

Choosing Tactics: The Efficacy of Violence and Nonviolence in Self-determination

Disputes

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Disputes over self-determination have led to many long running, destructive civil wars. From South Sudan to Sri Lanka to the former Yugoslavia, movements seeking greater self-rule have employed violence to achieve their aims. Not surprisingly, much of the scholarly work on self-determination (SD) centers on violent secessionism. Moreover, the most comprehensive study comparing violence to nonviolence (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011) shows that mass nonviolent campaigns are generally more effective than civil war, but not in secessionist or ethnic disputes (Manekin & Mitts 2021). Indeed, mass nonviolence is rarely used in self-determination disputes, including disputes with and without secessionist aims (Cunningham 2013).

This characterization of self-determination movements as inherently or necessarily violent, however, is largely the product of how we have conceptualized nonviolence and success in quantitative studies of these conflict processes. In this article, I advance a broader view of both the use of “nonviolent” tactics and how we should evaluate their “success.” In doing so, I examine the question of when and how nonviolence can be effective in self-determination disputes, where mass nonviolent mobilization is uncommon.

In contrast to mass movements for regime change, nonviolent resistance among self-determination movements is usually smaller scale and more sporadically employed. While only about 4% of SD movements use mass nonviolence,¹ nearly 75% use smaller-scale nonviolent tactics, approximately the same percent that use violence against the state at low levels.² For example, the

¹ *Mass nonviolent campaigns* are events with at least 1000 participants and constitute a continuous push for some aim. *Nonviolent tactics* are planned events of disobedience and disruption, but do not need to include large numbers of people nor occur in the context of a continuous “campaign” (Sharp 1973). For example, we see sit-ins and protests used outside the context of mass campaigns.

² About 44% of SD movements engage in civil war (UCDP), while about 75% of disputes include some use of violence against the state (including attacks within and outside the civil war context).

Berber movement in Algeria employed a general strike in 2003, Turkish Cypriots used small scale protests in the 1980s, as did the Rohingya in Myanmar in the 1990s. While protests can be quite large and can develop into mass campaigns, many acts of nonviolence have limited participants and occur more sporadically.

Secession, the creation of a new legally recognized state, is often used to measure “success” in studies of the efficacy of different tactics.³ However, secession alone is an insufficient measure of success in the context of self-determination and secessionist struggles. While mass campaigns often mobilize for radical aims (regime change being the most common), the goals of self-determination disputes are typically more circumscribed. Only about 35% of self-determination disputes ever experience a period of unified demands for independence, while the vast majority make diverse claims over their status within the state (such as for greater taxation power or a regional parliament). The “successes” of self-determination movements mirrors this trend. Few movements achieve secession, but many of them succeed in gaining concessions that improve their status within their host state and afford them greater autonomy (Cunningham 2014). The successes that self-determination movements achieve are a diverse set of accommodations, spanning cultural accommodation to substantial political reforms.

This article focuses on self-determination politics for three reasons. First, these disputes are an area in which the use of nonviolence has been underestimated and (to a large extent) previously unmeasured. Second, these disputes are present in many countries and constitute a persistent challenge for states. Finally, self-determination disputes provide somewhat of a “hard case” for evaluating the effect of nonviolence in contrast to other tactics. Self-determination claims go to the

³ Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) focus on campaigns with maximal goals.

heart of the issue of sovereignty.⁴ These disputes have the potential to fundamentally undermine existing states, which Butt (2018) argues creates the strongest incentives for states to vigorously repress and fight off self-determination challengers (see also Walter 2009).

The central question in this study is under what conditions are different tactics effective in self-determination disputes? Starting with a reconceptualization of both nonviolence and success in self-determination politics, I build on existing work on nonviolent tactics and social movements more broadly to argue that small scale nonviolence (for example sit-ins, boycotts, and hunger strikes) can be effective for self-determination movements to gain concessions from the state.⁵ When SD movements use nonviolence, this enables them to more successfully frame their claims as broader human rights issues, rather than as fundamental rights to national self-determination. This framing helps the movements to elicit international solidarity and pressure. This pressure on their host state can lead to concessions to the movement (i.e., success) by altering the relative costs of repressing or accommodating the movement.⁶ This mechanism of international solidarity and pressure can substitute for mass mobilization in SD movements which generally have mass participation deficits (as they often represent small and bounded populations). The argument advanced here offers an alternative, but complementary, pathway for effective nonviolence compared to existing studies

⁴ Movement leaders and members make decisions about tactics with an eye to success. If movements are accurate in their assessment of state responses to tactics, we run the risk that we will only see nonviolence when it is sure to work (i.e., a selection problem). Yet, state responses appear stochastic enough that we can assume there are significant mismatches between what movements think will happen and what occurs in many instances. I return to this point in the analysis.

⁵ See Hallward et al (2017) on the need to expand our conceptualization of nonviolence.

⁶ This is akin to the “boomerang effect” Keck and Sikkink (1998) suggest is the mechanism through which transnational advocacy networks apply pressure on governments.

rooted in mass participation (Sharp 1973; DeNardo 1985; Ackerman and Duvall 2001; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

I examine this argument using data on the extent to which self-determination movements employ nonviolent tactics over time, including the use of violence and nonviolence in these disputes, as well as conventional political action. To capture the success of movements employing different tactics, I use data on concessions made to these movements over the issue of self-determination (including a wide range of accommodation related to the status of the group). By focusing on autonomy-related policy concessions (the key issue in these disputes), I can examine the efficacy of different tactics despite the fact that the vast majority of SD movements never achieve secession, thus offering a more thorough examination of tactical efficacy in these disputes. I find that violence is not the only path to success in self-determination politics. In contrast to conventional wisdom, I find that nonviolent tactics are associated with accommodation even when they are used outside the context of mass sustained campaigns. Moreover, while violent mobilization is also associated with a higher chance of concession, nonviolence has a greater impact, i.e., nonviolence is more effective than violence.

