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# Understanding strategic choice: The determinants of civil war and nonviolent campaign in self-determination disputes

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**Abstract**

What determines why some self-determination disputes develop into mass nonviolent campaigns, others turn into civil wars, and still others remain entirely in the realm of conventional politics? A great deal of work has addressed the factors that lead to violent mobilization, but less attention has been paid to understanding why disputes become violent or nonviolent, comparing these two as strategic choices relative to conventional politics. This article examines the determinants of strategy choice in self-determination disputes by analyzing how a variety of factors affect the costs and benefits of conventional political strategies, mass nonviolent campaign, and civil war. I find that civil war is more likely, as compared to conventional politics, when self-determination groups are larger, have kin in adjoining states, are excluded from political power, face economic discrimination, are internally fragmented, demand independence, and operate in states at lower levels of economic development. I find that nonviolent campaign is more likely, as compared to conventional politics, when groups are smaller, are less geographically concentrated, are excluded from political power, face economic discrimination, make independence demands, and operate in non-democracies. Examining the full set of strategies available to self-determination groups allows us to more accurately understand why these groups engage in mass nonviolent campaign and civil war.

**Keywords**

civil war, dissent, nonviolence, strategic choice

Violent disputes over self-determination are the most common conflicts in the world today. Yet, many groups seeking greater self-rule pursue it through conventional politics. Still others mobilize for mass nonviolence in a bid to achieve greater self-determination. Why do groups with similar grievances challenge the state in different ways?

Individuals and organizations seeking political change can employ a variety of tactics ranging from conventional politics to nonviolent tactics to violence. Increasing attention has been paid to nonviolence as a successful strategy for social change (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Additionally, the question of why civil wars occur has received much study. Yet, we know little about whether the choices to pursue violent rebellion or nonviolence rather than conventional politics have similar or disparate causes when seen as alternatives.

These gaps in knowledge exist because violence and nonviolence have been studied predominantly as separate phenomena, and because much of the cross-national research on large-scale conflict has focused on civil wars. Several decades of research have improved our understanding of why some states experience civil wars at certain times. However, we typically study civil war in isolation from alternative means for creating social change. That is, we study civil war as dichotomous – either war or

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nothing. Dissidents, however, have several options available to them beyond civil war – they can remain inactive, operate through conventional political channels, adopt violent tactics, or engage in nonviolent resistance.

This article focuses on the different strategies employed by self-determination (SD) groups, as an important subset of social movements in international politics. These groups challenge the state for greater autonomy, and at the extreme, independence. I argue that groups pick strategies based on the costs of those strategies and their anticipation of achieving success through them. Operating through conventional politics is generally less costly; however, institutional channels do not exist in all states and, even if they do, not all groups can anticipate achieving their objectives through them. Irregular political strategies (such as mass nonviolence or violence) are likely to be more costly than conventional politics but each may be more attractive to SD groups given certain conditions that lower the costs of mobilization or increase the chance of success.

In the next section, I briefly discuss the politics of self-determination and survey existing explanations for when and how groups mobilize against the state. I then focus explicitly on the strategies available to SD groups and provide a theoretical framework for why they pursue specific strategies which emphasizes the costs and benefits of different types of mobilization, and how different factors should influence each. I conduct an empirical analysis of the determinants of civil war, nonviolent campaign, and conventional politics in state–SD group dyads. I find that civil war is more likely than relying on conventional politics, when self-determination groups are larger, have kin in adjoining states, are excluded from political power, face economic discrimination, are internally fragmented, demand independence, and operate in states at lower levels of economic development. I find that nonviolent campaign is more likely, compared to conventional politics, when groups are smaller, less geographically concentrated, excluded from political power, face economic discrimination, make independence demands, and operate in non-democracies. I conclude by highlighting future directions for research on strategic choice that includes multiple possible strategies of dissent.

## The politics of self-determination

Self-determination disputes revolve around disagreement between groups with claims to national self-determination and their host state over the status of the group within that state. SD groups make a large range of demands on states, but all seek greater self-rule. At the extreme, groups such as the East Timorese, the Chechens in Russia, and the Oromo in Ethiopia have demanded a sovereign state. Short of this, many SD groups seek autonomy within their host state, though the nature of these demands varies widely.[1] States engaged in disputes with SD groups have a variety of preferences as well but, in general, prefer to retain as much authority at the center as possible. However, because these disputes are costly, states balance their desire to retain power with their desire to minimize the costs these disputes place on them.

Groups seeking greater self-determination, then, seek to gain greater control over their own affairs from a state that is often reluctant to give it to them. These groups can pursue these aims in three basic ways. They can press their demands through conventional political channels, such as engaging in electoral politics, petitioning the state, or pursuing legal recourse. All SD groups make public demands on the state for greater autonomy, and when they use conventional political strategies, they do so through largely institutional means.

SD groups can also resort to irregular (or unconventional) politics. This means strategies that are designed to impose some costs on the state in connection with the demands that are being made and which operate outside of normal institutional channels. Irregular politics can involve either violent challenges to the state or nonviolent tactics. Violent tactics can include civil war and terrorism and are designed to impose sufficient costs on the state so that it gives the group some, or all, of what it wants.

Nonviolent tactics entail some form of non-routine and non-institutionalized political behavior directed toward some policy change, and which does not involve violence. This may include activities such as strikes, protests, sit-ins, and direct action but excludes institutionalized forms of political behavior such as voting (which here I am treating as conventional politics).[2] Nonviolent action encompasses both acts of commission (i.e. doing something authorities seek to

[1] SD group demands vary from identity protection to cultural, economic, and political autonomy, to independence, and even union or reunion with another state.

