

Dilemma Actions Boost Nonviolent Campaign Success

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Abstract

In the past three decades nonviolent social protest has become the most reliable path to democracy. However, not all nonviolent mobilization campaigns succeed. Since the early 20th century, less than 40 percent of nonviolent mass mobilization campaigns meet with success; and even during in the decades since the start of the third wave of democratization in 1974 more than half of these campaigns have failed. We examine why some nonviolent campaigns are more successful than others by analyzing the use of a particular type of tactic, the *dilemma action*, which is a nonviolent civil disobedience tactic that provokes a “response dilemma” for the target. Collecting original data on dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, we find that roughly one-third of mass nonviolent campaigns in the past century deploy this strategy. We theorize four mechanisms linking dilemma actions to nonviolent campaign success: facilitating group formation, delegitimizing opponents, reducing fear, and generating sympathetic media coverage. Finally, we assess whether dilemma actions increase campaign success rates, finding that dilemma actions are associated with a 11-16 percent increase in campaign success.

Introduction

In the past three decades mass, nonviolent social protest has become the most reliable path to democracy (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Celestino and Gleditsch, 2013). Further, despite growing evidence of recent democratic backsliding (Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg, 2017; Haggard and Kaufman, 2021), sustained nonviolent mobilization remains a proven path to democratic survival, especially among new democracies (Kadivar, 2018). However, not all nonviolent mobilization campaigns succeed. Since the early 20th century, less than 40 percent of nonviolent mass mobilization campaigns meet with full success; and even during the decades since the start of the third wave of democratization in 1974 more than half of these campaigns have failed.¹

We examine a key nonviolent campaign tactic, dilemma actions, which are techniques devised by nonviolent activists to provoke a reaction from opponents that will reflect negatively on them. These actions tap into widely held beliefs or norms in society and use unpredictability and humor to force opponents to choose between suboptimal reactions. While conventional wisdom holds that nonviolent mass protest is a more effective method of resistance than violent approaches (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011), researchers and practitioners still lack a clear understanding – based on empirical comparisons of tactics across distinct movements – of which tactics within the range of nonviolent strategies work best and why these tactics contribute to campaign success. Research on nonviolent tactics largely focuses on comparison of a few cases and within movement tactical changes (e.g. McAdam et al., 1982; McAdam, 1983; Koopmans, 1993; McCammon, 2003; Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; Shuman et al., 2021, 2022). And recent comparative studies of mass nonviolent movements predominantly examine the structural characteristics of the nonviolent campaign itself (Schock, 2005; Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013; Edwards, 2021; Manekin and Mitts, 2022) or the types of opponents against which nonviolence strategies are most successful (e.g. Chenoweth, Perkosi and Kang, 2017; Croissant, Kuehn and Eschenauer, 2018; Thurber, 2018; Sato and Wahman, 2019; Chin, Song and Wright, 2022). Building on these contributions, this paper introduces, conceptualizes and measures dilemma actions. We then use global data on dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns to assess how this tactic influences campaign success.

This paper first introduces the concept of a *dilemma action* and provides descriptive details on the common features of these tactics. We then document the extent to which nonviolent campaigns utilize these tactics, demonstrating that roughly one-third of mass nonviolent campaigns in the past century deploy this strategy. Further this rate of deployment remains relatively constant over time, suggesting that our original collection of data on dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns does not suffer from recency bias. We then propose four micro-level mechanisms by which dilemma actions shape nonviolent campaign success: facilitating group formation, delegitimizing opponents, reducing fear, and generating sympathetic media coverage.

Last, we assess, using both descriptive analysis and econometric tests, whether dilemma actions increase campaign success rates. We find that dilemma actions are associated with an 11-16 percent increase in campaign success but that this positive effect has diminished over time. Further, we demonstrate that dilemma actions are most likely to lead to campaign success when the target opponent is a closed authoritarian government that does not hold elections. Thus, one reason for the diminishing effect of dilemma actions on campaign success may be that authoritarian governments increasingly hold elections, meaning fewer regimes are closed autocracies where dilemma actions have historically been most successful.

¹Data and estimates from Chenoweth and Shay (2020a).

What is a dilemma action?

