

Review Article

Who Gains from Nonviolent Action? Unpacking the Logics of Civil Resistance

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LaGina Gause, *The Advantage of Disadvantage: Costly Protest and Political Representation for Marginalized Groups* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Mohammad Ali Kadivar, *Popular Politics and the Path to Durable Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

Ches Thurber, *Between Mao and Gandhi: The Social Roots of Civil Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

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It has been over a decade since the publication of *Why Civil Resistance Works*, where authors Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan show that maximalist¹ nonviolent movements are more than twice as likely to succeed as armed insurgencies.² This book led to a burgeoning literature on civil resistance; it drew from early thinkers like Gene Sharp and the vast social movements literature in Sociology, influenced related fields in Political Science, and significantly impacted the policy and activist worlds.³ More recent data, however, suggest that since approximately 2010, nonviolent movements have not succeeded as often as in previous decades.⁴ Importantly, this decrease in nonviolent movement success is a trend that we are witnessing alongside a rise in state repression, democratic backsliding, and authoritarianism worldwide.⁵ Violent crackdowns are taking place in the midst of a rise in the number of protests globally, including some led by marginalized minorities seeking rights. We propose that understanding these trends requires disaggregating the conditions under which we might expect nonviolent action to

succeed. An integrative reading of the books reviewed here suggests that we gain greater insight on this front by specifying the question to ask who gains from civil resistance. The answer, we argue, lies in the fact that the logic of nonviolent action differs depending on regime type and the status of those who lead the movement.

Scholars of nonviolent action, protest, and social movements have long examined the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of contention. Earlier works in Sociology explain social movements as a political process where structural conditions such as regime type, grievances, and resources account for most of the variation in main outcomes. For example, in her 1979 book on social revolutions, Theda Skocpol argues that the breakdown of the administrative and military capacity of the state allowed for oppressed peasants to successfully revolt against the monarchy.⁶ Later work, such as that by political sociologist Donatella della Porta, moves beyond an exclusively macro-level explanation to incorporate meso and micro dimensions.⁷ In addition to the political opportunity structure, della Porta argues that the ideological motivations of the main actors, as well as group dynamics and strategic interactions with the state, help explain the presence of leftist terrorism in democratic Italy and Germany. This turn to organizations, leadership, and their strategic interactions with the state have since become more common in the literature.⁸

This literature generally characterizes movements as lying on a continuum between nonviolent and violent. The political process framework that underlies contention is largely applicable regardless of where the case falls on the spectrum of tactics.⁹ By contrast, within Political Science the study of armed rebellion is largely separate from the study of protest. Scholars of rebellion mainly study civil wars and rarely examine the role of nonviolent contention.¹⁰ Some scholarship bridges this gap, such as the works of Wendy Pearlman and Oliver Kaplan,¹¹ but in most cases the focus remains on state-building and other non-violent aspects of waging war, rather than on nonviolent resistance itself.¹²

The study of protest within Political Science varies depending on subfield. The tradition in American Politics (AP) is similar to Sociology in that it treats tactics on a spectrum. The more recent wave of work in Comparative Politics (CP) and International Relations (IR), on the other hand, compares nonviolent to violent mobilization, rather than different levels of mobilization, or mobilization versus the absence of mobilization. While CP and IR scholars might acknowledge that movements cannot be perfectly categorized as either violent or nonviolent, the key comparisons and counterfactual analyses on which their inferences rest rely on these ideal types.¹³ These differences in approaches to the study of mobilization are critical for the CP subfield, as they raise questions about the kinds of phenomena that are comparable, the assumptions that are built into the counterfactuals we rely on to make inferences about collective action, and the extent to which different comparisons change our theories about the origins and outcomes of mobilization.

Three recent books in CP, AP, and Comparative-Historical Sociology—Ches Thurber's *Between Mao and Gandhi: The Social Roots of Civil Resistance*, LaGina Gause's *The Advantage of Disadvantage: Costly Protest and Political Representation for Marginalized Groups*, and Mohammad Ali Kadivar's *Popular Politics and the Path*

to *Durable Democracy*—tackle the longstanding questions of the origins and effects of mobilization in ways that help us answer many of the current shifts we are witnessing globally regarding protest, repression, and democratization. These books theorize and empirically test their arguments by comparing nonviolent versus violent movements, mobilization by disadvantaged versus advantaged groups, and longer versus shorter mobilization campaigns.

These books advance our understanding of protest in dictatorships and democracies, in part theorizing mobilization in the context of the digital revolution. Even with pre-digital era data, Thurber's and Gause's books carefully theorize and sometimes test how their arguments apply today. They improve our knowledge of the conditions for collective action success and shift focus to the critical transition period post-regime change.¹⁴

The books also advance research on the role of ethnic difference and marginalization in movements. In particular, these books improve our understanding of how marginalized populations can be advantaged or disadvantaged by nonviolent action, building on studies that have also broken ground in this area.¹⁵ The books illuminate how population composition and interconnections make nonviolent action more or less probable. They also help explain the apparent paradox of nonviolent discipline: on the one hand, the nonviolent action literature has long argued that nonviolent discipline is crucial for success because it reduces repression and increases legitimacy,¹⁶ while bottom-up violence has proven effective in some movements.¹⁷ In line with recent research,¹⁸ these books suggest that nonviolent discipline is not an objective quality that movements possess or do not possess; rather, the public interprets the use of nonviolent tactics differently depending on the identity of movement leaders. These insights on minority status raise new questions about coalition building and organizational development in nonviolent movements. How can disadvantaged populations forge coalitions with powerful sectors? When do these alliances help excluded minorities succeed?¹⁹

In terms of methodological contributions, these books are exemplars of multi-method research. They leverage advantages of each method and data source while not over-claiming what can be inferred from each empirical approach. They also innovate on specific methods, blending approaches in unique ways. For example, Thurber builds on studies that rely on quantitative network data by providing thick accounts of the connections between core groups of organizers in a series of case studies. He then uses cross-national data to test the generalizability of his theory. Gause uses a formal model to conceptualize the communicative function of protest for legislators in a democracy. She then provides survey data from Members of Congress and their staffers to probe the model's assumptions and employs two event datasets at the subnational level to test its predictions. Kadivar combines two sets of comparative case studies with quantitative analysis of an event dataset of transitions to democracy. Kadivar uses three main case studies to explain the mechanisms of success and failure and then develops two additional cases to test and examine exceptions to his theory.