[2] This concept draws on McAdam & Tarrow (2000). They argue that political actors make decisions about tactics along three dimensions – legal vs. illegal, institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized, and violent vs. nonviolent. Here, I differentiate between violent and nonviolent and institutionalized and non-institutionalized activity, and ignore whether the activity is legal.

prevent) and acts of omission (i.e. refusing to do something the authorities' orders require).

## Determinants of strategy

Why do some SD groups engage in conventional politics, while others resort to irregular strategies (either violent or nonviolent)? Additionally, when groups use irregular strategies, why do some use violent tactics, and others use nonviolence? There is a large literature that addresses why some countries experience civil wars and others do not. This literature does not focus on self-determination explicitly, but many civil wars are fought over self-determination. The cross-national literature on the determinants of civil war generally suggests that civil wars are more likely when state capacity is lower, opportunity cost for potential rebels is lower, grievances (both political and economic) are higher, terrain is more conducive to insurgency, the state has a larger population, and the country has previously experienced a civil war.[3]

A related body of work addresses ethnic conflict more directly. Toft (2003) finds that ethnic groups are more likely to challenge the state when they are geographically concentrated, and Jenne, Saideman & Lowe (2007) find that concentrated groups are both more likely to rebel and more likely to make more extreme demands related to self-determination. Saideman & Ayres (2000) show that ethnic groups divided by political borders generate conflict. Cederman, Wimmer & Min (2010) find that ethnic groups are more likely to rebel when they are excluded from power at the center. Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch (2011) show that both ethnic groups that are poorer and those that are more wealthy than the average group are more likely to be involved in ethnic conflicts with their host state. Walter (2009) finds that conflict is more likely between ethnic groups and states when there are more ethnic groups in the state.

Many, but not all, ethnic conflicts are fought over self-determination. Cunningham (forthcoming) finds that civil war is more likely between states and self-determination groups when groups are more internally divided. An additional literature focuses on secessionist disputes (a subset of self-determination disputes), examining when these disputes turn violent. Sambanis & Zinn (2006) find that repression of nonviolence related to self-determination makes secessionist disputes more violent. Sorens (2012) suggests that these disputes turn violent when states treat sovereignty as non-negotiable, refusing to provide legal recourse for self-determination claims.

The literature on civil war, ethnic conflict, and self-determination/secessionist disputes has highlighted a number of factors that increase the chance of violence. In general, however, these studies compare violence (primarily measured as civil war) to the absence of violence. This dichotomy ignores variation in the alternative means that groups can use to pursue claims against the state. A lack of violence could mean that the group is not mobilized, that it is highly mobilized but working through conventional political means, or that it is pursuing a determined course of nonviolent tactics. By lumping these strategic choices together, this literature misses the possibility that some factors may increase the chance of any mobilization, some may increase the chance of a specific type of mobilization, and some may have differential effects on different tactics.

## Theoretical framework

I develop a basic theoretical framework here for exploring the determinants of self-determination group strategic choice. I assume that groups pick strategies that they anticipate having the greatest chance of success (defined here as achieving greater self-rule) at the lowest cost.[4] Costs can be imposed by the state through repression (which at the extreme can include mass killing). Costs also include opportunity costs as individual members of the SD group forego other activities to mobilize on its behalf.

In general, we can expect that engaging in conventional politics will be less costly to groups than using irregular tactics (either violence or nonviolence). Conventional politics is generally less costly for two reasons. First, because institutional channels already exist, there is a lower cost to mobilization because the group can use existing political channels to influence the state. Second, when groups use conventional politics they are operating within the rules of the game and so the state is more likely to refrain from using extreme measures against the group even if it disagrees with the group's policy demands than if the group uses irregular tactics.

[3] See Collier & Hoeffler (2004), Cederman, Girardin & Gleditsch (2009), Fearon & Laitin (2003), and Hegre & Sambanis (2006).

[4] Groups choose strategies not only as the result of rational strategic calculations. Some individuals have a principled opposition to violence. Groups and individuals may respond to demonstration effects, mimicking strategies that are successful in other cases. Emotions may also affect how groups challenge the state (Peterson, 2002).

Irregular tactics, by contrast, can be quite costly. Mobilizing a mass nonviolent campaign or guerrilla insurgency requires convincing individuals to abandon their daily activities and participate. Additionally, individuals have to be willing to assume the risks of reprisal from the state. At the extreme, when states respond to irregular tactics with violence this can lead to large-scale destruction of the territory and population of the SD group, as happened in the Chechen conflict in Russia.

While conventional politics is generally less costly than irregular tactics, groups may still choose not to use conventional politics if they have little expectation of achieving their goals by doing so. Groups can see operating through conventional politics as unlikely to be successful when institutional political channels do not exist or are so weak that they cannot be effectively used. For example, the Tibetans in China resorted to nonviolent campaign and have had little to no access to power through conventional political channels. Even if institutional channels exist, the group may anticipate not achieving its goals through them because the state is unresponsive or the group lacks the strength to sufficiently pressure the state to make concessions through conventional politics.

Groups have incentives to pursue irregular tactics when they anticipate that those tactics will be successful. For example, the Bodos in India turned to civil war in the late 1980s after years of pressing their demands through conventional politics. Another group, the Tripura, had recently achieved greater self-determination through civil war,[5] indicating a higher chance of success for this strategy. In general, groups use irregular tactics to impose costs on the state to convince the state to concede to their demands. Violent tactics impose costs on the state by leading to loss of life, expenditure of resources, disruption of normal economic activity, and, potentially, challenging the legitimacy of the state. Violent tactics, however, are not the only way to impose costs. Nonviolent resistance is also designed to make disputes costly for states. The short-term goal, for example, of general strikes is to impose costs by halting productive economic activity. Mass protests, hunger strikes, and sit-ins all work to undermine the legitimacy of the state, which is another way to impose costs.