Nonviolent Tactics and Success

Our current understanding of the efficacy of nonviolence is based on the works of a rich body of scholarship and a set of well-known nonviolent campaigns (such as the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa, and Gandhi's work in India). More recently, Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011:14) study compares mass violent and nonviolent campaigns provided statistical support for the efficacy of nonviolence. They defined campaign success as meeting two criteria: "(1) its stated objective occurred within a reasonable period of time (two years) from the end of the campaign; and (2) the campaign had to have a discernible effect on the outcome". The central argument they (and others) make is that *mass participation* will play a critical role in generating sufficient pressure on the

state to concede to movements' maximal demands (DeNardo 1985: 35). Sharp (1973) sees this mass participation as critical for engendering the disintegration of the ruling regime. Because costs to individuals decrease as more people join in nonviolence, campaigns spiral up in an escalation of participation, exerting pressure on the state (Kuran 1991, Yin 2006).

Empirically we see that self-determination movements rarely achieve mass nonviolent mobilization. In part, this is because of the longevity that characterizes most self-determination struggles. Many movements for national self-determination link their struggles to historical memories and events of the national story. For example, the Catalanian *Generalitat* (the local governing body) can be linked back to the 17th century; it was abolished by the Franco regime and later restored by the Spanish government (McRoberts 2001). The Karen movement in Myanmar can be dated back to the late 19th century, and has been fighting the state as recently at 2013 (South 2011). The goals of these movements are often long-term, such as eventual secession or a high degree of autonomy. The complexity deepens because different organizations within self-determination movements frequently hold diverse goals, and few movements have clear unified objectives. More often, different organizations in the same movements represent different interests, creating a plethora of objectives. For example, in the Papuan movement in Indonesia, some organizations seek total independence, while others seek limited autonomy.

The existence of diverse and long-running goals in SD movements, as well as empirical trends in accommodation of these movements, necessitates a reconceptualization of "success" in evaluating the efficacy of different tactics of resistance. Empirically, we see that concessions made to self-determination movements are typically incremental, such as greater rights for the movement's constituent population, or devolution to local political institutions. For example, the South Tyrolans in Italy received iterated concessions from 1969 to 2001 which gradually increased local power and elevated the status of the German language in the region. Even in South Sudan, which achieved independence, the movement had received lesser (and later rescinded) concessions decades earlier in

the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement. These limited, often incremental, concessions are in stark contrast to the often-rapid pace of democratic transition (such as occurred in a number of post-Soviet states in the early 1990s) or regime change (such as in Tunisia in 2011).⁷ Limiting success to maximal goals skews our understanding of the conditions under which nonviolence works.

Nonviolent Tactics and the Chance of Concessions

I present an argument here about how more commonly used smaller-scale nonviolence can be effective in self-determination groups gaining concessions from the state. States have several options in trying to manage these disputes. First, states can ignore such claims.⁸ Second, states may elect to use repression or fight openly with these movements. Repressive strategies include jailing movement leaders, systematically excluding the SD population from positions of power, declaring movement organizations illegal, and restrictions on native language use and education to name a few. At the extreme, it can include sustained civil war (as with Nigeria's response to the Ibo in the Biafra War) or even ethnic cleansing (as we see in Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya). Third, states can accommodate some or all of movements' claims.⁹

Accommodation of self-determination movements occurs in a number of ways. States have

⁷ Even when secession occurs, it is not a rapid process. The 2011 referendum leading to the creation of South Sudan stemmed from the 2005 political settlement.

⁸ States have incentives not to ignore SD movements because these movements create costs for states. These costs can be generated through all types of tactics. Using largely conventional political participation, the Scottish Nationalist Party captured increasing shares of previously Labour-held seats in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s, effectively pressuring the Labour Party to accommodate Scottish demands. Movements can impose costs with work slowdowns and boycotts.

⁹ See Walter (2009) and Cunningham (2014) on state incentives to fight or accommodate.

made constitutional changes to accommodate minority languages (as with the Berber in Algeria). Others have reached accords that create new local governance structures (such as with the Chittagong Hill Peoples in Bangladesh), have created new regions (such as the creation of new states in India), made broader changes in state decentralization that address minority demands (such as in France with the Corsicans). Some states have allowed movements to hold referenda on independence (as in Quebec and Scotland).

States frequently respond to SD disputes by repressing or accommodating the movements, or with some mix of the two. States' decisions to repress or accommodate are influenced by the tactics that opposition movements use (Moore 1998). These tactics can impose direct costs on the state. Violent tactics, such as insurgency and terrorism, can damage state capacity, hurt the economy, and threaten survival of the government. Similarly, mass nonviolent tactics, such as strikes, boycotts and protests, impose direct costs on the government by hurting the economy and undermining state capacity. These direct costs are the primary mechanism through which these tactics lead to "success" in a bargaining framework and in studies of mass nonviolence (Schock 2005).

Opposition tactics can also generate costs for the government through international attention and pressure (Keck and Sikkink 1998).¹⁰ SD movements can generate attention and solidarity with external audiences (such as elements of the international community) that affect the relative costs and benefits to governments of both repressing SD movements and accommodating them.

International actors can affect this cost-benefit calculation in two main ways. First, international actors can directly incentivize concessions to SD movements. They can do this by requiring states to alter their behavior toward these movements as a condition of membership in

¹⁰ See Huff and Kruszewska (2016) on how tactics induce domestic pressure, and Coggins (2011) and Griffiths (2016) on the importance of international actors.

inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). For example, signatories to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) had to alter domestic laws with respect to minority languages. The FCNM (a multilateral treaty in the Council of Europe) serves as a key part of the Copenhagen criteria for entry into the European Union. Individual states and IGOs can also make a variety of types of international aid contingent upon peaceful resolution of these disputes or increased respect for basic rights of these peoples. The use of “peace conditionality” after civil wars has been seen as an opportunity for the international community to advance respect of human rights, such as in the case of Bosnia (Boyce 2002).¹¹

Second, international actors can raise the costs of repression of SD movements. Existing work has shown that states are sensitive to international pressure about human rights, although certain types of states are more sensitive than others (Haftner-Burton 2008; Hendrix and Wong 2013). Pressure on states creates costs for them in several ways, including decreasing domestic public opinion of the government (Ausderan 2014) and creating financial hardship for the state (Barry et al 2013).

