

How Nonviolence Ends: Protest, Repression, and Escalation during the Arab Spring

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Abstract

Nonviolent resistance can be a powerful tool for ordinary civilians to transform their governments. In 2011, the so-called Arab Spring swept through North Africa and the Middle East, and while the focus is typically on whether movements achieved success, there was a wide diversity in how these movements ended. Rather than only focus on success, I argue for conceptualizing nonviolent outcome types in a similar fashion to how scholars of violent campaigns categorize conflict outcomes. Applied to nonviolent campaigns, outcomes range from a repressive defeat to full success. I also add an additional outcome type, which is the escalation of nonviolent movements to the use of violence. This project connects outcome types with internal movement dynamics to build an inductive understanding of whether and how the anatomy of a movement affects termination type. I conduct a sequence analysis on original events data on the Arab Spring to determine which movements cluster together. I then compare these clusters to the outcome types, and find that the campaigns in each cluster tend to have the same termination type. Based on these clusters, I develop an escalation process model to understand the escalatory process. I find that the most extreme outcomes, including escalation, full success, and repressive defeat, come at the end of this process.

How Nonviolence Ends

I begin with a brief consideration of each of the termination types, how they are conceptualized, and what we know about these different outcomes.

Total success

As a result of the work of Erica Chenoweth and colleagues, who find that nonviolent movements tend to achieve success at higher rates than their violent counterparts (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Chenoweth and Lewis 2013, Chenoweth et al. 2017), there is considerable interest in explaining why nonviolence can be successful. Total success is defined as movements achieving their maximalist goal within one year of peak activity. Attributes of successful movements include large campaigns in terms of participation as well as diversity (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011), which allows for tactical diversity, draws international attention, and encourages loyalty shifts (e.g., Nepstad 2013).

Partial success

Partial success come when movements achieve significant concessions that partially achieve the movement's maximalist goals. Movements that end in partial success are often grouped with movements that end in total success. It is understood that large and diverse movements can encourage greater accommodations from the government, although some movements fall short of encouraging defections, loyalty shifts, or otherwise find a negotiated end.

Fizzles

There are many protest campaigns that "fizzle." I consider a movement to fizzle if participants lose interest and the wave of protest dies down. Given the interest in maximalist goals, I consider a campaign to have fizzled if it ends without adopting regime change or territorial overthrow as a goal. The literature on protest cycles can help address the question of "minimalist" movements dying down, especially the demobilization phase (e.g., Tarrow 2011). Dynamics such as exhaustion, polarization, and selective repression can discourage participation and lead to the end of a movement.

Repressive defeat

Perhaps the most difficult of these outcomes to separate, a repressive defeat is not as obvious of an outcome as a full or partial success. There is an opaque line between when a movement "fizzles" and defeat, especially as repression is likely to be involved in both cases. I conceptualize a repressive defeat as one where a maximalist movement ends when the military is mobilized against the campaign, deployed in a mass fashion, and it produces significant loss of human life. Examples include China's Tiananmen Square campaign or Bahrain's Arab Spring protests. There is little work done on the idea of a repressive defeat, to my knowledge, although a large body of work examines the relationship between repression and protest. There is certainly heterogeneity among failed events, and by thinking about a repressive defeat, there may be interesting post-movement dynamics that are distinct from movements that fizzle or gain partial concessions.

Escalation

The final outcome of consideration is escalation, where the movement adopts violence as its primary strategy. Thus far, there is not significant work to draw from in order to understand escalation. Some have focused on the breakdown of movement discipline (Pickney 2016) or on the escalation of a single event (Gustafson 2016), but there has been less attention paid to understanding when movements adopt violence as a general strategy.

Question

Given these different types of outcomes, what internal movement dynamics precede the different termination types? Are there similar patterns of interactions between the protesters and government? Are there certain steps that need to be reached to realize certain outcomes?

Research Design & Data

To explore the outcomes of nonviolent campaigns, I collected events data on the group of movements commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. These movements cluster together in time and space, took place in similar types of regimes, had similar demands, and experienced real variation in outcomes. This allows for an inductive exploration of movement dynamics and whether movements that had similar termination types also had similar types of government-movement interactions and campaign characteristics.

I collected data on 17 Middle Eastern countries (excluding Israel/Palestine) by searching news articles using Lexis-Nexus. The data were also checked against the NAVCO 3.0 data, SCAD data, and additional resources as available. I focused on nonviolent collective dissent, such as marches, demonstrations, or protests, as well as violent events such as riots. On the government side, I coded repressive events as well as concessions that were given to the opposition. This allowed for a sequence analysis to be performed, wherein the sequences of protest, repression, and accommodation are compared to one another to generate clusters of movements. The goal of this process is to begin to build knowledge about the trajectory of movements and how they map onto outcomes.