We conclude by outlining two areas of future research that emerge from these books. The first calls for future studies to link the individual level and the social psychology literature to meso- and macro-level theories about minority status and exclusion.²⁰

The three books advance our understanding of the macro and meso levels by expanding the concept of exclusion to encompass various forms of disadvantage rarely studied alongside ethnic exclusion, such as the lack of endorsements from formal organizations. These works also demonstrate that the same status that disadvantages a group or organization under one regime type could advantage it under another. These findings challenge the widely held idea that ethnic exclusion is always a disadvantage in nonviolent collective action.²¹ Future research could map these insights about advantage and disadvantage in movements onto the literature on identity, emotions, and repression dynamics.

The second area of future research has to do with how processes of social expectation and prospective thinking are changing with the advent of the digital era. Social expectations, from the part of government officials and activists, play a significant role in explaining the development of organizing structures, the onset of mobilization, the politics of allyship, as well as the use and impact of repression. However, not much is known about where and how activists, as well as state agencies, get the ideas on which they base their social expectations, and how these ideas shape the formation of coalitions and the organizational infrastructure of movements.²² Scholars have argued that protest movements are becoming more common and less successful because their reliance on social media short-circuits the difficult and mundane process of building organizations and alliances.²³ Despite the centrality of these factors, however, little is known about how information technology has transformed prospective thinking, thereby changing the ability of movements to meet the central challenges of movement building.

Between Mao and Gandhi

In *Between Mao and Gandhi*, Ches Thurber explains why some movements for regime change choose to engage in armed resistance while others adopt a nonviolent approach. To explain variation in strategic choice across time and space, Thurber presents a theory about the social ties of the organizational core of the movement. He starts from the premise that a core group of challengers acts on their belief about the viability of civil resistance as a strategy to overthrow the state. Organizers will be more likely to decide on nonviolent action as opposed to armed action if they possess direct, interpersonal social ties to the grassroots and the regime. Social ties to different grassroots organizations serve a bridging function that enables them to mobilize the masses. Direct interpersonal ties to the regime make loyalty shifts more probable and repression less likely, both of which increase the expectation that civil resistance will be possible and effective. These groups are called integrated because they have ties with society (grassroots) and the elites (regime).

Insular challengers are those with weak grassroots and regime ties. They will be more likely to take up arms because insurgency induces regime change through a very different mechanism, which has more to do with material resources than mass mobilization. A small group of committed, well-resourced and disciplined fighters can control territory, inflict heavy losses on the state, and induce political concessions. Two other

types of challengers according to the typology (i.e., the “off-diagonal cases”) are insider cliques, characterized by strong ties to the regime but weak ones with the grassroots, and marginalized majorities, which have deep ties to the grassroots but weak ties to the regime. The theory expects the strategies of insider cliques to include assassinations and even coups, though these cases largely fall outside of the scope of Thurber’s book. Marginalized majorities, on the other hand, will be more likely to opt for civil resistance because of their greater mobilizing capacity. However, these mobilizing attempts will tend to face higher levels of state repression because the regime seeks to preserve its privileged minority status and avoid majority rule. Higher levels of state repression may also lead the movement to adopt armed action in combination with civil resistance, thus making hybrid campaigns more likely.

Thurber tests this theory with a three-pronged strategy. First, he leverages within-case time variation in campaign strategies in Nepal and shows qualitative differences in network structure to explain the choice of civil resistance and armed action by different organizational cores. Second, Thurber selects cases where the challengers are marginalized majorities, who lack regime ties but are strongly rooted in the grassroots (Syria, India, and South Africa). In these contexts, Thurber explores the challenges of waging civil resistance when ethnic divisions and exclusionary institutions reign. Some of these challengers were successful in building a strong civil resistance campaign, which Thurber uses to analyze how exclusion can be overcome by building organizations, constructing alliances, and internationalizing the struggle. Finally, Thurber probes the generalizability of his theory about social ties and strategic choice through a cross-national study that uses ethnic group size and fractionalization as a proxy for social ties. In doing so, he finds that on average, smaller, more excluded ethnic groups are more likely to initiate violent campaigns and that dominant ethnic groups are more likely to adopt a nonviolent strategy. His quantitative findings are thus consistent with the logic that integrated organizations are more likely to wage civil resistance and insular organizations are more likely to choose armed struggle.

Thurber’s book is a significant contribution to the study of nonviolent resistance and to the literature on conflict more broadly. He convincingly argues that social ties and networks condition the strategy that people use to challenge the state, superseding the driving force of ideological commitments. Even in cases when we would expect ideology to be important, such as when having past experience in one type of struggle and engaging in deep training, we observe strategic changes that co-vary with types of social ties, as expected in Thurber’s theory.

Thurber’s work has implications for understanding state repression. His evidence shows that social ties mediate the relationship between mobilization, and the severity and effect of repression. When a movement’s core has interpersonal ties to the regime, repression is less likely to be severe and more likely to backfire. Regime ties, therefore, make civil resistance onset more likely and severe repression less likely for both nonviolent and armed campaigns. The mobilizing prowess of marginalized majorities means that they opt for civil resistance, but these efforts are undermined by the potential—or actual—use of extreme repression. Thurber’s theory accounts for why movements led by

marginalized majorities and excluded minorities are more likely to involve armed struggle: it is less a result of more extreme grievances and more due to a lack of interpersonal social ties with the grassroots to mobilize the masses (in the case of excluded minorities) and of regime ties to prevent extreme forms of repression (in the case of marginalized majorities). Thurber's book thus crystallizes the tradeoffs and obstacles that excluded groups face when mounting a challenge against authoritarian and repressive states, particularly if they seek a peaceful way out.