Dilemma actions are nonviolent civil disobedience strategies activists employ in an attempt to provoke a “response dilemma” for the target. Dilemma actions are also called *dilemma decisions* or *dilemma demonstrations*, but, irrespective of the preferred term, their core characteristic is the *dilemma*, which activists design to put an opponent in a “lose-lose” situation where all opponent responses to the action reflect negatively on the opponent (Lakey, 1987; Duhamel and Pearson, 2004).² Either the opponent does not try to suppress the action, thereby looking weak, or looks absurd or heavy-handed by trying to repress them. Critical to our definition of a dilemma action is the idea that activists tap into a widely held belief to help broaden support for the action. As such, the dilemma activists typically use irony during the action, often humor, to expose abuses of power (Popovic and McClennen, 2020). The goal is to show a wide audience that a repressive government that says it is serving the interests of the public is not, a reality that is intrinsically ironic, and that, when revealed through the dilemma action, builds support for regime change among members of the audience.

For example, in 1982 during the Polish Solidarity movement, the people of Świdnik, a small town in eastern Poland, decided to protest government-media propaganda by taking their television sets for a walk. Since the government controlled all news media, activists decided that boycotting the news was not an effective tactic because such a boycott is not publicly visible. At first, activists unplugged their sets and placed them on their windowsills every evening at 7:30. This initial tactic, however, did not attract widespread attention. Thus, the activists took their TV sets onto the street, “walking” them in wheelbarrows as though they were baby carriages. Before long, anyone walking the streets of Świdnik at dusk could see friends and neighbors ambling and laughing, pushing their TVs, using the half-hour previously spent listening to the official newscast to greet one another, gossip, and share in the thrill of standing up to the regime together.

The practice of “walking” TV sets soon spread to other Polish towns, forcing the government to decide how best to respond. State authorities could not arrest these protesters since there was no law specifying that Polish citizens were prohibited from placing their television sets in wheelbarrows and walking them in the street. So, government officials decided to move up the curfew from 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., which would mean that everyone would need to stay home during the news broadcast hour. By forcing everyone to stay home, the government revealed their powerlessness to contain public criticism. Further restricting citizens’ mobilization rights in response to “walking”

²The first activist to write about the success of dilemma actions was George Lakey, who offered an early account of what he called “dilemma demonstrations” (Lakey, 1987). Lakey tells the story of a U.S. Quaker activist group operating in 1967, during the second Indochina war. The Quakers organized a ship to deliver medical supplies to North Vietnam and that plan put the U.S. government in a dilemma. Either they would allow a ship to deliver goods to an enemy or they would stop it. If they chose the first option, they would look weak against their opponent. If they chose the second, they would create a humanitarian scandal. Lakey’s concept of a dilemma is slightly different from the one we use in our study because he does not emphasize the importance of choosing a dilemma that correlates to a widely held belief. Philippe Duhamel, a Canadian activist, devised a “dilemma demonstration” in 2001, after reading Lakey’s work. Duhamel organized a nonviolent protest over trade issues, dubbed a “Search and Seizure Operation” at the Department of International Trade and Foreign Affairs in Ottawa. The protesters arrived at the government building holding a giant key that they claimed they needed to unlock government secrets. Ninety-nine people were arrested, even though all were released within a day. However, more importantly, the Canadian government found that public attention to their secrecy was overwhelming, and they eventually released the documents the protesters demanded. In his 2004 book, Duhamel describes the effective components to a dilemma demonstration, including widely informing the public about the issue, making the goals of activists clear, and calling into question the legitimacy of the target. The key component, though, is the way that the dilemma demonstration demands a response on the part of the opponent. For Duhamel, this is greatly enhanced by including a deadline for an answer to the activists (Duhamel and Pearson, 2004). While this list does not include the exact same set of components we use to define dilemma actions, there is much overlap in our descriptions.

TV sets outraged large portions of the Polish public, helping to build support for the activists. In contrast to peaceful protest, this type of dilemma action was far more effective at challenging the repressive Polish government: it built support within the community, reframed the narrative around state media propaganda, yielded an opponent response that hurt the government's credibility, and helped reduce the public's fear of state authorities. Central to this dilemma, the absurd action tapped into the widely held, public belief that Polish citizens should be able to take a peaceful evening walk.

Dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns

To test the efficacy of dilemma actions as part of a nonviolent campaign, we examine dilemma action tactics that took place during the 320 nonviolent campaigns included in the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) 1.3 data set (Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a). The nonviolent campaigns in NAVCO 1.3 provide a pre-defined sample within which to code the presence of dilemma actions, allowing us to compare success rates of campaigns with and without dilemma actions.

To code the presence or absence of dilemma actions during a campaign, researchers first familiarized themselves with the range of tactics used by each campaign and searched for markers of dilemma actions during the campaigns. Examples of these markers include: boycotts, hunger strikes, media art, strikes, sit-in, symbols. If a dilemma action was found, then we coded descriptive and evaluative features of these actions, discussed below. The team did not seek all dilemma actions within a specific campaign if they found at least one example of such a tactic being used by campaign activists. If there was no evidence of any dilemma actions during the campaign period, the team checked primary and secondary sources a second and third time to confirm the absence of a dilemma action.

To better understand this process of coding dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, we provide one example. During the “The Cutlery Revolution” in Iceland in 2009, which featured an anti-government protest that placed pressure on members of Parliament in the wake of an economic crisis, nearly two thousand people, led by Hörrður Torfason and the Social Democratic Alliance political party, gathered outside of Iceland's Parliament building to bang pans, pots, and other kitchenware. These demonstrators created disruptive levels of noise and drew media attention to their outrage over Iceland's economic situation. The demonstrators demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Geir Haarde and government officials, calling for administrative reform to improve government transparency. This disruptive action forced the government to choose between criminalizing the protesters, which would likely generate public perception that the government had overreacted, or allowing the noisy demonstrations to continue. The Cutlery Revolution helped demonstrators achieve their short-term goals: by the end of the month, Prime Minister Haarde, his government, the head of the Central Bank, and the director of the Financial Supervisory authority had all announced their resignation; and early elections were held in the spring. For this case, two members of the research team independently consulted five distinct secondary sources, including newspaper articles, an encyclopedia entry, a peer-review journal article, and an extant data base of nonviolent mobilization.

Not all nonviolent campaigns deployed dilemma actions, however. And this variation allows us to assess whether dilemma actions improve the odds of nonviolent campaign success. Indeed, the data indicate that dilemma actions occur in roughly one-third of nonviolent campaigns, while we find no evidence of dilemma actions in about two-thirds of nonviolent campaigns.

Dilemma actions also occur outside of nonviolent campaigns, in part because many attempts

at mass mobilization – both those with and without dilemma actions – never grow large enough to meet the campaign size threshold of 1,000 participants to be recorded in the NAVCO data as mass nonviolent campaigns. For example, in July 2009, Kazakhstani youth activists mobilized a protest after the former mayor of Almaty was murdered. The mayor was an outspoken critic of long-time president Nursultan Nazarbayev and government officials ruled his death as a suicide. The government corruption, cover-ups, and lack of support for the working class led to the creation of several socialist youth movements, the largest and most successful of which became Sotsopr. The Sotsopr (otherwise known as Socialisticheskoe Soprotivlenie or SocSopr) activist group arranged a series of protest actions against the regime, which they titled Nurotar. In one type of tactic, the youth participants wore sheep masks and showed their “support” for the president. Displaying fabricated, mocking adoration, the activists wore the masks and worshiped Nazarbayev on their knees and gathered on the official state holiday that was dedicated to the capital. The tactic allowed activists to depict Nazarbayev supporters as sheep who blindly followed their leader, thus mocking both his sheep supporters and the autocrat himself. While the Sotsopr activist group arranged a series of dilemma action tactics, they do not qualify for the NAVCO database because they do not meet the size threshold. Kazakhstan’s size and lack of communication infrastructure at the time made it difficult for members of Sotsopr across the country to organize in larger numbers. These demonstrations often occurred in isolation from one another until activists could meet at the national Sotsopr conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, dilemma actions may occur as part of one-time events or during leader-less protests that also do not qualify as sustained nonviolent campaigns in the NAVCO 1.3 data. For example, the 2013, the “Kisses in the Subway” protest in Ankara, Turkey was not part of a larger protest effort and, therefore, does not qualify as a nonviolent campaign in the NAVCO database. In this case, Turkish subway officials tried to stop public displays of affection after capturing a couple kissing on camera. More than 100 people flooded the metro station and kissed for several minutes, while holding signs reading “free kisses”. Officers then had to decide whether to criminalize kissing or let these protesters undermine their authority.