One form of pressure that has increased over time is the “naming and shaming” of human rights abusers (Hafner-Burton 2008), wherein nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or other actors attempt to shed light on abuses and change state behavior through public criticism. Human rights abusing states have also been targeted with economic sanctions in the form of decreased aid from actors such as the World Bank (Lebovic and Voeten 2009), as well as from individual states.¹² External actors also increase the costs of repression by giving aid directly to NGOs that engage in monitoring and reports on treatment of minority populations. In the early 1990s, over 60% of the

¹¹ Csergo et al. (2017) find that facilitation by external actors was central of groups achieving self-government in post-communist cases.

¹² This literature yields mixed findings (c.f. Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Richards et al 2001).

United Kingdom's allocation of aid conditioned on human rights was directly related to "ethnic minority and indigenous rights," (Crawford 2000, 144).¹³ Individual states, IGOs, and NGOs can all increase the attractiveness of accommodation of SD movements relative to repression of them.

A key part of attracting positive international attention for SD movements is the way in which they frame their struggle; that is, how they make their case to outsiders and position their cause in the larger political context (Benford and Snow 2000).¹⁴ Frames are a critical way that organizations and movements give people something to identify with, thus enabling recruitment of participants and attraction of external support (Tarrow 1994; Bob 2005). Organizations in SD movements work strategically to create a specific narrative in pursuit of their objectives and can use nonviolence to draw a specific type of attention to movement aims.

Diagnostic framing – where opposition actors identify the problem and its attributes – is central to how SD movements can elicit external mobilization on their behalf (Benford and Snow 2000).¹⁵ Whether self-determination claims are perceived as reasonable demands or radical extremism depends on the success of SD movements in framing them. Gamson (1992:33) argues that "successful" frames, especially those focused on injustice, must connect, "broader socio-cultural forces with human agents who are appropriate targets of collective action." In the case of SD movements, this has largely taken the form of attempting to frame their claims as "human rights" issues rather than "national" issues.

Organizations pursuing self-determination must seek to establish the resonance of their claims

¹³ See Nepstad (2011) on sanctions hurting movements if pressure is seen as foreign domination.

¹⁴ As Galtung 1969 called it, this international "chain of nonviolence," was a key factor in the success of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa but has typically linked to *mass* nonviolence in studies of tactical efficacy (c.f. Schock (2005) on the anti-apartheid struggle).

¹⁵ They also address prognostic framing (shaping how we think about solutions to a problem).

with actors beyond their constituent population to gain support from the international community. While the demands of such movements are typically narrowly targeted to benefit their population, the validity of these claims can be viewed in the larger context of human rights. Demands for linguistic rights became an international human rights issue over time with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages for instance.

More overt political demands can be framed in a similar way. The international community has developed a growing body of laws and institutional mechanisms for supporting human rights that can be linked to national self-determination. The Atlantic Charter (1941) asserted a right to self-government, though not secession (Sohn 1981). United Nations (UN) resolution 1514 established “peoples” rights to be free from foreign subjection, though this was applied primarily to colonial relationships. More recently, in 2007 the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, creating another mechanism for groups to claim greater self-rule. Secessionist rebels have increasingly tried to adhere to legal standards of conflict to leverage international law to their favor (Jo 2015; Stanton 2016).

Self-determination movements, and non-state actors more generally, engage in a number of actions to garner attention and frame the way they are seen, and they are cognizant of these challenges. In his exploration of tactics by Argentinian dissidents, Brysk (1993:265) argues that actors understand that “[all] demands are not equally internationalizable or equally directed at the state.” Moreover, McLagen (2006:1) shows that activists understand this and have responded by building, “a formidable transnational communications infrastructure through which ‘local’ actors’ claims ... are formatted into human rights ‘issues’.”

Self-determination movements attempt to establish the validity of (and solidarity for) their

claims in the international community.¹⁶ While it is possible for movements using violence to do so,¹⁷ generating such support will be easier for movements employing nonviolence by helping to establish a view of these movements as an aggrieved actor with sincere claims (Shaykhutdinov 2010). Nonviolence calls attention to a movement's demands, but also signals that their claims have not been (or cannot be) addressed adequately through conventional political channels such as electoral politics. Nonviolence also increases the chance of "backfire," wherein repression breeds support for the movement (Martin 2007). States often try to prevent backfire by stigmatizing the opposition to legitimate repression (Hess & Martin 2006); this will be more difficult if the state cannot brand activists as violent or as terrorists.

Empirically, we see SD movements making human rights related appeals. For example, activists in the South Tyrol region of Italy invited the Dalai Lama to visit and expressed mutual sympathy for human rights issues related to self-determination.¹⁸ Anjouese separatists in Comoros have also made explicit claims related to human rights, identifying a key goal in their political struggle as building, "a new society, more free, more just and more respectful of human rights."¹⁹

Using nonviolence to strategically frame movement aims is not always straightforward. These movements are complex, and we see competition among actors in the same movement

¹⁶ Global support for counterterrorism increases the advantage of nonviolence. Placement on a terrorist watch list can have severe consequences for movements.

¹⁷ Fazal and Griffiths (2014) argue a decline in the norm of territorial conquests has incentivized (even violent) secession claims.

¹⁸ "Bestowed A Minorities Award, His Holiness the Dalai Lama Speaks About Secular Ethnicity in Bolzano." States News Service, 4/10/13.

¹⁹ "Anjouan secessionist Internet-based newspaper launched" BBC Summary of World Broadcasts 3/28/00. Anjouan forces have also been accused of human rights violations.

around framing. Sometimes this is overt, such as when there is internal disagreement over aims (such as autonomy vs. independence). In other cases, some elements of the movement employ violence while others use nonviolence. While some suggest that a “radical flank” can benefit a movement by making moderates appear reasonable (Haines 1984), the co-occurrence of violence and nonviolence could also undermine the ability of the movement to successfully employ a human rights frame.

Nonetheless, the use of nonviolence increases the potential for SD movements to garner positive attention from international actors through human rights framing, and for these actors to justify pressuring the host state for better treatment of the SD movement’s population. Human rights monitoring organizations have called for action on the rights of SD populations in a number of instances. Conciliation Resources, for example, continues coverage on the challenges in Northern Ireland highlighting the role of the “application of a human rights lens” leading to “non-violent restorative justice projects.”²⁰ Similarly, Human Rights Watch has reported on criminalization of free speech and protest behavior in India, and the prosecution of nonviolent activism in Indonesia and Yemen.²¹

The international community, particularly IGOs, have created mechanisms to pressure states in response to these human rights claims.²² For example, the Organization for African Unity (now the African Union) creating the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) (among other institutions), which addresses rights related to self-determination, such as in Ethiopia (see the

²⁰ “Northern Ireland – peace, resilience and community activism” Avila Kilmurray. <https://www.c-r.org/news-and-views/comment/northern-ireland-%E2%80%93-peace-resilience-and-community-activism> Accessed 1/15/20.