Results

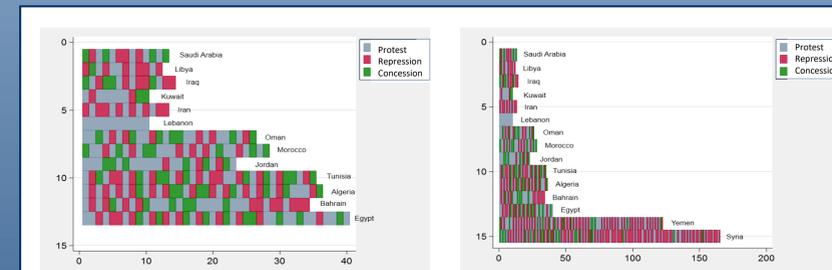


Figure 2. Sequence Analysis Plots

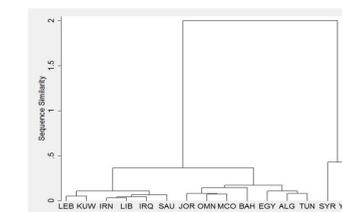


Figure 3. Cluster Analysis Results, Ward's Linkage

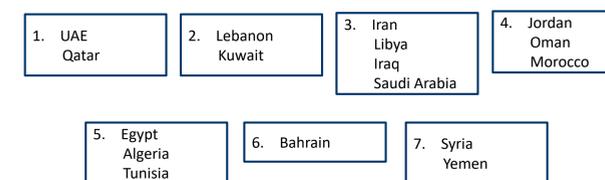


Figure 4. Clusters that Emerge from the Sequence Analysis

Table 1. Describing the Clusters

Cluster	Outcome	Movement Descriptions
1: UAE, Qatar	Status Quo	No movement forms.
2: Lebanon, Kuwait	Fizzles, with tolerance	Movement forms but fails to grow, sequence is short and marked with tolerance.
3: Iran, Iraq, SA	Fizzles, with repression	Movement forms but fails to grow, sequence is short and marked with repression. <i>Misfit: Libya, escalated to violence</i>
4: Jordan, Oman, Morocco	Fizzles, with concessions	Movement forms and grows, but does not adopt a maximalist goal. Longer movements that win concessions and have limited repression.
5: Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria	Success / Partial Success	Movement forms, grows, and adopts maximalist goals. The regime backs away from using repression, leading to substantial concessions and/or full success.
6: Bahrain	Repressive Defeat	Movement forms, grows, adopts maximalist goals, and the regime engages in military-style demolition of the movement. Ends in a violent defeat as movement fails to fight back.
7: Syria, Yemen	Escalate to Violence	Movement forms, grows, adopts maximalist goals, faces strong regime violence, and develops means to engage the state violently in an organized manner. <i>Libya also went through these steps, ended in escalation</i>

Discussion: A Model of Escalation

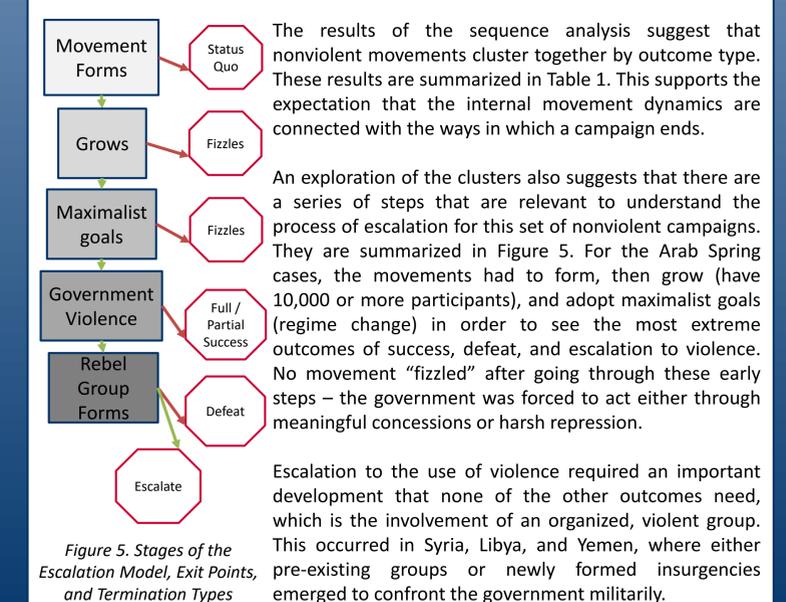


Figure 5. Stages of the Escalation Model, Exit Points, and Termination Types

Conceptualizing Termination: Nonviolent Campaigns

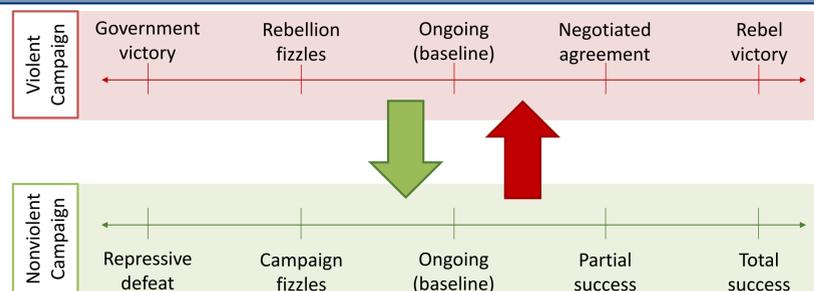


Figure 1. Continuum of violent (top/red) and nonviolent (bottom/green) political success
Adapted from Fortna (2015)

The literature on nonviolence has primarily conceptualized the outcome of nonviolent campaigns according to their level of success. Rather than thinking primarily in terms of success, I propose considering outcomes in a similar fashion to how civil war scholars conceptualize the outcomes of violent campaigns.

Figure 1 presents outcomes for both violent and nonviolent campaigns, displayed along a continuum of success for the respective sides. From the perspective of the opposition, outcomes move from the worst possible – violent defeat – to the best possible – total success or victory. The termination types towards the center of the scale represent middling outcomes. A partial success or negotiated settlement represent a departure from the status quo and some form of concession won by the opposition movement, while in the case that a movement simply ends or fizzles out, defeat has been avoided but no concessions were won, and the opposition is no longer able to continue the conflict in that manner.

In addition to these four termination types, a critical fifth outcome also comes in the form of either escalation or de-escalation, where movements jump from one continuum to the next. These outcomes have received less attention overall, but represent important possibilities. The goal of this project is to better understand the trajectory that leads to these different outcomes.