Features of dilemma actions Do dilemma actions contribute to campaign success? While our main goal is to assess this question by comparing the success rates of nonviolent campaigns with and without dilemma actions in the subsequent analysis, here we point to some features of dilemma actions that likely contribute – both symbolically and materially – to campaign success.

By definition, all dilemma actions receive some sort of media attention. Media attention entails reports about the dilemma actions in domestic and/or international news sources, across all mediums: newspaper, radio, television, online, and social media. More importantly, media coverage of the dilemma actions tends to be sympathetic to the campaign’s goals (84 percent of the time). Sympathetic media coverage means the news source reported on the dilemma action in a way that describes the activists in a positive way, often portraying their concerns as legitimate and the action itself as appropriate, justified and/or effective. Unsympathetic coverage, in contrast, portrays the activists as disruptive, extreme, and/or irrational.

This finding is important because public perceptions of activists play a strong role in activism efficacy. Bashir et al. (2013), for example, find that if the public perceives activists as “eccentric and militant”, the broader public will have less interest in supporting the cause, regardless of the tactics employed by activists. Thus, the fact that dilemma actions tap into widely held beliefs may help avoid perceptions of activists as eccentric or malign. In addition, media priming shapes whether the public identifies with an activist group: Wasow (2020) notes that media coverage “can be sympathetic or hostile” to activists, which results in a significant shift in public support for a

cause.

In only a handful of cases (16 percent), we find no evidence of sympathetic media coverage. For example, in 1982, the Casamance separatists wanted to establish independence from the Senegalese government to foster their own cultural identity. Activists organized a peaceful protest during which they removed the Senegalese flag from all government buildings and replaced it with the white flag of Casamance. The government responded harshly to this action because they did not want to signal tolerance of the Casamance independence movement. In this case, the media coverage was not sympathetic to activists because the decision to replace the Senegalese flag with the Casamance one alienated the broader public, only appealing to existing supporters of the protest movement.

For the vast majority of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, the action is followed by an increase in campaign participants (92 percent) and the movement continues mobilizing after the dilemma action occurred (82 percent). For example, during the Denim Revolution in Belarus in September 2005, a youth activist, Nikita Sasim, tied his denim shirt to a stick and waved it like a flag to stop police forces from confiscating symbols of their group's protests. As a result, denim quickly became the symbol of the revolution and carried on throughout the rest of the campaign. Denim was a strategic symbol because it doubled as a simple article of clothing while representing the democratic freedoms of the western countries where denim is often worn.

Dilemma actions also teach campaign participants about mobilization strategies and are thus replicated by different groups and/or at later dates during the nonviolent campaign. The Otpor Movement in Serbia influenced many nonviolent protest organizers to adopt dilemma actions, including Kmara and the Rose Revolution in Georgia. Kmara adopted Otpor's clenched fist logo and employed similar slogans at rallies, such as "Gotev Je" (He is finished). The activists realized that humor and irony were important weapons in defeating an autocratic regime. As a result, Kmara designed a mock funeral for the government's economic plan at the state chancellery garden. The funeral interrupted an economic program presentation occurring at the same time. The activists were arrested and charged with "hooliganism." Their decision to adopt humorous tactics came straight from Otpor's strategy of humor. We find evidence that 44 percent of dilemma actions are internally replicated at least once during the campaign after the first event.

Further, we find qualitative evidence suggesting that most dilemma actions (87 percent) help to reduce fear or apathy among campaign participants. The Carnation Revolution in Portugal (1974) was a bloodless coup that brought down a dictatorship and paved the way for democratization. During the revolution, demonstrators gave soldiers red carnations, which the soldiers then placed in the barrels of their guns or pinned to their uniforms. This action decreased fear of violence for the protesters because the peaceful action of presenting flowers discouraged the soldiers from responding forcefully.

Similarly, for most of these actions (93 percent), we find evidence that the event boosted public sympathy for the nonviolent campaign. For example, in December 1977, four women began a 23-day hunger strike in Mexico in honor of their tin miner husbands. Soon after, fifty other wives and their children joined them. This technique initially fell under some criticism, so the children were replaced with adult strikers. By January 18, 1978, there were over 1,380 people fasting, supported in solidarity by churches, universities, and people in Mexico. The broad public was sympathetic toward the initial plight of the women mobilizing for economic justice for their husbands in the mines.