[5] The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, which conferred more autonomy on the Tripura group, was created in 1982; see the council website at http://ttaadc.nic.in/contact1.htm.

The ability of SD groups to use irregular tactics to impose costs on the state varies. Some groups are easier to mobilize than others for either violence or nonviolence. Additionally, some states have greater capacity to resist violent (or nonviolent) mobilization. In general, when groups anticipate being better able to impose costs through irregular tactics, they are more likely to choose one of these strategies.

Why do some groups choose nonviolent tactics and others violence? While both violent and nonviolent tactics can be used to impose costs, they require different types of mobilization. One of the key differences that emerges from the literature on nonviolence is the importance of numbers of people. Effective protests, boycotts, and work-stoppages need many individuals to participate to pressure the state. In contrast, a lone suicide bomber can impose large costs on the state by attracting attention to his or her cause, killing civilians or state personnel, and creating a sense of fear in the populace. Successful nonviolence, then, requires a greater number of participants than violence (DeNardo, 1985; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011).

Different groups will see different possibilities for achieving success through violence or nonviolence. This calculation is affected by structural features of the state and group. Some states are more prone to insurgency because of geographic features such as rough terrain, large size, or a dispersed population. These features that facilitate insurgency could make violence more attractive by lowering its costs without having the same effect on nonviolence.

In general, then, I expect groups to use conventional politics when institutional channels exist and when groups anticipate being able to achieve some success through those channels. I expect groups to use nonviolent tactics when there are barriers to conventional politics and when they anticipate being able to overcome the challenges to mobilization of a mass nonviolent campaign. I expect groups to use violence when there are barriers to conventional politics, and when they anticipate being able to impose costs on the state through violence.

## Hypotheses

A number of factors could affect SD groups' choice of strategy. Here, I focus on several that are likely to influence the perceived efficacy of different tactics in achieving their aims or to influence the degree of grievance felt by SD groups. I examine how these factors affect the likelihood that groups will use violence or nonviolence

relative to purely conventional politics.[6] As such, I assume that the group has mobilized to pursue self-determination, and so I do not address the question of why some groups mobilize and others do not. My focus here is on two irregular politics strategies that we observe empirically – civil war over self-determination and mass nonviolent campaign to press demands for self-determination. Lower levels of violence and nonviolent resistance occur in self-determination disputes, but the execution of civil war or a nonviolent campaign requires a degree of collective action and mobilization that should be influenced by the factors discussed here.[7]

When effective institutional channels exist, groups are more likely to use them than when they do not exist or are weak or ineffective. The state's regime type should affect this. Democracies generally provide greater opportunity for aggrieved groups to seek redress through conventional political channels. As such, democracies are likely to be more responsive to citizen demands and grievances than non-democracies.

*H1:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be less likely, relative to conventional politics, in democratic states than in non-democratic states.

The stability of governance structures should also influence SD groups' perceptions about the chance of success in using conventional politics to achieve their goals. When regimes are stable, they are more likely to have effective institutional channels that groups can use. Politically unstable regimes, by contrast, lack these effective channels and so groups are less likely to view conventional politics as a viable strategy.

*H2:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, during periods of political instability.

Both regime type and political instability affect the attractiveness of conventional politics because they influence whether SD groups anticipate institutional channels being effective. Groups can also adopt irregular tactics when they anticipate the costs of doing so to be lower. One factor that affects this anticipation is the capacity of states to punish irregular tactics. States with high capacity can repress dissent and make groups more likely to use whatever institutional channels are available, rather than pursuing more risky strategies. In weaker states, by contrast, the potential costs of both violence and nonviolent resistance are lower.

*H3:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be less likely, relatively to conventional politics, when state capacity is higher.

Regime type, political instability, and state capacity can affect SD group strategic choice because they determine the degree to which conventional politics is seen as a viable option. As such, each of the hypotheses predicts a similar effect for violence and nonviolence. Other factors, however, influence SD groups' capacity for mobilization and thus may have differential effects as violent and nonviolent mobilization pose different challenges to SD groups.

One factor that could affect SD groups' strategic choice is their size relative to the overall state population. Larger groups are likely to be able to impose costs through nonviolent resistance because nonviolence generally requires high levels of participation to be effective. Additionally, larger groups are more likely to be able to achieve success through conventional politics (when institutional channels exist) because they are better able to place pressure on the state. Smaller groups, by contrast, may not anticipate that either conventional politics or nonviolence will help them achieve their goals, and so are more likely to resort to violence.

*H4:* Civil war will be less likely, and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups are larger relative to the state.

In addition to size, the geographic concentration of the population should influence the group's capacity to mobilize for protest or insurgency. Toft (2003) shows that a higher degree of geographic concentration contributes to violent mobilization of ethnic minorities. Arguably, concentration should have a similar, or even greater, effect on nonviolent mobilization as the success of nonviolence is thought to be contingent on mass participation and this participation is more likely when individuals are closer together.

[6] Conventional politics and violent and nonviolent tactics are not mutually exclusive, as groups can and do continue to press demands through institutional channels while using irregular strategies. Here, I focus on when groups will use violence or nonviolent tactics, as opposed to relying solely on conventional politics.

[7] While I examine these larger strategies and attribute them to specific SD groups in the analysis, many SD groups contain a diversity of organizations that employ varying degrees of violent and nonviolent actions. Getting over the hurdles necessary for collective action that can bring people and organizations together to pursue a strategy is what differentiates these lower-level activities from the larger 'strategies' addressed in the article.

*H5:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups are more geographically concentrated.