²¹ “The Criminalization of Peaceful Expression in India” Human Rights Watch. 5/26/16.

²² Tir and Karreth (2018) argue highly structured IGOs will most successfully at this.

Combined Report to the ACHPR, 2008). This discussion leads to a central hypothesis:

H1: Movements that employ nonviolence will be more likely to get concessions from the state than those that do not.

Measuring Success and Tactical Choice

To explore the efficacy of nonviolence in self-determination disputes, we need information on the use of nonviolent tactics at a lower level than mass nonviolent campaigns, and on the successes of SD movements. To construct this dataset, I build on the Cunningham (2014) sample of self-determination movements. These data cover a 45-year time period (1960 – 2005) and include 138 different SD movements in 77 countries. These data and analyses speak to key relationships predicted by the theory, but do not directly test the underlying mechanism linking the use of nonviolence to increased international solidarity.

The unit of analysis in this study, SD-movement year, is based on the coding of movement organizations as making claims of self-determination status. Making “claims” means that there was some organization in the movement that made public demands related to the status of the group, but claim-making does not necessarily imply the use of nonviolent or violent tactics. Movement organizations can publicize demands through statements and can engage in conventional political actions – such as running political candidates.

The original sample of movements comes from the Center for Development and Conflict Management’s (CICDM) Peace and Conflict report, which includes a global set of SD movements (Marshall and Gurr 2003). The CICDM list of movements originates from the Minorities At Risk (MAR) project, and because the MAR project includes “politically active ethnic groups,” there are limitations in which movements are included in this study (Sambanis et al. 2018). By relying on the CICDM list, this study speaks most directly to the role that nonviolence plays in active disputes for self-determination.

Concessions over Self-determination

Given the rarity of secession, a broader concept of success will offer more leverage in our understanding of tactical efficacy.²³ As an alternative measure of success, I employ data from Cunningham's (2014) dataset on accommodation of self-determination movements. These data offer information on a wide range of accommodations made to SD movements, regardless of whether the movement used violence, nonviolence, conventional political action, or just made claims. The concessions measure includes instances of the host state granting the SD movement greater power or rights related to their identity. Some concessions increase power in one area, such as increased autonomy over language policy or local security provision. In other cases, concessions are multifaceted and address multiple different substantive areas, such as political and cultural issues.^p

Examples of concessions include the creation of the Saami Parliament in Norway in 1987, which included cultural and linguistic protections, as well as spending powers. In 1969, the Canadian government constitutionally recognized French through the Official Languages Act in response to Québécois demands. In 2003, the Anjoune in Comoros received greater powers over tax collection, fiscal policy, and security policy. The data include 189 movement-year observations in which SD movements received concessions where the movement had one or more organizations actively making demands. Each of the concessions represents a concrete "success" for a SD movement.

Self-determination movements receive concessions across the globe, though SD movements are most successful in the West (68 observations), Asia (35 observations), Sub-Saharan Africa (29 observations) and Eastern Europe (28 observations), and less so in Latin America (19 observations)

²³ See also Shaykhutdinov (2010), which examines territorial autonomy arrangements..

and North Africa/Middle East (10 observations).²⁴ These data on concessions highlight the extent to which SD movements achieve goals short of maximalist concessions. Among all the concessions that occurred from 1960 to 2005, only a handful were secessions.

SD Movement Tactics

To examine the effect of nonviolence on the achievement of concessions, I employ data on the use of nonviolent tactics by organizations in self-determination movements from the Strategies of Resistance Data Project (SRDP) (Cunningham et al 2020). These data include the yearly behavior of over 1,100 organizations that represent specific self-determination movement populations in their struggle for greater self-determination. The SRDP includes data on violent and nonviolent behavior of constituent organizations for SD movements on a yearly basis. The data encompass a wide range of nonviolent actions, including economic noncooperation (strikes, tax refusals, consumer boycotts), protest behavior (rallies, protests, demonstrations), nonviolent intervention (sit-ins, occupations, blockades), social noncooperation (hunger strikes, self-immolation, other self-harm), and political noncooperation (organizational boycotts of elections, withdrawals from political office or government).²⁵ The dataset also includes indicators of the use of violence by an organization against the state, as well as participation in conventional politics.

Using this, I create a measure of the use of nonviolence, violence, and conventional political action within a movement in each year. I employ this movement-year measure of nonviolence (rather than an indicator at the individual organization level) because the success of these movements is measured and conceptualized as concessions to the self-determination population, rather than to a specific organization. Empirically, concessions to SD movements are made to the

²⁴ These regions vary in the number of observations in the data (Appendix Table 2).

²⁵ These include the majority of Gene Sharp's (1973) identifies 198 actions in nonviolent resistance.

movement as a whole, such as shared language rights or greater political autonomy enjoyed by the movement's population.²⁶

In each movement-year observation, indicators are coded for the exclusive use of nonviolence, the exclusive use of violence, a mix of nonviolence and violence, and conventional politics (such as running candidates in elections or registering as a political party). For a movement's tactic to be coded, the SD organization or their identified supporters must be reported to have participated in the action. Movements are still included in the data regardless of whether any of their organizations use any particular tactic (nonviolent, violent, or conventional). This allows me to examine the extent to which movements employ different tactics, including a mix of tactics, or no actions beyond claim making.

Trends in Movements and Tactics

These data demonstrate a great deal of variation in the tactics employed by SD movements. While very few SD movements use mass nonviolent campaign, the majority of movements use nonviolence. There are 106 movements (75%) where at least one constituent organization used nonviolent tactics at some point in the dispute. At least one constituent organization used violence in a similar number of movements (107). To illustrate the use of violent and nonviolent tactics, Figure 1 shows over time trends in movements using violence and nonviolence, as well as the number of movements getting concessions. The background shade shows the number of active self-determination movements in the sample.

²⁶ This does not preclude specific organizations from benefiting more than others from concessions.