By reducing fear and boosting public sympathy, dilemma actions nearly always (88 percent of cases) help reframe the opponent as less scary or more repressive. The Protests of the Innocent in Romania demonstrates how dilemma actions reframe the narrative of the protest to boost the campaign's success. In this case, Romanians gathered in public spaces with their children and dogs. The government tried to downplay the protests by claiming that protesters were receiving

money from businessmen like George Soros. In response, protesters escalated their actions by providing the children and dogs with signs like “Soros, where is my money?” This tactic reframed the government’s narrative by exposing government propaganda, making government officials look absurd for suggesting that the protests were funded by Soros.

How do the targets of the nonviolent campaign react to dilemma actions? We find that most dilemma actions (90 percent) are met with some sort of aggressive or violent response from the opponent, or at least a response that makes the opponent appear like they are overreacting. For example, the Red Army Illegal Flag protest in Malawi in 2011 was met with a violent crackdown by riot police. State security forces targeted protesters wearing red clothing or waving the old Malawi flag. In response to the repression, protesters refused to back down, which only increased the threats and violence against them. Further, more than half of the dilemma actions elicit some sort of concession, such as the resignation of a government official or policy change, from the opponent. During the 2018 Armenian Revolution, the general strike in Yerevan led to the election of Nikol Pashinyan over incumbent Serzh Sargsyan. The strike obstructed major roadways and transportation access; teachers and students stopped attending school; and an estimated 150,000 people gathered in the Republic Square with customized shirts, posters, and flags. The halt to life in the capital led the Republican MP’s to assure Pashinyan that his bid for office would not be blocked and that the Republican party would not put forward a candidate.

Where do campaigns utilize dilemma actions? Scholars have long theorized that mobilization strategies depend, in part, on political context (e.g. McAdam et al., 1982; Kitschelt, 1986; Tarrow, 1989; Almeida, 2003). Theories of political opportunity structure, for example, note that mobilization is more likely when governments are less repressive or when elites divide, perhaps with some defecting elites supporting the social mobilization. The claims of mobilizing agents and the specific strategies they choose – including whether they choose primarily violent or nonviolent tactics – therefore depend on the larger opportunity context. For example, mobilizing agents may be more likely to choose nonviolent protest to military rule rather than terrorist tactics when a large, well-organized political party supports the aims of the mobilization campaign. Further, nonviolent protest mobilization may be less common where citizens can express political demands and hold governments accountable through free and fair elections, namely in consolidated democracies.

Because mobilizing tactics depend on political context and that context varies considerably over time and space, we might expect that dilemma actions are more likely to occur in some places or times than in others. Indeed, as we show below in Figure 2, nonviolent campaigns are more likely in the past three decades than in the 80 years prior to 1990.³ Further, there is a wide disparity in the geographic distribution of nonviolent campaigns. Mass nonviolent campaigns occur in nearly 4 percent of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, largely due to the uprisings during the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in over 2 percent of Latin American countries. But nonviolent campaigns are much less frequent in Western democracies (0.4 percent) and in sub-Saharan Africa (0.9 percent). The top map in Figure 1 illustrates these patterns. Countries and territories left blank on the map are those with no recorded nonviolent campaigns. We can see the visual clustering of these campaigns in the former Soviet empire and in Latin America.

The bottom map of Figure 1 shows the geographic reach of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns. The geographic pattern appears, again, to be skewed more heavily towards the former Soviet empire and Latin America. However, this distribution is largely the result of where nonviolent campaigns arise – not where dilemma actions occur during campaigns. Table 1 shows the percentage of nonviolent campaigns in each geographic region that have dilemma actions. In total, 33 percent

³We use the NAVCO 1.3 data on nonviolent campaigns, discussed below.