Size and concentration are both demographic features of groups that affect their ability to mobilize to impose costs on the state. Another factor that can affect an SD group's ability to mobilize is whether it spreads across borders. When SD groups span borders, transnational kin can provide support for mobilization against the state without the state being able to directly respond (Cedermans, Girardin & Gleditsch, 2009). This support can make violent mobilization easier by providing economic or military assistance for a violent campaign. Yet, we would not expect this support to increase the ease of mobilization for nonviolence because nonviolent campaigns generally rely on mass participation rather than material resources.

*H6:* Civil war will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups have kin in another country.

Size, geographic concentration, and transnational kin are all features of SD groups as a whole. However, SD groups vary in their internal structure, and the internal political dynamics of these groups can affect their actions and their interactions with the state (Cunningham, 2011). One important way that SD groups differ is that some are represented by a single political organization, and others comprise multiple different organizations making different demands. When groups have multiple internal factions making demands, they have difficulty bargaining effectively with the state because organizations cannot make reliable promises about the behavior of other organizations in the same group which might facilitate settlement of their dispute. This problem of credibility makes civil war more likely. Internally divided groups should be less likely to use nonviolence, however, because nonviolence generally requires large-scale participation and when groups are divided it is harder to get multiple organizations to cooperate for a mass campaign.

*H7:* Civil war will be more likely, and nonviolent campaigns will be less likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups are more internally divided.

SD groups also vary in the demands they make. While all SD groups demand greater self-governance, some demand total independence from their host state (although this varies over time within SD groups). States are generally extremely hesitant to allow parts of their sovereign territory to break off, and so, in general, SD groups can anticipate being unlikely to achieve total independence through conventional politics. Thus, when groups demand independence they are more likely to use irregular tactics because they do not anticipate success through conventional politics.

*H8:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups demand independence.

Beyond the factors that influence the potential efficacy of different strategies for groups, the degree and type of grievance the group experiences should affect how it challenges the state. All SD groups have some grievance about their status. Yet, among these groups that seek greater self-rule, there is variation in the degree to which they are included in governance and in their relative economic position in the state (Hechter, 1975; Gourevitch, 1979).

Some SD groups have more political power at the center (by being included in governing coalitions) or possess more local control over the territory in which they operate. Others, however, are purposefully excluded from political power. Groups that are excluded from power are less likely to see conventional politics as a viable avenue for pursuing their grievances and thus more likely to use irregular tactics, either violent or nonviolent.

*H9:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups are excluded from political power.

SD groups' economic position can also affect their motivation for mobilization. Some SD groups are significantly poorer than the general population.[8] These groups are likely to have greater grievance because of perceived economic discrimination. There is significant evidence that more aggrieved groups are more likely to rebel. We would expect a similar pattern for nonviolence because grievance does not make violence a more viable strategy than nonviolence. Rather, we would expect increased economic grievance to make irregular tactics generally more likely.

*H10:* Civil war and nonviolent campaigns will be more likely, relative to conventional politics, when SD groups have economic grievances.

[8] Ethnic groups that are wealthier than the general population may also desire separation (Cederman, Weidmann & Gleditsch, 2011; Alesina & Spolaore, 2003).

## Research design

To assess the effect of these factors on the likelihood of civil war, nonviolent campaign, and conventional politics, I conduct a large-N study of all self-determination disputes on a yearly basis from 1960 to 2005. To identify self-determination disputes, I use the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) Peace and Conflict Report (Marshall & Gurr, 2003). This report includes a list of disputes between states and non-state ethno-political groups within their territory that make claims based on a right to greater self-determination (for example, the Scots in the United Kingdom and the Kurds in Turkey). The majority of the ethnic groups in the world do not make claims for self-determination, so this is a set of cases where there is an express disagreement between the group and the state about the group's status related to a right to self-determination. This list includes not only secessionist groups, but also all groups that make demands for greater self-governance based on their national identity.

Based on the CIDCM list, this study includes 146 groups making claims for self-determination in 77 different states since 1960. The CIDCM list does not indicate the years in which these disputes are 'active'. To create this dataset on mobilization for self-determination, I identified all years in which some organization representing the group is making public demands on the state for self-rule.[9] This excludes, then, years where the group is essentially doing nothing.

The unit of analysis in this study is the state–SD group dyad year and includes all years where the group is actively pursuing its demands.[10] Thus, all observations in the dataset include some type of mobilization. The dependent variable is a categorical measure of whether the group is engaged in largely conventional politics, nonviolent campaign, civil war, or both civil war and nonviolent campaign.

Largely conventional politics means that in a specific year, one or more organizations was actively making public demands for greater self-determination on behalf of the group, but that neither a civil war nor a nonviolent campaign was ongoing. This coding is not a direct measure of conventional political activities such as electioneering, filing lawsuits, lobbying, or so on, but rather indicates that the group was active (i.e. one or more organizations was making demands on its behalf) and not engaged in either large-scale civil war or a nonviolent campaign.

Nonviolent campaigns are coded from Chenoweth & Stephan (2011), who define a nonviolent campaign as follows:

> [A] series of observable, continuous, purposive mass tactics or events in pursuit of a political objective. Campaigns are observable, meaning that the tactics used are overt and documented. A campaign is continuous and lasts anywhere from days to years, distinguishing it from one-off events or revolts. Campaigns are also purposive, meaning that they are consciously acting with a specific objective in mind, such as expelling a foreign occupier or overthrowing a domestic regime. Campaigns have discernable leadership and often have names, distinguishing them from random riots or spontaneous mass acts.[11]

The Chenoweth & Stephan (2011) data are the first attempt to collect systematic cross-national data on all nonviolent campaigns. As such, they allow for testing when self-determination disputes engage in nonviolent campaigns, since they include every case that meets this definition.