Prospective thinking and social expectations play a crucial role in Thurber's theory about the origins of civil resistance. So much so that at times, the author discusses the outcome rather than the origins of the movement. This slippage is important for two reasons. First, many of the theories in conflict studies place significant weight on what the main actors know, what they think others know, what they think others know about what they know, and so on. Yet, there is rarely any evidence about how actors reach these conclusions and how they calibrate their actions based on them. Secondly, the fact that the origins and outcomes of movements are so deeply linked in the minds of the main actors means that there are important selection problems that need to be further examined. The main intractable selection problem we see has to do with how repression conditions the onset of civil resistance movements differently than armed insurgency. This selection problem is critical to understand not only the origins question, but also the movement success question. How does actual and expected repression against different groups factor into whether nonviolent action is chosen at all, whether it passes the threshold for us to consider it a "movement" or a "campaign," whether it becomes the predominant form of struggle in a society, and whether it eventually succeeds?

Thurber makes some progress in this regard by showing that activist leaders organize small and localized actions to test their capacity for mobilization. For example, leaders call for a protest, observe a weak showing and harsh state response, and then retreat and rethink their strategy. These early actions may also occur in the case of armed insurgencies, though Thurber does not explore this topic. The question remains, however: how can one distinguish between any number of calibration attempts and onset? Are they not the same thing? Is an early nonviolent protest attempt not the same as the onset of a civil resistance movement? We think that the empirical distinctions are largely arbitrary (a movement starts at a given participation number) and the theoretical distinctions remain underspecified.

That civil resistance requires deep social ties does not mean that Thurber thinks insular or insider cliques face an insurmountable structural challenge. Those who seek a peaceful way out of a dictatorial regime, but are not yet integrated, can form coalitions, build organizations, and/or internationalize the conflict. However, coalitions are difficult to construct, require major compromises, and may easily come apart when strained. Building organizations is also akin to developing interpersonal ties; however, this strategy requires an enormous investment of time and effort. The international community could mitigate the difficulties of lacking social ties, especially to the regime. However, relying on the international community can put the movement's legitimacy in peril, while the movement itself can also become too focused on their international standing

and neglect their roots.²⁴ In addition, the international community can promise to intervene and not do so when repression reaches extreme levels.²⁵

Two aspects of these dynamics remain unclear in Thurber's book, however. First, how can insular or marginalized majority groups forge alliances with the regime? The cases in the book, and even the theoretical discussion, explain more about how groups can develop—and have developed—grassroots ties. Can movements forge ties with the regime or are these connections more structural? Second, can organization-building take place during war and serve as the basis for nonviolent action? Thurber explains the ways in which the Maoists took decades to develop organizations during a civil war, which they then used to call on the masses for nonviolent resistance. But less is said about how war allowed Maoists to successfully develop the social roots of civil resistance, considering that wartime civilian compliance could reflect coercion and territorial control more than interpersonal ties. When does war cripple connections between grassroots organizations and when does it build them?

Finally, the centrality of social connections for the onset of civil resistance begs the question: how has social media changed this dynamic? Thurber explains that the advent of digital technologies means that even insular challengers can mobilize vast numbers of people quickly. Interpersonal ties to organizational cores are no longer required to mobilize the masses. However, presumably ties to the regime are still important insofar as lacking them should give activists pause given repression and the unlikelihood of defections. It is also less clear how social media has changed activists' prospective thinking. Have large protests lost their ability to signal the mobilizing prowess of an opposition movement? If so, how do activists now calibrate their actions? How do states understand the strength of their challengers if governments cannot rely on mobilization as a heuristic? The onset of civil resistance movements is easier now than ever, and it seems to not require integrated challengers. However, current empirical trends pointing to nonviolent action's declining success rate demonstrate that starting a movement is much easier than winning. Therefore, Thurber's theory seems very well equipped to provide us with an understanding of what makes movements succeed, and not just begin.

Popular Politics and the Path to Durable Democracy

In *Popular Politics and the Path to Durable Democracy*, Mohammad Ali Kadivar examines the reasons why some social movements successfully transition to democracy whereas other bottom-up transitions fall back to dictatorship. While grassroots contention may successfully oust an entrenched dictator, activists seeking regime change are often unprepared to face critical questions in the immediate aftermath: who will govern during the transition? What structure should the new democratic institutions take? How will they ensure that authoritarian leaders do not retain political power in the process? Kadivar contends that a movement is likely to consolidate its gains if it has been able to reach overarching agreement on the answers to these questions by the time of the transition.

In particular, Kadivar argues that prolonged social movements are more likely to ensure a continuation of democracy post-transition than popular campaigns that achieve success quickly. A longer period of contention means that the opposition has time to discuss, negotiate, and build consensus around a positive political project that guides the fragile moment of transition. Kadivar identifies two major threats to democracy that manifest during transitions and have long-term implications: weak civilian control over the military and weak institutionalization of democratic rules and constraints. The book argues that the process of intra-movement negotiation, refinement, and institution-building can offset both of these threats. First, it creates hegemonic opposition organizations that can credibly signal the movement's ability to re-mobilize if needed during the transition period. Second, a well-organized movement also produces civil society actors experienced in protest who can act as a check against potential encroachments on their new rights and institutions, including by those hegemonic opposition organizations.

Kadivar demonstrates how movement duration is tied to democratic consolidation by first establishing the relationship between social movement duration on the one hand, and years as an electoral democracy and the quality of democracy on the other. Kadivar constructs a dataset using various sources, including the Geddes, Wright, and Frantz dataset of political regimes and Chenoweth and Stephan's definition of primarily nonviolent campaigns.²⁶ He codes the duration of popular campaigns contributing to a democratic transition and shows that longer campaigns correlate with democratic survival, the quality of democratic institutions, and the strength of civil society. Kadivar then provides evidence for the connection between duration, organization-building, and democratic consolidation in five case studies: Poland, South Africa, Pakistan, Egypt, and Tunisia. While Poland and South Africa are the paradigmatic cases of long campaigns that developed strong oppositional organizations before achieving regime change, Pakistan is the ideal case to show the perils of a transition where popular mobilization played a peripheral role.