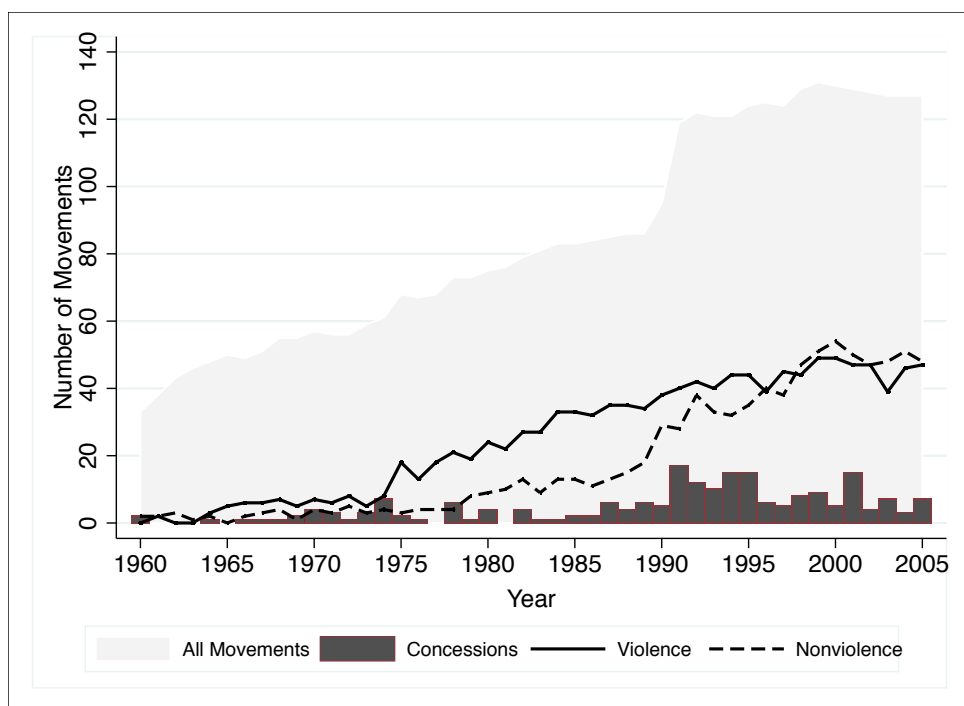


Figure 1. Over time trends in nonviolence, violence, and concessions

Nonviolence is used by movements in all regions of the world and in different regime types. Appendix Table 3 shows the distribution of observations of nonviolence and violence, as well as the number of observations where both tactics are employed, in each geographic region and in democratic and nondemocratic states. The observations with a mix of violence and nonviolence includes cases where one specific organization employs both tactics as well as movements where distinct organizations employ different tactics.²⁷

Table 1 shows the frequency of each tactic type for all movement-year observations, including the number of observations in which movements exclusively employ nonviolence, exclusively employ violence, employ both violence and nonviolence, exclusively employ conventional/institutional political action, as well as the frequency in which we see movements actively making public claims for greater self-rule, but not engaging in one of these tactics.

²⁷ See Appendix Figures 1 and 2 for graphical case illustrations of tactical variation.

Table 1. Frequency of Tactics (movement-year observations)

Tactic	Frequency	Percent
Exclusive nonviolence	250	6.74%
Exclusive violence	641	17.28%
Mixed	453	12.21%
Exclusive institutional action	266	7.17%
Claim-making only	2,099	56.60%

In the majority of observations, organizations in SD movements just make claims but do not actively engage in either conventional or non-conventional politics. The exclusive use of violence is more common than either a mix of violence and nonviolence or the exclusive use of nonviolence. Movements exclusively use nonviolence in about 7% of observations and use nonviolence at all in about 20% of observations (combining the nonviolence and mixed categories).

Tactically Efficacy

I present a series of analyses examining the relationship between accommodation of self-determination movements and the tactics movements use. I employ logistic regressions in all analyses as the measures of concession are all dichotomous. The independent variables in the first set of analyses are a set of dummy variables for SD movement tactics, which include exclusive use of nonviolence, exclusive use of violence, mixed (both violence and nonviolence were used that year), as well as a measure of conventional/institutional action. The reference category is all observations in which constituent organizations in a movement were making demands or claims for greater self-determination, but not employing any of these tactics. Each tactic variable is lagged by one year.

In addition to the tactic variables, I add several factors likely to be associated with both the use of nonviolence and the chance of accommodation to the models. First, I include a measure of the number of organizations in the movement (log transformed), which is shown to be robustly

associated with concessions.²⁸ This may also reflect the degree of pressure on the state that the movement can exert. I include three factors that capture different contexts in which the movements operate. These include the Unified Democracy Score to capture political openness,²⁹ whether the movement ever demanded independence, and logged gross domestic product per capita to capture economic development.

Movements in more democratic states may face governments more sensitive to nonviolent societal pressure, and that may be more open to granting concessions. Movements which have made independence demands at some point, conversely, may face a state less willing to make concessions if they fear a large-scale secession attempt. Secession seeking groups, moreover, must be more sensitive to international perceptions, which should influence their decision to use nonviolence. Economically developed states may be better able to accommodate self-determination demands with respect to economic policies. Movements may also take economic development into account in determining whether nonviolent strategies such as economic noncooperation are likely to be effective. In all models, I account for temporal dependence by including (but not reporting) the number of years since the organization last received a concession (t), as well as t -squared and t -cubed.³⁰ Table 2 shows these analyses.

²⁸Cunningham (2014).

²⁹ Pemstien et al. (2010). Findings are similar in direction, size, and significance if the Polity2 (Marshall and Jaggers 2002) score is substituted for the Unified Democracy Score.

³⁰ Carter and Signorino (2010).