To measure the occurrence of civil war, I use the Uppsala Conflict Data Project/Peace Research Institute Oslo Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) and include all conflict years for civil wars that reach a total of 1,000 battle deaths.[12] I use this threshold to make a clear comparison between large-scale violence and mass nonviolence. The nonviolent campaigns measure only captures large-scale nonviolence, though empirically there are a great number of smaller-scale uses of nonviolence

[9] This is coded using both aggregated data sources (the Uppsala Conflict Data Project [UCDP] and Minorities At Risk [MAR]) and news reports from Keesings Record of World Events and Lexis Nexis Academic. Keesings and Lexis Nexis may lead to underreporting of activity related to self-determination in places with media restrictions or limited access for the media. This means that in some years, there may be organizations active in conventional politics that I miss in this data because their actions are not reported in any of these sources.

[10] This approach differs from studies that address the likelihood of civil war or nonviolent campaign at the country level. It also differs from studies that presume no mobilization if the group is not directly engaged in a specific action, such as civil war or electoral politics.

[11] Quoted from the online appendix for *Why Civil Resistance Works* (http://www.ericachenoweth.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/WCRWAppendix-1.pdf). Chenoweth & Stephan (2011) acknowledge the difficulty of discerning start and end dates for campaigns. They code these dates based on consensus among sources they used to collect the campaign data.

[12] I use Version 4_2011 of the ACD (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Themnér & Wallensteen, 2011).

Table I. Distribution of strategy type, self-determination/state dyad years

| *Strategy* | *Obs.* | *Percent* |
|---|---|---|
| Largely conventional politics | 3,233 | 82.94 |
| Nonviolent campaign | 60 | 1.54 |
| Large-scale civil war | 590 | 15.14 |
| Both nonviolence and civil war | 15 | 0.38 |
| Total | 3,898 | 100 |

that are excluded from the Chenoweth & Stephan (2011) data.

Table I shows the distribution of yearly observations for the SD disputes across these categories. It is most common for SD groups to be engaged in largely conventional politics. Civil war is the next most common, with just over 25% of SD groups having engaged in civil war at some point in time. Mass nonviolent campaigns are relatively rare, with about 5% of SD groups having engaged in nonviolent campaigns since 1960.[13] Only four cases include periods of both civil war and nonviolent campaign at the same time – the East Timorese and Papuans in Indonesia, the Palestinians in Israel, and Kosovar Albanians in Yugoslavia.

To evaluate the ten hypotheses, I use multinomial logit, clustering standard errors on the self-determination/state dyad. Multinomial logit allows me to assess the effect of independent variables on particular strategies given the set of alternative options and is appropriate when the dependent variable is nominal as it is here.[14] The baseline category in this analysis is largely conventional politics (as defined above) and so the analyses evaluate the likelihood of civil war and nonviolent campaign relative to that baseline. Because the 'both civil war and nonviolent campaign' category is sparsely populated, I do not focus on it in the discussion of the results.

### *Independent variables*

To test H1, referring to state regime type, I use a democracy dummy. Democratic states are those with a score of 6 or greater on the Polity score in that year.[15] Political instability (H2) is measured as a three or greater point change in the Polity score of the state in the past two years. I measure state capacity (H3) using gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (log-transformed).[16]

To test H4 about relative group size, I create a measure of the relative group population using data on state population from Gleditsch (2002) and a measure of group population drawn from MAR and the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) data. The variable is a measure of the state population divided by the group population (log-transformed). I measure geographic concentration (H5) using the MAR measure of geographic concentration, which is an ordinal scale measuring from dispersed to concentrated. To test the effect of transnational kin (H6), I use the MAR measure of whether the SD group has kin in a nearby state.

To measure internal fragmentation of the SD group (H7), I use Cunningham's (2011) measure of group fragmentation, which is a logged measure of the number of organizations making demands related to self-determination on behalf of the group each year. To measure independence demands (H8), I use a measure from Cunningham (forthcoming) which indicates whether any organization in the SD group made a demand for independence each year.

I examine the effect of political exclusion (H9) using the *excluded* variable from the EPR project (Cederman, Wimmer & Min, 2010). This variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the SD group was excluded from power at the center. I proxy economic grievance (H10)

[13] There are relatively few self-determination movements using nonviolent campaign (both as a percentage of nonviolent campaigns and compared to the number that engage in civil war). This may be the case because nonviolent campaign is viewed as less effective. It could also be the case that nonviolent campaign is used, in part, to draw international support and generate legitimacy for a movement. Self-determination struggles, however, draw their legitimacy from a different source – historical claims to sovereignty. Thus, we might expect, all else equal, that nonviolent campaign is less common among self-determination disputes than other kinds of resistance, such as pro-democracy movements.

[14] One concern with using multinomial logit for this type of analysis is that the fourth category (both civil war and nonviolent campaign) violates the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumption. While strictly true, this is unlikely to be a meaningful problem. Violating the IIA assumption is problematic either when the alternative choice (here the 'both' category) is likely to draw unevenly from other options, or when we are particularly concerned with the entry or exit of different choices (such as new political parties emerging in a election). Given that the options specified here (conventional politics, nonviolent campaign, civil war, or both nonviolent campaign and civil war) are more or less exhaustive and fixed, multinomial logit is not an inappropriate modeling choice (see Alvarez & Nagler, 1998).

[15] This coding is from the Polity IV project (Marshall & Jaggers, 2000).

[16] GDP data are taken from Gleditsch (2002). GDP is a distant proxy of state capacity and can be used to measure many concepts. Hendrix (2010) compares alternative measures of state capacity asserting that bureaucratic capacity and tax-to-GDP ratios are the best measures. Unfortunately, data on these measures are limited and cannot be used for many of the dyad years in this study. I include additional measures of state capacity in the robustness checks.