The more extensive case studies of Egypt and Tunisia illustrate the book's mechanisms, demonstrating how the two movements met the challenges of transition. Egyptians barely had time to build pro-democracy oppositional organizations when Mubarak's regime fell less than three weeks into the campaign. The two major political forces left, the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, were not democratic, while the original revolutionaries remained disorganized. The case of Tunisia is interesting because on the surface it contradicts Kadivar's central argument: it was a short-lived campaign that delivered relatively durable democracy. However, Kadivar argues that it was a pre-existing organization (a large labor union, the UGTI) that allowed Tunisia to leverage its capacity for mobilization and negotiation after Ben Ali left power. The UGTI was not a political party that would reach power, but instead played an effective role as a mediator between the major political forces. In both Egypt and Tunisia, the struggle between Islamists and non-Islamists took center stage during the transition, but it was only in Egypt that the polarization brought an end to the democratic opening.

Kadivar's timely book helps us understand why social movements that achieve quick success do not tend to bring about long-lasting change. Importantly, his theory draws our attention to the process of mobilization itself, as well as to the less visible aspects of movements. Durable success post-transition lies in lesser studied dynamics of mobilization, such as organization-building, negotiations, and the development of democratic practices. A key question that we are left with is whether campaign duration and organization-building always go hand-in-hand. Does a longer movement always mean a stronger and better oppositional organization in the end? Presumably these organizations can be created pre-mobilization, as we saw with the UGTI in Tunisia. It seems that duration ultimately serves as a proxy for organizational cohesion and development. Kadivar at times argues that organizational development can only be achieved during mobilization. In Serbia and Ukraine, however, activists undertook organization-building efforts precisely in order to develop the mobilizing capacity to jump-start the 2000 Bulldozer and 2004 Orange revolutions, respectively. The work of Wendy Pearlman in Syria shows that social movement organizations may be non-existent in very repressive societies, which means that activists are forced to develop organizations during contention.²⁷ An important area of future research might then ask, what aspects of organizational development can be forged pre-mobilization and which have to be hashed out during contention? Are cases like Tunisia, which have pre-mobilization organizations that serve as bulwarks of democracy, less common than cases like Egypt, which lack strong democratic forces? And relatedly, what are the conditions under which longer campaigns lead to even more disagreement and movement fracture?

Kadivar's theory suggests that for democracy to endure, a hegemonic organization—like an oppositional political party forged during a long period of mobilization—would ideally govern post-transition to provide stability during the period of democratic consolidation. At the same time, there are important downsides to oppositional political parties leading social movements for regime change. Political parties are more likely to view politics as zero-sum and aim for a minimum winning coalition.²⁸ By contrast, civil resistance is based on a very different logic: the more groups, sectors of society, and people involved, the more power that campaigns can harness. In addition, the more people involved, the more widely the movement can impart democratic practices for a successful post-transition period.

There is thus a tension between negative coalitions, which can be very inclusive and support procedural democracy, and positive coalitions, which provide a clearer path to institutional power but inevitably exclude certain groups and visions. Kadivar argues that a strong and independent civil society provides a check on new political parties. However, under what conditions does a dominant oppositional political party steamroll civil society and support authoritarianism and when does the effervescence between dominant oppositional political parties and independent civil society help democratic consolidation? In the Egyptian case, the "opportunistic" behavior of groups that Kadivar describes reminisce of party behavior in competitive democratic elections. Why isn't the belief in procedural democracy a sufficient vision for durable success? And why wasn't

the negative coalition in Egypt, for example, activated when their young democracy came under threat from the military once again?

An additional lingering question is tied to Kadivar's key mechanisms. The book argues that revolutionary forces need a strong, coherent organizational infrastructure in order to have credible leadership during transitional negotiations. The idea is that a strong organizational infrastructure produces civil society actors who can provide a check on recently elected leaders once they take power in the post-transition period. If a movement is organized as a decentralized coalition of smaller organizations, however, it may still lack clear leadership during the transition period. Meanwhile, if a hegemonic organization comes to dominate other movement actors, then there may not be a strong civil society that can act as a check in the post-transition period. Kadivar's theory assumes that any organizational infrastructure will have the same impact across cases. Furthermore, Kadivar does not theorize sources of cross-movement variation in organizational cohesion and fracture beyond the duration of mobilization. While his mechanisms shed light on the importance of intra-movement dynamics to democratic outcomes, further research is needed to examine how the specific configurations of a movement's organizational infrastructure emerge and then shape short- and long-term outcomes.

Jonathan Pinckney's recent book on civil resistance transitions suggests how variation on this front may shape outcomes.²⁹ Like Kadivar, Pinckney is concerned with the long-term effects of bottom-up regime transitions for democratic consolidation. Instead of focusing on regime durability, however, Pinckney explains variation in regime type. Both authors highlight the importance of a movement's ability to remobilize during and after the transition if needed. Pinckney adds to this condition the need for movements to avoid maximalist behavior. In other words, movement leaders must compromise and institutionalize revolutionary goals. Per Pinckney's theory, a hegemonic organization with the power to remobilize may not facilitate a transition to full democracy if it empowers maximalist leaders who engage in intransigent all-or-nothing behavior. In these cases, the country remains in a perpetual state of transition and extra-institutional contention. By contrast, one could witness a situation like in Zambia, where various organizations united under the umbrella of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in 1990 to resist the country's one-party regime. Upon forcing the government to hold elections in 1991, however, civil society largely demobilized, while the MMD ran as a political party and subsequently established a new single-party regime.³⁰ Was the failure to transition to a full democracy the result of the movement's short duration, or was it the result of the configuration of power within the movement?