Table 2. The effect of tactics on concessions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Nonviolence ⁺	1.011** (0.226)	0.828** (0.247)	0.977** (0.207)	0.957** (0.217)	0.815** (0.212)	0.745** (0.218)
Violence	0.441 (0.227)	0.250 (0.231)	0.773** (0.229)	0.540* (0.235)	0.597** (0.222)	0.666** (0.243)
Mixed	0.486* (0.239)	0.009 (0.307)	0.412 (0.256)	0.548* (0.257)	0.329 (0.252)	0.079 (0.332)
Institutional action	0.319 (0.353)	0.145 (0.334)	0.033 (0.347)	0.362 (0.365)	0.122 (0.344)	0.040 (0.345)
Number SD orgs (log)		0.466** (0.128)				0.361** (0.134)
Democracy score			0.500** (0.090)			0.288* (0.125)
Independence demand				-0.418* (0.188)		-0.408* (0.196)
GDPpc (log)					0.336** (0.067)	0.119 (0.092)
Constant	-2.578** (0.197)	-2.973** (0.233)	-2.946** (0.225)	-2.382** (0.214)	-5.393** (0.636)	-3.909** (0.769)
Observations	3,656	3,656	3,655	3,656	3,656	3,655

Robust standard errors in parentheses

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

⁺all tactic variables are lagged one year, time since concessions, t, t² and t³ included but not reported

These analyses show support for the hypothesis that nonviolence will increase the chance of concessions. The exclusive use of nonviolence is positively associated with a higher chance of concessions across all models.³¹ The use of violence is also positively associated with concessions when controlling for the level of democracy, historical independence demands in the movement, and economic development. A mix of tactics is significant and positive in Model 1, with no additional controls, and continues to return a positive, but not statistically significant coefficient in the other models. Movements in more democratic contexts are more likely to get concessions.

³¹ Results are similar with a two-year lag on the tactics indicators. See Appendix Table 4.

Movements where demands for independent statehood have been made are less likely to do so. The coefficient on GDP per capita (logged) is positive in Model 4 and remains positive but not statistically significant in Model 5 (which includes all covariates). Figure 2 illustrates the relative impact of each term.³²

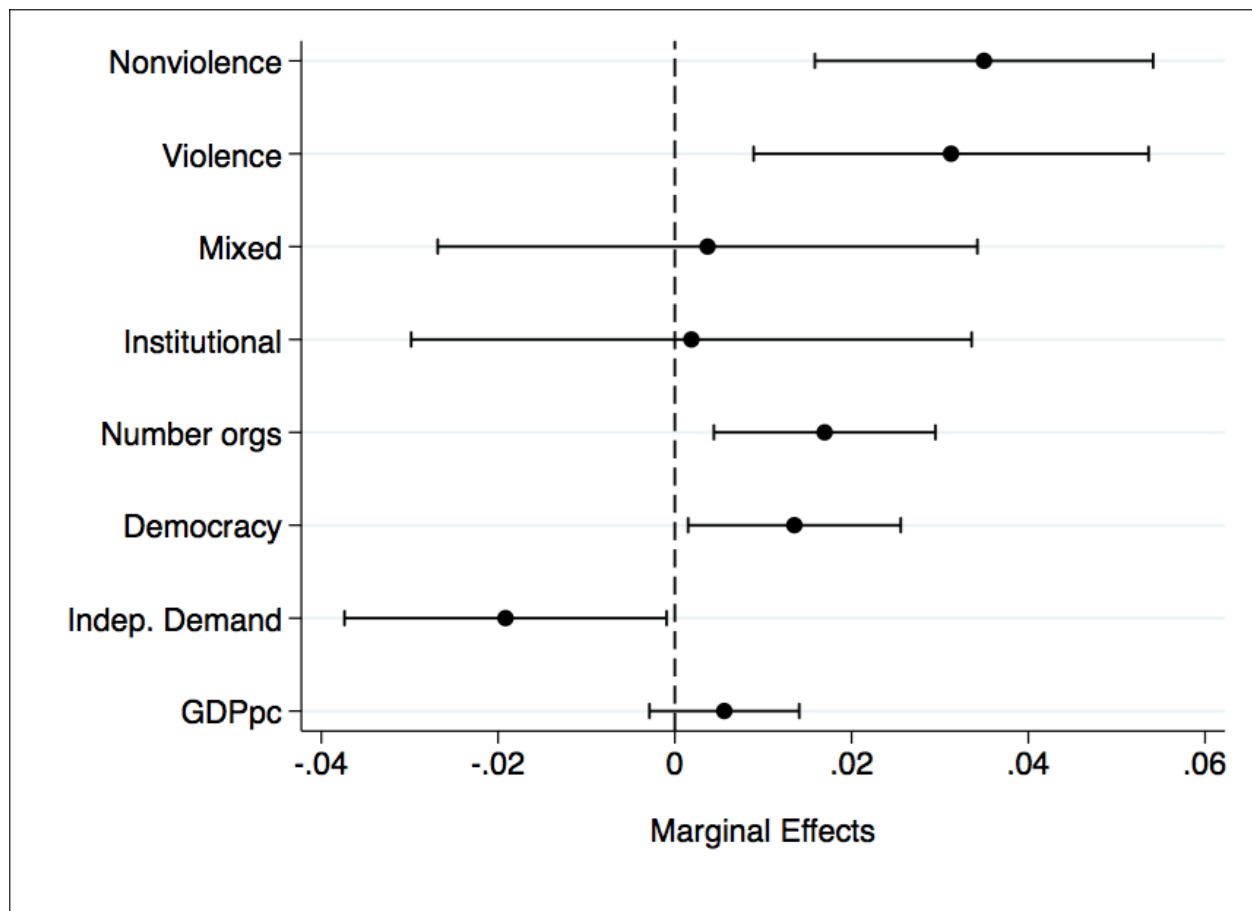


Figure 2. Marginal Effect (Table 2 Model 6)

These findings highlight that nonviolence can increase the chance of success, but that violence is playing a role in gaining accommodation as well. Figure 2 shows both pure nonviolence and pure

³² Predicted probabilities generated using the margins command in Stata14, holding other factors at observed values. The pattern looks similar when other factors are held at their means.

violence in the previous year are associated with a greater probability of concessions. Consistent with other studies of accommodation in such disputes, we see that the baseline probability of success in any given year is low (a little more than 3.5%). The use of pure nonviolence in the previous year more than doubles this chance. This percentage change is larger than any other predictor in the model. The use of pure violence in the previous year has a slightly smaller effect, and the size for the marginal effect of the number of self-determination organizations and the democracy score is about half the size of the impact of nonviolence.³³ The role of violence may be to exert the direct pressure that we see in both civil wars and mass nonviolent campaigns, while these findings support the idea that lower-level nonviolence also leads to success.