Table II. Multinomial logistic regression on strategy choice in self-determination disputes (1960–2005)

| | *Nonviolent campaign* | | *Civil war* | | *Both* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Democracy | –1.54* | (0.58) | 0.27 | (0.49) | –1.57* | (0.60) |
| Political instability | –0.36 | (0.79) | –0.15 | (0.31) | –15.07* | (1.00) |
| State capacity (GDPpc) | 0.11 | (0.29) | –0.45* | (0.18) | –0.44 | (0.31) |
| Relative group size | –1.26* | (0.54) | 0.54* | (0.22) | –1.14* | (0.40) |
| Group concentration | –0.97* | (0.32) | –0.58 | (0.38) | 1.23* | (0.68) |
| Kin in adjoining state | 0.99 | (0.83) | 1.31* | (0.76) | –1.35 | (0.94) |
| Group fragmentation | –0.06 | (0.36) | 0.89* | (0.24) | 1.24* | (0.60) |
| Independence demands | 1.43* | (0.59) | 1.18* | (0.41) | 15.08* | (1.32) |
| Political exclusion | 0.40 | (2.69) | 1.42* | (0.69) | 11.46* | (1.44) |
| Economic discrimination | 1.03* | (0.61) | 0.47* | (0.17) | 1.90* | (0.82) |
| State population | 0.65* | (0.36) | –0.29 | (0.19) | –0.31 | (0.31) |
| Nonviolent campaign in last 3 years | 6.18* | (0.92) | –0.94 | (1.09) | 6.18* | (1.11) |
| Civil war in last 3 years | –0.20 | (0.64) | 3.88* | (0.40) | 3.31* | (0.82) |
| Constant | –6.62 | (5.61) | –2.84 | (3.13) | –28.06* | (4.50) |
| Number of observations | 2300 | | | | | |
| Psuedo R-squared | 0.50 | | | | | |
| Log-likelihood | –730.46 | | | | | |

Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered on SD group/state dyad. *$p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

using a measure drawn from the MAR data – the average level of economic discrimination the group faces measuring less to more discrimination.

In addition to these variables which test the ten hypotheses, I include three control variables. I control for the state population (log-transformed). I also include measures of whether there was a civil war or a nonviolent campaign in the dyad in the previous three years, as these strategies may have some degree of path dependence. Table II reports the results of this analysis. Because all of the hypotheses are directional, I report one-tailed *p*-values.

I find partial support for hypothesis H1. The results show that SD groups in democracies are less likely to engage in nonviolent campaign, relative to largely conventional politics, than groups in non-democracies. I do not find a significant relationship between democracy and civil war over self-determination.[17] The negative effect on nonviolent campaign suggests support for the argument that democratic states are likely to have more, and more efficient, channels for SD groups to pursue their agenda through conventional politics.

The analysis shows no significant effect of political instability (H2) on the use of either type of irregular strategy in SD disputes. This is unsupportive of the expectation that political instability would make irregular tactics more likely because conventional politics would be perceived as less effective. It is possible that political instability makes states less able to offer concessions to groups and so decreases the incentive to use irregular tactics, but it is difficult to read too much into a non-finding here.

I find partial support for H3. Greater state capacity (measured by GDP per capita) is associated with a lower chance of civil war over self-determination, but has no significant effect on nonviolent campaign. The result for civil war is consistent with many studies that indicate that 'stronger' states are better able to avoid civil war. The different effect on civil war and nonviolence might suggest that stronger states are more effective at repressing violent opposition than nonviolent mobilization.

I find the opposite of my expectations of H4, referring to relative group size. The analysis shows that relatively larger SD groups are less likely to use nonviolent campaigns, but more likely to engage in civil war, relative to conventional politics. This is contrary to the expectation that larger groups would be more likely to use nonviolent campaign because they have greater numbers and the success of nonviolent campaigns depends on mass participation.[18]

[17] The literature on civil war typically finds that democracies are less likely to experience civil war, although this relationship is partly driven by the correlation between democracy and economic development. Here, I am examining a subset of civil wars over self-determination, and democratic states such as India have engaged in a number of wars over self-determination.

[18] To see if larger groups are refraining from nonviolent campaign because they are included in political power, I examined the correlation between political exclusion and group size and found a small positive correlation (0.18).

The relative size of the group is one of many things that affect mobilization capacity (i.e. the ability of the group to overcome collective action problems to mobilize for nonviolence) and so may not be fully measuring the concept.[19]

H5 predicted that more concentrated groups are more likely to experience nonviolent campaign and civil war, relative to largely conventional politics. I find the opposite of this expectation for nonviolent campaign because concentration is negative and statistically significant. It is also negative (but not significant) for civil war. However, the variation on this concentration variable is quite limited as nearly all SD groups have some degree of geographic cohesion. Toft (2003) examines the effect of ethnic group concentration more broadly, and it is possible that more concentrated ethnic groups are more likely to become SD groups and so we do not find the effect of expected concentration within that set of groups.

I find support for H6, that kin in an adjoining state will have no effect on nonviolent campaigns and make civil war more likely, relative to largely conventional politics. I expected no effect of kin on nonviolent campaigns because it is unclear that kin can provide the type of resources necessary for effective mobilization for nonviolence, and indeed the results show no significant effect of kin on campaigns. The effect of kin on civil war, meanwhile, is positive and significant. This is consistent with the findings on the role of kin in civil war more broadly, such as Jenne (2006) and Cederman, Gleditsch & Girardin (2009).