Kadivar's theory also opens up additional questions on the relationship between movements' organizational development and repression. Kadivar initially theorizes that organization-building may happen during periods of lowered repression. Once built, those organizations then sustain a movement through subsequent periods of repressive backlash. Longer mobilizations thus require greater organization precisely so that they can endure cycles of repression. In his statistical analysis, Kadivar finds that longer movements tend to emerge under more, not less, repressive regimes. However, his measure averages civil liberties in the ten years prior to a transition, which leaves open

the possibility of significant fluctuation in levels of repression that might correlate with lower or higher degrees of movement organization. While explaining such a finding is beyond the scope of the book, identifying the relationship between organizational development and repression would clarify the causal chain in Kadivar's theory and provide important insight on declining movement effectiveness today. Is repression something that forces movements to organize? Do movements need to be organized already to endure severe repression? Or is it similar to the two-way relationship he describes between protest mobilization and organization-building, with each action fostering and reinforcing the other?

The Advantage of Disadvantage

In *The Advantage of Disadvantage: Costly Protest and Political Representation for Marginalized Groups*, LaGina Gause argues that protest in the United States is most effective when it is led by the marginalized and disadvantaged in society. Counterintuitively, when White or other privileged communities protest, they do not get their demands translated into legislation as often as minorities do. The reason is that those who have less social, political, and economic power face higher barriers to collective action; therefore, their protest signals stronger preferences than when well-off or well-organized citizens protest. Gause argues that protest is not a helpful device for representatives to discern when an issue is more or less salient for White or other privileged constituents. Lower barriers to participation mean that we would expect advantaged populations to protest in the United States for important and for less important issues, while we would only expect disadvantaged populations to protest when an issue is truly salient. In turn, members of Congress are more likely to act on more intense preferences from their constituencies, as they demonstrate the potential electoral costs if representatives are not responsive.

Gause defines protest and collective action broadly to include any action in which "multiple participants publicly profess a grievance or concern" (p. 3). This term thus includes everything from petitions to lawsuits, protests and riots, and even lynchings and mob violence. Her analysis takes the full spectrum of tactics into account, arguing that any form of collective action seeks to shape legislators' behavior. Indeed, all forms of protest communicate citizen demands, but legislators gauge the level of salience of these demands by observing who is protesting. There are myriad barriers to protest, including lacking financial resources or formal education, being a member of a marginalized community, organizing without a formal group, and/or being subject to state repression. As each of these factors raise protest costs, they signal on behalf of the protesters a greater commitment to seeing their issue addressed.

Empirically, Gause first probes her theory's assumptions by surveying local, state, and national elected officials and their staffers. The survey responses are consistent with the idea that elected officials care about and pay attention to protest. Representatives not only reportedly care about who is protesting, but also take into consideration the size of protests, the demands, and the political implications of addressing protesters' concerns.

To test her core arguments, Gause leverages the Dynamics of Collection Action (DCA) dataset. She uses a subset of the data from 1991–1995, a period during which national protest movements were less pervasive, in order to reduce potential spillover effects of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and subsequent national movements. Restricting the analysis also allows the author to more accurately evaluate the relationship between protest events and representatives' voting behavior. Gause finds that overall, representatives are far more likely to support legislation when protesters are Black than when they are White, when they are lower-income as opposed to higher-income, and when they lack the backing of formal organizations. In short, representatives pass legislation to address protester concerns more often when the group protesting is somehow disadvantaged than when it is advantaged.

Gause also finds that the size of protests matters as does electoral competition and partisanship, but that the advantage of disadvantage holds even controlling for these factors. Legislators are consistently more likely to enact laws in response to protests from low-resource than from resource-rich groups, even when there is little political competition in their district. Further, Democrats and Independents vote with Black protesters more than with White protesters, and Republicans are about as likely to vote with Black constituents as with their White counterparts following protests from these groups. There is almost no case of legislators favoring protests by high-resource groups compared to low-resource groups.

Gause's excellent book challenges our assumptions about the ways that minorities are disadvantaged in social movements,³¹ even as she builds on recent work in line with her argument.³² In the democratic context, where extra-institutional mechanisms of protest are protected, minorities are more likely to succeed than privileged groups because of electoral competition and representation. Gause agrees that minorities are more likely to face more repression than high-status groups, but instead of arguing that repression (both actual repression and public support for repression) leads to defeat, Gause shows that legislators are more likely to favor protests that are costlier and therefore those that suffered state repression. In particular, Gause disrupts assumptions about the limits and opportunities for ethnic minorities in social movements. Whereas Thurber's book suggests that minority populations are inherently disadvantaged in struggles against authoritarian regimes, Gause's book suggests that the opposite is the case for those same populations in democratic contexts. In regimes with electoral competition and protections for extra-institutional contention, representatives have incentives to pay greater attention to protest by disadvantaged minorities than privileged constituents—even more so if they protest violently and suffer repression. Gause's finding also undermines the prevailing understanding in the civil resistance literature that nonviolent discipline is almost always helpful for success,³³ and that it is especially important for excluded minorities to remain nonviolent to gain public support and reduce the probability of repression.³⁴ The only exception to the overwhelming agreement on the importance of nonviolent discipline is the situation when violent flanks are helpful because they serve as a contrast to the nonviolent wing of the movement.³⁵

Gause boldly argues that disruptive and even violent protest is more effective in the United States than peaceful protest, because it signals to legislators that the issues are

of higher salience. The steep costs of using violence means that protesters deeply care about the issue and may electorally punish legislators who ignore their demands. Gause acknowledges that there could be electoral risks for supporting fringe issues and disruptive protest. However, her analysis shows that being responsive to the demands of disruptive protesters does not seem to have negative consequences for legislators. However, if violent protests are perceived as disorganized, would they not counter the signal that the movement's organizational capacity might translate into an electoral force? In addition, it could be that a legislative response to violent protest may be perceived by some as an effort to bring order, which incumbents need to do to demonstrate that they are effective representatives for the community as a whole. As such, the question remains as to why these forms of costly collective action are rewarded with legislative support: is it because they signal high salience for the protesters and their constituents or because inaction can fuel more violence and affect how other constituents perceive their representatives' ability to maintain the peace? Nevertheless, Gause's initial findings turn the study of nonviolent action on its head, as they change what it means to have advantage and disadvantage in certain political systems and the conditions under which different types of extra-institutional tactics are most effective.

