

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict
by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan

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Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

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Erica Chenoweth's and Maria J. Stephan's book is one of the most timely released study in the past decade. Shortly after non-violent protest movements swept the Middle East - changing regimes and the political discourse in many countries – the two researchers released this comprehensive study, analyzing the historical efficacy of non-violent resistance.

Using their Non-violent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) data set, the authors quantitatively analyzed 323 violent and non-violent resistance campaigns for the period 1900 to 2006. Their conclusion: non-violent movements are nearly twice as likely to achieve success (or partial success) than their violent counterparts. Chenoweth and Stephan hypothesize that non-violent campaigns are more likely to succeed because non-violent activism creates lower barriers to participation, creating the conditions for diverse membership and allowing mass mobilization across key social sectors.

Perhaps their most interesting findings relate to the consequences of violent and non-violent movements for post-conflict regimes. The NAVCO data show that successful non-violent movements produce democratic regimes more often than successful violent movements. Interestingly, the data also reveal that non-violent campaigns do not necessarily benefit from outside material support, although the authors acknowledge that small amounts of money, sanctions, and international public support can have a positive impact on successful movements. However, they caution that "outside support for local non-violent groups is a double-edged sword" since that is often used by regimes to delegitimize such movements (p. 225).

To support their findings, four case studies explain why some non-violent movements achieve success, partial success, and, at times, fail. The Iranian revolution (1977-1979) and the Philippine People's Power movement (1983-1986) are their textbook examples of how broad-based civil resistance, mass participation, and strategic non-cooperation from all sectors of society can succeed against authoritarian regimes. Similarly, the authors make a persuasive case in their explanation why the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-1992) was a relatively peaceful movement that achieved "partial success," or at least more progress than the violence used by the PLO and Hamas. The label "partial success" in this instance is one that some analysts may take issue with, since the Israeli occupation and settlement activity increased substantially over the following decades. Finally, the Burmese Uprising (1988-1990) case study shows how both violent and non-violent campaigns can fail if such movements do not create and maintain unified popular support and generate loyalty shifts within a regime.

Perhaps Chenoweth and Stephan's most daunting task is pre-empting scholarly critiques questioning how they can accurately define a resistance movement as entirely "violent" or entirely "non-violent", and sufficiently determine which faction contributed most to a movement's success when such movements operate simultaneously. But when compared against years of failed violent activism in countries like Iran and the Philippines, the authors argue that

identifying and framing successful non-violent campaigns within the fog of violent and non-violent activism is actually not as difficult as some may assume, especially when considering the amount of diverse support and mass mobilization that successful non-violent movements produce.

True to academic form, the book reads as a lengthy, quantitative research report full of nuance, definitions, and important caveats explaining the inherent difficulties when systematically studying violent and non-violent movements. Some may disagree with their methodologies or the way they coded their data, but their justifications and rationales are refreshingly straightforward and transparent.

Yet when it comes to framing their study, one striking aspect that may irk some scholars is how they situate their research within existing the literature. They claim that a "prevailing view among political scientists is that opposition movements select terrorism and violent insurgency strategies because such means are more effective than non-violent strategies at achieving policy goals" (p. 6). They argue that Robert Pape's (2003, 2005, 2010) work - which holds that suicide terrorism is an effective strategy to defeat occupying democratic powers - "could be applied to almost all scholars whose research tests the efficacy of different violent methods" because such scholars fail to compare violent methods to non-violent alternatives (p. 25-26).

It is certainly true that some security scholars are biased toward studying violent conflict. But it is a bit unfair to project Pape's heavily criticized work onto the entire research community as accepted scholarship, particularly when several terrorism researchers have argued that using terrorism as a strategic tactic is rarely successful and at times even self-defeating (Crenshaw, 1992; Rapoport, 1992; Hoffman, 2006; Abrahms, 2006). Moreover, the authors' data reveal that insurgent movements in their data base succeed roughly 25% of the time, which they acknowledge is in line with similar other studies. Thus, despite framing their research as breaking new ground in the arena of security studies, their findings are actually in line with accepted scholarship on the relative ineffectiveness of terrorism and insurgent violence.

The book is novel in its attempt to quantitatively compare and contrast violent and non-violent insurgencies and in pushing back against security scholarship that has been reluctant to study non-violent movements. As such, it is a welcomed contribution. Terrorism researchers, alas, are left wanting more nuanced analysis on the efficacy of terrorism and insurgent tactics within their NAVCO data set. But perhaps such a study is in the works.

About the Reviewer: Jason Rineheart is a Research Assistant at the Terrorism Research Initiative.