The internal structure of SD groups (H7) also affects what type of strategy the group uses. As predicted, I find that more internally fragmented groups are significantly more likely to engage in civil war than to rely on conventional political strategies. SD groups with many different organizations will have difficulty negotiating successfully with the state to avoid conflict because fragmentation creates credibility problems for SD organizations. H7 also predicted that more fragmented groups would be less likely to engage in nonviolent campaign, relative to conventional politics. I do find a negative sign on the group fragmentation variable for nonviolent campaign, but it is nowhere near statistically significant.

Moreover, when SD groups demand independence, the results show that they are more likely to engage in irregular politics (both nonviolent campaign and civil war) than in largely conventional politics (H8). Independence is rarely achieved solely through conventional politics and, thus, relying on conventional politics is unattractive when SD groups choose to pursue secession.

The findings on political exclusion partly support H9. I expected political exclusion to increase the chance of both nonviolent and violent irregular politics. I find support for the expectation for violence – political exclusion is positive and statistically significant for civil war. However, the analysis shows no significant effect of exclusion on nonviolent campaigns. A closer examination of the data shows that this non-finding is driven by the inclusion of the Croats in Yugoslavia, who only have organizations making demands for self-determination in a small number of years. During the years in which they made public demands for self-determination, the Croats were not politically excluded and engaged in a nonviolent campaign for twice as many years as they did conventional politics. When this case is excluded from the analysis, the political exclusion variable is positive and statistically significant for both nonviolent campaign and civil war.[20] This suggests that, consistent with H9, systematic exclusion from political power at the center makes conventional political strategies unattractive to SD groups seeking greater self-rule because the state has expressly excluded the group from achieving power at the center in the regular political process.

Finally, I find support for H10, that economic grievance increases the chance of mobilization for irregular politics (either nonviolent or violent). When groups experience a greater degree of economic discrimination, both nonviolent campaign and civil war are significantly more likely than conventional politics. This suggests that SD groups with greater economic grievance are more likely to use irregular political strategies than rely on largely conventional politics to achieve their goals.

Some of the control variables yield significant predictions about the use of nonviolent campaign and civil war in self-determination disputes. Nonviolent campaign is more likely, relative to largely conventional politics, in more populous states. This may be because successful nonviolent campaigns are contingent on high levels of

[19] In many cases, these are groups that are very small relative to the state, and so a difference in this variable may pick up small differences between groups with low populations. I also ran the model with a measure of the group's size (logged) and this returned similar results.

[20] Exclusion of the Kosovar Albanians also alters the results on political exclusion, making the negative coefficient on nonviolent campaign significant. Thus, the findings on political exclusion on nonviolent campaign appear to be quite sensitive to change in the analysis.

Table III. Summary of statistically significant findings with predicted effect in parentheses (non-findings are indicated by 'None')

| *Hypothesis* | *Factor* | *Effect on nonviolent campaign* | *Effect on civil war* |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Democracy | Negative (–) | None (–) |
| H2 | Political instability | None (+) | None (+) |
| H3 | State capacity (GDPpc) | None (–) | Negative (–) |
| H4 | Relative group size | Negative (+) | Positive (–) |
| H5 | Group concentration | Negative (+) | None (+) |
| H6 | Kin in adjoining state | None (no effect) | Positive (+) |
| H7 | Group fragmentation | None (–) | Positive (+) |
| H8 | Independence demands | Positive (+) | Positive (+) |
| H9 | Political exclusion | Positive* (+) | Positive (+) |
| H10 | Economic discrimination | Positive (+) | Positive (+) |

*The coefficient in Table II is negative, but this is driven by one specific case of nonviolent campaign (the Croats in Yugoslavia); excluding this case yields a positive, statistically significant coefficient.

participation, though it is not clear that individuals outside the SD group would participate in campaigns for greater self-determination for others in society. In contrast, a larger population is associated with a lower chance of civil war, though this is not quite statistically significant ($p = 0.06$). This finding on civil war is contrary to some studies that suggest that larger populations generally attract conflict (Raleigh & Hegre, 2009).

Both of the variables capturing the recent use of a specific irregular strategy are significant predictors of that strategy. The existence of a nonviolent campaign in the previous three years is associated with a greater chance of nonviolent campaign. Likewise, the occurrence of civil war in the previous three years is a positive and significant predictor of civil war over self-determination. This suggests that there is some path dependence in strategy choice from year to year, which is logical given that the outcomes examined here are large-scale events (both nonviolent campaign and civil war).[21]

Table III summarizes the findings with respect to the 10 hypotheses, with the anticipated effect included in parentheses.

To determine the substantive effect of these factors on the occurrence of nonviolent campaign and civil war, I used CLARIFY to generate predicted probabilities (King, Tomz & Wittenberg, 2000). I simulate the effect of changing each factor from the first to third quartile of the data, while holding the other variables constant (categorical variables at their mode and interval variables at their means). For nonviolent campaign, regime type has the largest effect, with nonviolent campaign being eight times as likely in non-democratic states. Economic discrimination has the second largest effect, with nonviolent campaign being about three times as likely in groups that face higher levels of discrimination. Nonviolent campaign is about twice as likely in less geographically concentrated groups, in those that are currently secessionist, and in smaller groups. SD groups in more populated states are about 35% more likely to engage in nonviolent campaign. As noted above, the effect of political exclusion becomes statically significant and positive if the Croats in Yugoslavia are excluded from the analysis. When I exclude that case, I find that nonviolent campaign is about 25 times as likely when groups are excluded from power at the center (nonviolent campaigns are extremely rare when groups are included at the center).

Civil war is about three times as likely when groups are politically excluded, when the SD group is larger in size, when the group currently seeks independence, when the group has kin in an adjoining state, and among more internally fragmented groups. Those groups that face greater economic discrimination and those in poorer states are about twice as likely to be in civil war.