Assessing the Pressure Mechanism

The mechanism underpinning hypothesis 1 is that the use of nonviolence will help SD movements to induce international actors to pressure the host state on their behalf. There are many audiences SD movements can appeal to, and multiple avenues through which these actors might exert pressure on host states about the treatment of SD movements. I examine one possible pathway here, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions related to SD movements.

³³ Concessions can also be disaggregated to capture more nuance. Analyses on the effect of tactical choice on “cultural only” concessions, which are those that address only issues related to group culture, such as language rights and “political” concessions that address broader issues for the group such as security, economic, and political autonomy as well show consistent effects of nonviolence across both types, but that violence is not associated with a greater chance of cultural concessions (Appendix Table 5).

While the United Nations is only one external actor that might pressure host governments, it is an important actor with respect to global human rights norms (Risse et al 1999).³⁴

I examine the relationship between the percent of organizations in a movement employing nonviolence and resolutions by the UNSC about the self-determination to assess whether more nonviolence is associated with a higher chance of pressure from the UN. These resolutions include “diplomacy, new force authorizations and mandate expansions, sanctions, force re-authorizations, condemnations and ‘all else’” (Beardsley 2017: 12). There are 194 UNSC resolutions about self-determination disputes in the sample over the study period. I have coded an additional 34 movement-year observations where resolutions related to SD disputes were proposed and vetoed.

Table 3 reports coefficients from a logistic regression on UNSC resolutions (passed and vetoed) directly related to each self-determination dispute. Model 1 shows a simple bivariate regression which indicates that movements employing more nonviolence are more likely to see a UNSC resolution. Model 2 includes alternative tactics (violence only, mixed, and institutional action). Model 3 includes whether the state is a UN Security Council permanent member (P5), which White et al (2018) suggest affect the chance of UNSC resolution.

³⁴ Sändig and Granzow (2018) show some SD groups work to “align” themselves with the UN via framing choices.

Table 3. Logit Regression on UNSC Resolutions (1960 – 2005)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Percent nonviolence ⁺	1.120** (0.372)	0.939* (0.453)	1.051* (0.452)
Percent violence		0.509 (0.520)	0.483 (0.522)
Percent mixed		0.054 (0.615)	0.036 (0.610)
Percent institutional action		0.279 (0.397)	0.399 (0.406)
P5 Country			-3.301** (1.072)
Constant	-3.376** (0.395)	-3.535** (0.524)	-3.430** (0.528)
Observations	3,553	3,553	3,553

Robust standard errors in parentheses

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

⁺all tactic variables are lagged one year

The results in Table 3 provide support for the mechanism I advance here. The use of nonviolence is associated with an increased rate of UNSC resolutions directly related to the SD dispute. The UNSC is just one of many possible actors that can influence how states treat their self-determination movements. For example, the African Union has taken a clear position in support of the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara, specifically advocating for better treatment of Sahrawi with respect to human rights.³⁵

A brief example of the use of nonviolence to human rights framing to pressure mechanism can be seen in the Ogoni case. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria was noted for employing nonviolent resistance to elicit international support. MOSOP leader Garrick Leton framed the movement's claims, "We are not asking for the moon but the basic

³⁵ See official statement at <https://au.int/en/newsevents/20140415/african-union-calls-renewed-efforts-resolve-conflict-western-sahara> accessed 10/25/2021.

necessities of life-water, electricity, roads, education, and a right to self-determination so that we can be responsible for our resources and our environment” (quoted in Osaghe 1995: 336). MOSOP made human rights-based appeals to other states and international organizations, including United Kingdom, and the World Bank (Cooper 1999). Working with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), a global NGO, MOSOP garnered international attention and public rebuke of the Nigerian government. This pressure did not immediately lead to concessions to the Ogoni; however, it highlights the critical role of the human rights frame and how movements leaders view the use of nonviolence as key for pressing such claims.

Nonviolence and Endogenous Tactical Choice

A key challenge for any observational study, and for those addressing the impact of strategic choices in particular, is that actor choices are interdependent and to some extent endogenous. It is possible that the decision by movement organizations to use nonviolence at any particular time may be in response to expected concessions.³⁶ If this is a common occurrence, then the relationship I have identified between nonviolence and success in achieving concessions may actually reflect the effect of the concession-making process on nonviolence (i.e., reverse causality).

I address this issue in two ways.³⁷ First, an examination of the process of governments giving

³⁶ Recent work has also suggested that nonviolent tactics may be unavailable to certain populations based on social connections (Thurber 2013) or misperceptions about their violent nature (Manekin & Mitts 2021). However, these studies center on regime change for which mass mobilization is key.

³⁷ In further analyses, I controlled for previous concessions, previous civil war, number of SD movements in the state, repression of the movement, ongoing mass nonviolent campaign and presence of a radical flank (Appendix Tables 6 and 7). The positive and significant effect of nonviolence is consistent across all models. Violence returns a positive and significant coefficient in

concessions reveals that negotiations over these issues often take place over several years, but that most instances of open discussion of concessions are not followed by actual policy changes. The ability of SD movements to accurately project when they will succeed in getting a concession is uncertain at best. For example, the Tamil struggle for greater self-determination in Sri Lanka was littered with attempts to accommodate the movement and with promises of greater autonomy. In 1985, an autonomy plan was proposed by President Jayewardene, but was scrapped by the government. Another deal was proposed in 1986, but heavily contested by the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, one of the organizations within the Tamil movement. In 1987, the government promised to devolve some autonomy through a provincial council, and although this was contested by the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), it was implemented.³⁸ This iterative process of attempts, failures, and contestation (on the government and movement sides) illustrates the complexity of the concessions process and how difficult it would be for a movement to accurately anticipate and predict imminent concessions.

Second, I employ matching to address possible endogenous structural determinants of the viability of these tactics. Using Coarsened Exact Matching to preprocess the data allows me to compare a set of cases that are similar on a set of covariates (Iacus et al. 2009). The sample is matched based on the country's Unified Democracy Score, the country's logged GDP per capita and

the models controlling for civil war, repression, and the number of SD movements (each of which have a negative and significant effect). Mixed tactics are also positive and significant in models controlling for civil war, repression, the number of SD movements, and ongoing mass nonviolent campaign.