Gause also provides insight on the highly relevant question of how social media has impacted the dynamics and outcomes of collective action. Drawing on an original dataset of collective action events in 2012, Gause finds that digital actions are less likely to garner legislative representation than in-person actions. Because digital activism is less costly, it does not communicate issue salience as clearly and therefore is unlikely to elicit a response from elected officials. This argument is consistent with findings by scholars like Zeynep Tufekci,³⁶ who argues that it is precisely the ease of digital mobilization that undermines movement success. Importantly, Gause finds that despite the reduction in responsiveness to digital collective action, lower-resource protesters still maintain their relative advantage over higher-resource groups when protesting online. The exception are formal interest groups: they are more likely to achieve legislative wins than informal interest groups even though formal groups are more high-resource than informal ones. Gause explains this apparent contradiction by arguing that formal groups communicate a greater ability to translate protest into votes than informal groups. This finding suggests that when formal groups engage in online activism, they can also signal offline mobilizing capacity and their ability to become an electoral threat.

Extra-institutional collective action in a consolidated democracy is a method of last resort: it suggests that voting, the courts, and countless other institutional mechanisms of accountability and representation have failed. As Gause points out, American democracy has failed the poor, racialized minorities, and other disadvantaged communities in many realms: these populations have exhausted institutional avenues and thus launched protest movements like Black Lives Matter. High-resource and relatively advantaged populations also turn to protest as a last resort, but we think that powerful majorities who protest in consolidated democracies may be fundamentally different in the objectives they seek. If White citizens have exhausted institutional mechanisms without seeing meaningful change, it suggests that their demands are more fringe, even if they fall within the

same category of rights. On average, we would expect Blacks' protest demands to be less "disputable" (i.e., that simply require implementing the letter of the law) than the demands of White protesters, which may require expansions in the law. Another reason why racial minorities in the United States may observe more legislative action after protest than Whites is because of representatives' desire to maintain stability. Whether or not they are justified in believing so, if representatives fear riots from racial minority protest more than White protest, it may be that they are responding to the former more often to prevent disorder. In this case, legislative responsiveness may be similar to the dynamic described in authoritarian settings, where dictators set up institutions as safety valves and give concessions to the population, while manipulating them in some way to ensure regime survival.³⁷

The safety valve dynamic also raises the question of whether legislative representation constitutes a form of success for movements. In several examples, the votes that Gause labels as being "on behalf of" protesters may very well benefit or signal support for that population, but they may not meet the actual demands or address the core of the issue that brought protesters to the streets in the first place. The 1992 Rodney King protests in Los Angeles is one example Gause provides of a disadvantaged Black population protesting "an entire system of oppression that regarded Black people as less than citizens" (p. 20). Gause highlights the fact that Republican Congressman Jerry Lewis broke with his party and usual voting behavior to support bill H.R. 5123, which provided funding to rebuild destroyed businesses and establish a youth employment program in the area. While the protests did seemingly influence Lewis's vote, the question remains as to whether H.R. 5132 provided a meaningful form of representation for the protesters themselves. To what degree did the limited aid address the deeper systemic issues around equal status as citizens that Gause identifies as driving the protests?

Methodological Contributions

For aggrieved citizens who have been unable to effect change through state institutions, extra-institutional channels include the wide spectrum from armed insurgency to non-violent collective action. Within this area of study, armed insurgencies, civil war, and political violence have dominated the Comparative Politics subfield. The literature on civil war has made important progress using a variety of methods. Initially, it was dominated by large-N quantitative analysis of time-series cross-sectional datasets comparing all civil wars yearly in order to observe global patterns.³⁸ The models that these scholars tested shed light on questions of civil war onset, termination, and duration by including variables such as ethnic fractionalization, mountainous terrain, GDP per capita, and population size. Concerned with problems of statistical inference, the lack of independence between units, the inability to control for unobservables, and the enormous within-case variation exhibited in civil wars, comparativists turned to explaining the phenomenon at the subnational level.³⁹ Within-country comparisons control for colonial legacy, regime type, oil production, and neighboring countries, among other factors, to isolate variables

of interest. They leverage time and spatial variation, vast sources of archival data, as well as instrumental variables and exogenous shocks, for causal inference.⁴⁰

The Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset⁴¹ jump-started the global patterns era in the civil resistance literature, though it did so in a way that compares nonviolent movements to civil wars rather than nonviolent movements to the absence of movements.⁴² This research has improved our understanding of how the onset, outcomes, and dynamics of nonviolent movements are different from armed insurgencies.⁴³ Protest event datasets, which have been primarily used in Sociology to study the American Civil Rights Movement,⁴⁴ and have more recently been developed with regional and global coverage,⁴⁵ disaggregate the study of nonviolent collective action and, importantly, remove the judgment call that researchers have to make to give a start and end date to each “campaign” or “movement.” The nonviolent action literature has also more recently leveraged subnational variation with rich datasets and employed effective subnational and cross-national case study comparisons to examine movement success.⁴⁶ Work at the individual level, primarily through survey experiments, has also advanced the field and drawn connections to findings in social psychology. This literature has advanced our understanding of participation in high-risk protests by examining the role of emotions like fear and anger, as well as the impact of having a family history of repression.⁴⁷

