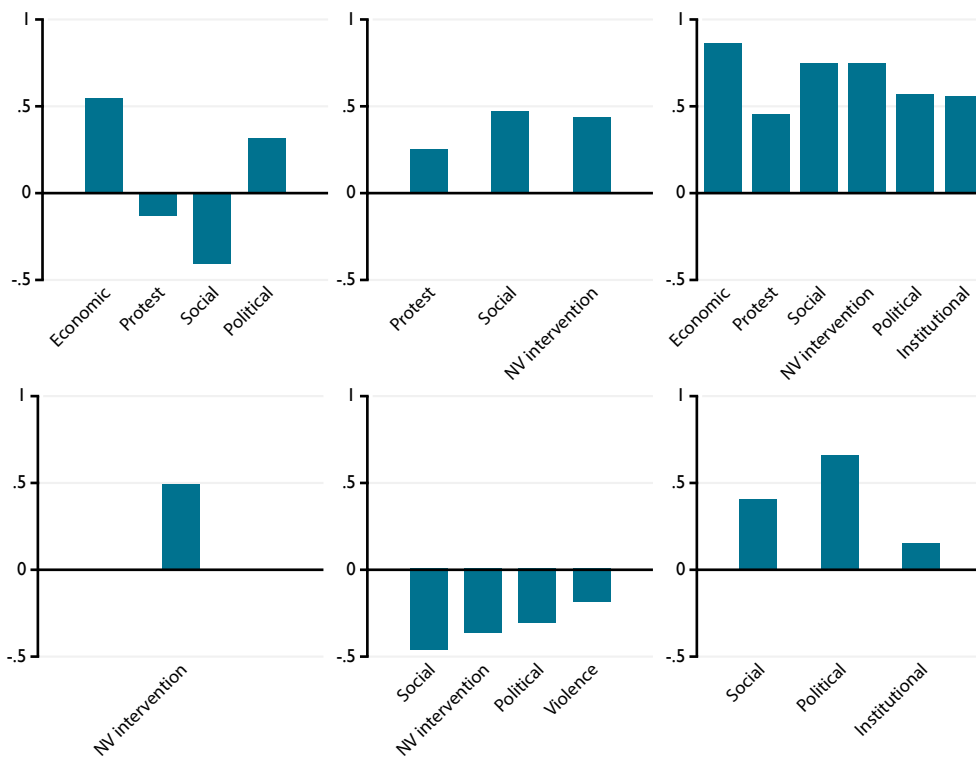


Figure 6: Effect of strategies used by other organizations on strategic choice

and nonviolent intervention about 40 percent more likely. Economic noncooperation makes political noncooperation (which can be a low resource strategy) about 25 percent more likely. The use of economic noncooperation by other organizations decreases the chance that any particular organization will use protest.

We also find evidence that low resource strategies will have a positive effect on one another. Social noncooperation increases the use of nonviolent intervention, as well as political noncooperation, by about 75 percent and 55 percent respectively. Social noncooperation by other organizations also increases the probability that any particular organization will use economic

noncooperation and protest.

Finally, a greater use of institutionalized participation (distinct from nonviolent direct action because it is not a strategy of disruption and delegitimization) has a positive effect on several nonviolent strategies. It has a large effect on political noncooperation, which we would expect given that the strategy requires some degree of institutionalized participation to be used. It also increases the chance of social noncooperation.

### Conclusion

The use of nonviolent strategies is interdepen-

dent within movements for greater self-determination. This stems from both direct diffusion and a diversification of strategies among organizations based on the respective resource needs of each strategy. Previously, only direct diffusion has been argued to drive the spread of strategies across organizations.

The nonviolent actions dataset captures a set of important yet often overlooked strategies of resistance. It provides a counterweight to scholarship that has focused primarily on violence or mass nonviolent campaigns.

We challenge the conventional wisdom that self-determination movements do not engage in nonviolence (see Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). In their study, Chenoweth and Stephan only identify four large SD campaigns that predominantly use nonviolence. Disaggregating the unit of analysis and the types of action can shed new light on the dynamics in self-determination disputes. Nonviolence is used in over 75 percent of the self-determination movements in our study.

Emphasizing rebellion and mass nonviolent campaigns affects expectations about where nonviolence is likely to occur and when it is likely to succeed. Furthermore, mischaracterizing disputes as inherently or overly violent influences approaches to conflict mediation and expectations for a successful resolution.

The logic of strategy diversification is not necessarily limited to self-determination movements. This study advances a new way of conceptualizing strategic decision-making that could be applied to other situations in which actors make interdependent choices about their actions. For example, interdependent strategy choices may arise in democratization movements, human rights campaigns, or cross-border conflicts. ■

### THE AUTHORS

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### THE PROJECT

The project 'Effective Non-Violence? Resistance Strategies and Political Outcomes', supported by the Research Council of Norway, examines conditions that foster the use of non-violent as opposed to violent tactics, focusing on specific actors and organizations, constituencies, and the state, and collecting new data on claims and tactics in territorial and governmental disputes.

### PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.