³⁸ Keesing's Record of World Events Vol. 31 (1985), Issue 5, p. 33581, Vol.33 (1987), Issue 1, p. 34875, Minorities at Risk Sri Lankan Tamil Profile, Horowitz (1989).

the region. Appendix Table 8 reports the results for each tactic.³⁹ These results suggest that the exclusive use of both nonviolence and violence are positively associated with concessions and mixed tactics are negatively associated with concessions. Conventional action is not associated with any of the concession outcomes.

Context Dependence

The use of nonviolence is positively associated with concessions in the study sample, and this finding is robust to a number of different statistical modelling choices. The contexts in which these tactics are employed may influence the costs they impose on the state, as well as the receptivity of the host state to international pressure. The literature on human rights has identified conditions under which states are particularly susceptible to international pressure, though there is no clear consensus on what factors are more important or whether these apply in a broad set of situations. Existing studies show that shaming of human rights abusers decreases government repression (Franklin 2008) and increases the likelihood of humanitarian interventions (Murdie and Peksen 2013). Local organizations on the ground can magnify attention to movement causes (Murdie and Davis 2012).

The literature on state sensitivity to international pressure suggests a number of factors that might impact a specific state's vulnerability to pressure. Factors proposed to affect state vulnerability include military and economic ties (Keck and Sikkink 1999), aid dependence (Apodaca and Stohl 1999), the relevance of reputation costs (Risse and Sikkink 1999), global balance of power (Dunning 2004), resource endowments (Girod et al 2016), and the extent of local monitoring (Risse et al. 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998). None of these studies address the impact of pressure on states about treatment of SD movements, but they offer a potential set of factors that could reflect sensitivity to

³⁹ Summary statistics for matching factors across samples reported in Appendix Table 9.

such pressure.

Drawing on that literature, I have reproduced the analyses in Table 2 in a variety of subsample contexts including: Cold War and post-Cold War cases, countries that are human rights signatories, economically dependent states, whether the state is an oil exporter, size of the state population, and whether the state has a young leader, who might be concerned with reputation.⁴⁰ The full results are available in Appendix Tables 10 – 15 (Appendix Table 16 summarizes the results.) The findings generally show a persistent relationship between the exclusive use of nonviolence and concessions to SD movements. On the whole, the findings do not suggest that nonviolence only works in more sensitive states.

Explanatory Power of Tactics

The preceding analyses show robust and multifaceted support for the hypothesis that nonviolence can help self-determination movements to succeed in gaining concessions from the state. Following the recommendations of Ward et al (2010), I examine the out-of-sample predictive power of the model using k(4)-fold cross-validation. This is a method for out-of-sample prediction wherein the data is split into four segments, then three segments are used to make a training set for the data (on which the model is re-estimated) and the fourth set is used to test the predictive power of the model. This technique is repeated 10 times so one random split of the data does not drive the results. Using this, I compare the AUC of models sequentially eliminating factors.⁴¹ The original in-sample AUC for Model 6 in Table 2 is 0.6884; employing k(4)-fold cross-validation with the same

⁴⁰ See appendix for data sources.

⁴¹ Receiver Operator Characteristic (ROC) plots allow me to assess the area under the curve (AUC). The plot shows the relationship between the rate of false positives and the rate of true positives.

model, the out-of-sample AUC is 0.6642 (a 2% decrease). This suggests that the model is not excessively overfitting the data.

To evaluate the out-of-sample predictive power of each factor in the model, I re-run the k(4)-fold cross validation sequentially eliminating each variable. If the AUC decreases when a variable is eliminated, the factor was increasing the predictive power of the model. The scale of the decrease of the AUC reveals how large the effect of that variable is on the ability of the model to predict concessions out-of-sample. In other words, the more the AUC drops when you take a variable out, the bigger role it plays in predicting concessions.

I find that the removal of two factors (mixed tactics and institutional action) actually increase the out-of-sample AUC, and thus lead to worse predictions about concessions. The cross-validation shows that the two tactics robustly associated with success in the preceding models—pure violence and pure nonviolence—both provide increased predictive power in the out-of-sample evaluation (see Appendix Figure 3 for a comparison of the change in the out-of-sample AUCs across tactics).

Taken together, the logistic analyses, matching analyses, and out of sample prediction indicate that a variety of non-conventional tactics affect the chance of success for SD groups. While violence does have a positive impact on the probability of accommodation, the exclusive use of nonviolence has a stronger and more impactful effect on the chance of concessions.

Conclusion

This article advances an alternative path for understanding how tactical variation affects the success of SD movements and specifically how nonviolence can work for SD movements without mass participation. This proposed path for effective nonviolence –the use of nonviolence facilitating human rights framing to international pressure on states – highlights an indirect route through which SD movements’ tactical choices impact state behavior toward them (promoting accommodation and punishing repressive behavior). Importantly, self-determination movements can

generate this international pressure through nonviolent tactics that do not require mass participation.

Empirical evaluation provides a great deal of support for this argument. Movements that use nonviolence are accommodated by their host states at a higher rate than those that do not. Prior focus on violence related to territory, secession, and self-determination has limited our understanding of these movements in two ways. First, it has led to a mischaracterization of these movements as inherently violent, leading us to overlook the use of a variety of tactics employed by SD movements. Second, the previous focus on violent conflict has frequently limited the examination of success to major changes in political status, such as secession, which would lead us to consider most of these movements as failing. A broader look at tactics and success provides a richer and more accurate picture of self-determination politics.

While others have shown the power of mass nonviolent campaigns, this study suggests that SD movements can substitute international solidarity as a mechanism to pressure states into making concessions. Nonviolence is not only a tool of the masses. Self-determination disputes provide a hard case for the argument here because self-determination claims often challenge the sovereignty of states by promoting a minority “nation.” Yet, these movements can employ small-scale nonviolence and alter their framing of their claims in ways that make the international community more predisposed to support them.

While the argument here focuses specifically on SD movements, small-scale nonviolence may also be effective in other contexts. For example, we know that mass nonviolence increases the chance of regime change, but we have less understanding of whether more localized nonviolent behavior works in enabling political dissidents to gain political concessions short of their maximalist goals. Further research could explore whether small-scale nonviolence is effective beyond self-determination struggles.

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