The analysis of social networks has also been a prominent method to study movements and human rights advocacy,⁴⁸ and this is where Thurber’s book contributes the most methodologically. The main within-country cases of challenger organizations in Nepal and Syria show qualitative differences in network structures that are made visible through extensive interviews of key actors. These rich data illustrate the processes through which decision-makers think about strategic options, namely, the use of nonviolent action versus armed action, before the movement reaches the onset threshold. The fact that the networks underpinning challenger organizations that chose nonviolent resistance exhibited similar characteristics, across such different time periods and countries, provides strong evidence for the generalizability of Thurber’s argument about the social roots of civil resistance. However, the network structure that Thurber argues makes civil resistance possible is more of a necessary than a necessary and sufficient condition for onset. The book therefore contributes to research that has also sought to explain the emergence of nonviolent protest by comparing it to armed insurgencies, by building predictive models,⁴⁹ and by favoring historical explanations.⁵⁰ Future research should examine the question of nonviolent movement onset by setting up the more straightforward counterfactual scenario of movement absence, while acknowledging its tidal wave or diffusive character, being sensitive to different onset thresholds, and disaggregating challenger organizations within the same potential movement à la Thurber.⁵¹

Kadivar and Gause’s main methodological contribution lies in disaggregating the outcomes of nonviolent collective action. Kadivar does so by examining the moment of regime transition and its aftermath to account for variation in democratic quality and institutions following successful mass mobilizations. This exciting new research links movement dynamics, including organization-building, with the more long-term effects

of protest movements following regime transitions.⁵² Kadivar's use of Arabic-language newspaper articles to map Egypt's transition moment is helpful in understanding how the anti-Mubarak alliance fractured, how the post-movement opposition became dominated by certain groups, and how they made decisions upon the success of the mass movement. Future research should leverage other sources of data that could move beyond national public debates on intra-opposition balance of power, decision-making processes, and the organizational infrastructure of different opposition groups.

Gause makes progress on the disaggregation of outcomes by addressing a key challenge in the democratization literature: the difficulty of attributing social change to bottom-up collective action.⁵³ That there was mass mobilization before and/or during a regime transition, or before and/or during legislative change, is not sufficient to infer that mass mobilization caused the change. By testing with time-series data the final passage of a bill in Congress closely following a protest within a representative's district, and during a time when there were no major social movements, Gause sets up a conservative test of her theory about the effects of protest. Questions remain about the relationship between movement demands and what representatives ultimately pass in the form of legislation. Therefore, future scholarship should continue this line of research, which links grassroots efforts to specific changes in policy at the meso level or political decisions at the macro level.

Minority Status, Ethnicity, and Exclusion

At the heart of the study of ethnic exclusion and minority status in Comparative Politics is power. Generally speaking, excluded minorities lack representation and access to government institutions,⁵⁴ are discriminated against in almost every facet of social and economic life, and are also subject to worse levels of repression than privileged populations.⁵⁵ Power is also at the center of nonviolent collective action as ordinary citizens seek to level the political playing field to affect change, particularly when institutional avenues close. Importantly, the books reveal that the mechanisms through which nonviolent action and protest generate power can be strikingly different depending on contextual factors, such as regime type. Gause discusses protest and other forms of collective action, even disruptive ones like riots, as serving primarily a communicative purpose in a democracy. In fact, protest serves as an alternative to polls and focus groups for elected officials facing re-election.⁵⁶ Therefore, in Gause's model, protests in democracies generate power through elections: protesters are as strong as activists' ability to show that they can translate street mobilization into votes.

On the other hand, Thurber and Kadivar convey protest movements as generating power by shifting relationships—institutional, financial, political, social, and even personal ones. For example, Kadivar discusses the importance of South African trade unions moving from a narrow focus on shop floor issues to a more militant strategy that used strikes and other labor tactics to advance political goals. This shift was critical in reorganizing

the movement to endure a period of repression and increasing pressure on the National Party to negotiate. Ultimately, Kadivar's and Thurber's model of collective action, as is the case with most of the scholarship on civil resistance, suggests that protest movements in dictatorships are as strong as their ability to generate defections and shifts in allegiances, especially from incumbent loyalists.⁵⁷ Movements win by weakening regimes and leaving them with fewer people who are willing to do their bidding, particularly among those who are part of the selectorate and winning coalition.⁵⁸ This pathway to success is why excluded majorities and discriminated minorities are disadvantaged in nonviolent collective action: they are often not part of the selectorate or otherwise integrated in society enough to impose real costs on the ruling elite.⁵⁹ Excluded groups have a more difficult time ensuring that the selectorate is disincentivized from remaining loyal to the incumbent.⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that in Gause's case, the main disadvantaged groups in the U.S. are included in the selectorate, as they are citizens and vote in elections. However, she argues that even undocumented immigrants are able to catalyze legislation. For non-voters to induce legislative change through protest, Gause argues that they must have some sort of private information that is meaningful to legislative behavior and also be able to assist or undermine legislators' goals. As such, there remain under-explored dimensions of influence that minorities have, which do not follow a purely electoral logic and which do not fit the expectations of selectorate theory, which predicts that excluded minorities outside of the selectorate have a particularly difficult time mounting a challenge against rulers. Furthermore, the two logics of how collective nonviolent action generates power (via signaling and shifting relationships) mean that excluded and discriminated minorities are advantaged in some situations and greatly disadvantaged in others. This duality builds upon political violence research in Comparative Politics and Sociology, which shows that ethnic homogeneity and minority status are at an advantage for the onset of mobilization because insular groups can develop tightly knit networks of trust.⁶¹ Putting these findings in the political violence literature in conversation with scholarly work on nonviolent action would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the role of race and exclusion in nonviolent movements.

What is missing from a signaling theory of collective action is the role of allyship. How does a multi-racial democracy develop without racial minorities building meaningful and cross sectoral alliances with majorities and advantaged populations? As Thurber demonstrates in his book, the nonviolent action literature theorizes alliances as one of the key mechanisms to success and argues that they are particularly important for minority-led movements.⁶² Minority-majority alliances are on the whole beneficial for the minority because they reduce the likelihood of repression, the severity of repression, and increase the likelihood of defections.⁶³ Therefore, minority-majority alliances make nonviolent collective action more likely to occur and more likely to succeed. Further, as Kadivar's work suggests, intra-opposition alliances are fundamental for the quality and durability of democracy post-regime change. However, Gause's model seems to suggest that allying with advantaged populations might minimize the communicative power of protest.