[21] I also pooled conventional politics and nonviolent campaign and ran a logistic regression to determine whether the results differ from what I find are the determinants of civil war when considering other alternative strategies. The results are indeed different. The primary differences are that political instability is a positive and statistically significant predictor of civil war, the kin finding is no longer significant, and nonviolent campaign in the previous three years is a significant positive predictor of civil war.

### *Robustness checks*

To test the robustness of these findings, I run a series of alternative specifications of the model in Table II. I present the analyses in an online appendix, but describe them briefly here. Because there are relatively few nonviolent campaigns, I repeated this analysis excluding each SD group/state dyad sequentially to see if any of the results

are driven by a single case. The biggest change is the sign switch on political exclusion when the Croats are excluded, described above. One other variable (economic discrimination) loses significance for nonviolence when two of the cases are excluded. In other specifications, some variables gain significance (such as kin for nonviolence) but in general the findings are similar to those in Table II.

The preceding analyses use a measure of civil war that requires 1,000 battle deaths over the duration of the conflict. I use this threshold because it allows for a more reasonable comparison between civil war and the nonviolent campaign measure, which addresses only mass uses of nonviolence. I recoded the strategic choice variable to include lower-level civil wars (25 battle deaths in a year) and repeated the analysis. The results are generally similar to those in Table II.

Finally, I re-ran the analysis in Table II adding a number of additional control variables (listed in the appendix). Controlling for additional factors, the most robust findings from Table II are those on democracy (H1), political instability (H2), and independence demands (H8) which do not change in sign or significance for nonviolent campaign or civil war in any alternative specifications. Some findings are more sensitive, such as the effect of group size and political exclusion on civil war and the effect of economic discrimination on nonviolent campaign. Additionally, several factors gained significance in some models. The specific differences, as well as the effect of the additional controls, are described in the online appendix.

## Conclusions and further directions

Groups engaged in disputes with their state have a menu of strategy choices that they can use to press their demands, including operating through conventional political channels, engaging in mass nonviolent campaign, or using violent tactics such as civil war. Whether groups stick to conventional politics or adopt an unconventional strategy, and which unconventional strategy groups choose, depend on the costs and benefits of different strategies. A variety of factors influence how groups choose to challenge the state by determining how easily they can access the state with any likelihood of accommodation and how easily the group can mobilize against the state. When a group's chance of achieving greater self-determination through conventional politics appear bleak (such as when the group is quite economically aggrieved, excluded from power at the center, demanding total independence, or operating in a relatively closed state), groups tend to pursue irregular strategies.

The findings in this article demonstrate that some factors – including whether the group demands independence, economic discrimination, and political exclusion – have the same effect on the likelihood of nonviolent campaign and civil war in self-determination disputes. Other factors, such as group size, have opposite effects on nonviolent campaign and civil war, while still others only affect one of these irregular strategies.

The fact that some factors have the same effect on civil war and nonviolent campaign means that analyses that examine civil war or nonviolent campaign as dichotomous and lump other outcomes together may actually understate the effect of these factors on each of these strategies. For example, political exclusion and economic discrimination make both civil war and nonviolent campaign more likely. When nonviolence is lumped with conventional politics or no action as 'no civil war', then the influence of these factors on the occurrence of civil war is understated because cases of nonviolent campaign, a form of irregular politics, are coded in the same way as either conventional politics or no activity. By separating these strategies out, we can examine how factors affect the likelihood of civil war and nonviolent campaign relative to purely conventional tactics.

The fact that some factors have different effects on civil war and nonviolent campaign suggests that the mobilization processes for these two irregular strategies differ. I have argued that both violence and nonviolent tactics can be used by groups to impose costs on the state, but that the things that influence the ability of groups to impose costs through these strategies may differ. While this article addresses a number of factors that help us understand the occurrence of mass nonviolence and large-scale civil war, a next step is to understand the processes through which mobilization occurs for each of these strategies. Here, I examine the occurrence of civil war and nonviolent campaign in disputes in which a significant level of mobilization has already occurred. Future work could look more directly at the mobilization process to uncover whether different factors play a role in the early stages of mobilization either by promoting or undermining collective action for nonviolence or violence.

A second area for future research entails the disaggregation of strategic choice by actor. I have examined how 'self-determination groups' pick strategies to engage the state, but many of these groups are really aggregations of different political organizations that make individual choices about whether to use violence or nonviolence.

In some cases, different organizations in the same group pursue different strategies at the same time, leading the overall groups to pursue a mixed strategy. Further exploration of the strategic choice of organizations and measures of lower levels of activity would increase our understanding of why specific organizations pick specific strategies, and when they are likely to use a mixed strategy approach to engage with the state (see Asal et al., 2013 in this issue).

Finally, this article focuses specifically on strategic choice in self-determination disputes, which are the leading cause of civil war. However, many civil wars and nonviolent campaigns are waged over other issues such as regime change. Future work could address the extent to which the factors that promote the use of nonviolent campaign or civil war in self-determination disputes also influence other types of substate disputes (see Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013). Anti-regime struggles have the potential to draw a much larger support base than self-determination struggles that involve a limited subset of the population. We know that nonviolent campaign is more common in disputes over regime change than self-determination, but do not know whether the same factors that make nonviolent campaign more or less likely in self-determination disputes would have the same effect for regime change. Whether groups seek self-determination or regime change, it is crucial to examine different strategies through which they can pursue these goals in relation to one another, not in isolation. Working through conventional political channels, engaging in violence or in nonviolence are not independent decisions made by actors in society, and treating them as such limits our understanding of how and when people challenge the state.

## Replication data

The dataset and do-file for the empirical analysis of this article can be found at http://www.prio.no/jpr.datasets.

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