These books thus have implications for the study of minority status and exclusion in Comparative Politics because they broaden the conception of advantage and disadvantage in nonviolent collective action. For Gause, protest sends the message of salience depending on who acts. But who acts is not just a matter of ethnic difference or even minority status. For example, the presence of formal organizations in protest efforts is related to failure, not success, because they communicate that the protest was less costly and therefore the issue less salient. This line of reasoning suggests that minorities benefit from working in isolation and without formal organizing structures. However, and as Gause also acknowledges, formal organizations can signal greater power at the ballot box, which should increase legislative attentiveness even with a lower degree of issue salience. We wonder if the forging of coalitions and the development of organizing structures could signal strength and salience in the same way that low resources do: minorities coming together with the majority and building organizations requires an enormous investment of time, energy, and commitment. Therefore, minority-majority alliances could demonstrate even more conviction and the potential for electoral consequences. Sustained action is another costly signal, and it can only be accomplished through organizing structures that are more likely to lead to durable change, as Kadivar demonstrates.

There may be downsides to broadening the concept of advantage and disadvantage to this extent, however. Some protester traits, such as alliances with formal organizations, might communicate issue salience and low cost at the same time, in which case the theory becomes indeterminate. Furthermore, past scholarly work shows that people interpret the same actions differently depending on whether they are waged by majorities or minorities.⁶⁴ Further research should examine how government officials and the public interpret the actions of protesters depending on minority status, especially in the more indeterminate cases of advantage and disadvantage. The other downside to using the same framework for all types of disadvantages is that we risk missing what is unique about the racialization of collective action that may not apply to other features that disadvantage protesters.

Conclusion

Whether we call it nonviolent action, civil resistance, unarmed social movements, and/or collective action, reading these books side-by-side allows us to glean unique insights on a phenomenon that is often siloed in scholarly work. Taken together, they make clear that movements exhibit fundamentally different logics depending on whether they take place in democracies or dictatorships and whether they seek maximalist political change or more modest reforms. The differences have significant implications for who is most likely to achieve success in such contexts, improving our understanding of how marginalized populations can be advantaged or disadvantaged through nonviolent collective action. They help explain the apparent paradox of nonviolent discipline being crucial for success in some cases and bottom-up violence proving effective in others.

These works also generate new insights into questions about repression, digital mobilization, coalition building, and organizational development that are useful for activists facing a challenging global context. In doing so, they also open up new avenues for research that can shed light on the declining effectiveness of civil resistance worldwide while remaining attentive to varying contextual conditions.

For example, the biggest obstacle that movements face in dictatorships, even before onset, is state repression.⁶⁵ Scholars have shown that non-state armed activity makes state repression more likely and more severe because the state suffers fewer reputational costs when repressing violent actors.⁶⁶ This is why civil resistance scholars and practitioners emphasize the importance of nonviolent discipline.⁶⁷ Repression not only prevents the emergence of protest movements, as Thurber argues, but also derails them and makes success more difficult. That said, the dynamics of backfire complicate the effect of repression on movements.⁶⁸ At moderate levels of repression, it could be helpful for activists if bystanders see the cruelty of the opponent.⁶⁹ Outrage can generate supporters and thus strengthen the movement.⁷⁰

But when repression involves the wholesale imprisonment, torture, and execution of the opposition, movements can rarely continue operating publicly, as Kadivar explains happened to the Muslim Brotherhood during General Sisi's takeover. Social movements then shift to the underground, where secrecy makes it very difficult to continue building the interconnections Thurber describes are crucial for civil resistance to take hold and to continue building the organizations that Kadivar contends are needed for long-term success. Future research should examine the conditions under which repression makes movements last longer because it is more difficult to win, while also making fractionalization more likely.⁷¹ Longer duration and more fractionalization may make both regime change and the consolidation of gains less likely. Regardless, given the increase in the number of authoritarian and repressive regimes in the world, these books make clear that activists would increase the probability of their success by focusing on relationship-building and organization-building.

Future scholarly work should also examine protest emergence and outcomes in contexts of high polarization, radicalization, and democratic backsliding. These books suggest that collective action may serve as a critical defense against authoritarianism. Kadivar, for example, demonstrates the importance of a mobilized civil society checking government institutions during regime transitions. Their ability to remain mobilized is what prevents authoritarian elites from claiming power. Gause suggests that protest activity is important so that the government lives up to its promise of equal rights. Democratic institutions are not a sufficient guarantor of equal rights, and mobilization serves as a critical tool for disadvantaged populations to achieve representation. However, in highly polarized or radicalized environments, the movement—and its use of even peaceful contentious tactics—may be perceived as radical and violent. This may be even more true for racialized or otherwise marginalized groups. In that sense, even nonviolent pro-democracy movements may be viewed by their audiences as threatening, intransigent, and unrepresentative, with the effect of further radicalizing supporters of the opposing side.⁷² If this dynamic unfolds, can nonviolent resistance in fact exacerbate

authoritarianism and make democracy less likely? Scholars ought to examine these questions and build on the three new books to develop different logics of how nonviolent resistance works and for whom.

NOTES

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1. Maximalism refers to the goals of the movement, which are either center-seeking or secessionist. Reformist movements are excluded.

2. Chenoweth and Stephan define success as a campaign achieving its stated goals within a year of peak activities, as a direct result of its activities. See Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

3. There have also been important critiques of the book, including that the database of nonviolent and armed insurgencies is incomplete (though the authors are constantly updating it: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/navco>) and that the book does not take regime type and repression seriously (See Fabrice Lehoucq, “Does Nonviolence Work?,” *Comparative Politics*, 48 (January 2016), 269–87). Others point out that the difference in success rates between maximalist nonviolent and armed insurgencies becomes essentially zero when marginalized groups in society lead campaigns (See Deborah Manekin and Tamar Mitts, “Effective for Whom? Ethnic Identity and Nonviolent Resistance,” *American Political Science Review*, 116 (February 2022), 160–80).

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