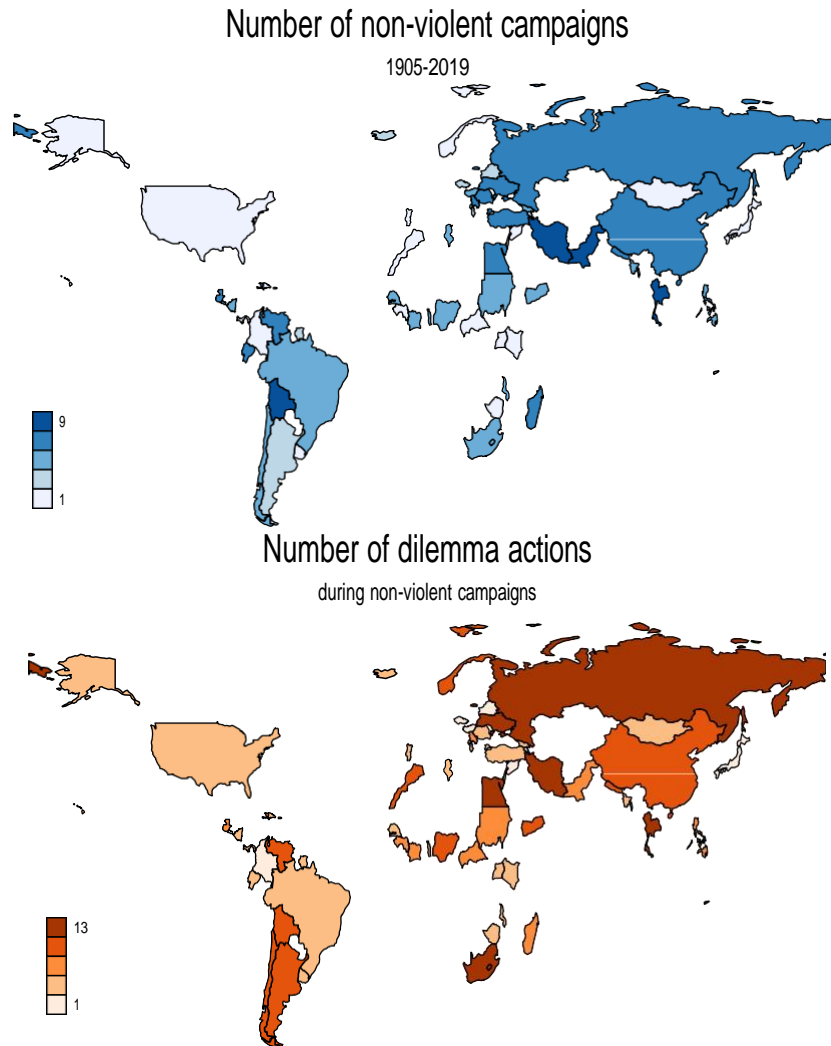


Figure 1: Dilemma actions and nonviolent campaigns across the world

of the 320 nonviolent campaigns have a dilemma action. And while some regions, such as Latin America, have more than others, such as Asia and the Pacific, the incidence of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns never strays too far from the global average of 33 percent. In short, dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns are more evenly distributed across the globe than the nonviolent campaigns themselves. This suggests that while political context – such as democracy – likely shapes the likelihood of nonviolent campaigns mobilizing, the same may not be as strong for dilemma actions during these campaigns.

Correlates of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns Even if there is no strong geographic pattern of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, other contextual factors may facilitate dilemma action strategies. For example, dilemma actions may be more likely when protesters face a particularly repressive government where citizens have few institutional channels for expressing dissent, such as political parties or elections, and where the state’s security apparatus effectively neuters media dissent or jails opposition leaders. In addition, those regimes that impose unnecessarily harsh restrictions on the public, such as limits on the numbers of people who can congregate,

Table 1: Dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns occur across the globe

Region	Share of nonviolent campaigns with Dilemma actions
E. Europe and C. Asia	0.35
L. America and the Caribbean	0.40
MENA	0.35
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.36
W. Europe and N. America	0.33
Asia and Pacific	0.23
Total	0.33

harsh curfews or limits on attire, open themselves up to dilemma action tactics. We thus want to know if dilemma actions are more likely to arise during campaigns facing a repressive regime.

Further, there may be bias in observing and collecting data on dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns. For example, larger countries or wealthier ones may have more news sources and these additional news sources may make it easier for researchers to find evidence of dilemma actions. If we more easily observe dilemma actions in large countries and country size shapes the effectiveness of dilemma actions, then analyzing the success of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns might produce biased estimates.

To understand whether and where potential confounding and selection bias may be present in the dilemma action data, we estimate a series of econometric models to assess the correlation between dilemma actions and other contextual factors. We report these correlations in Figure A-1 in the Appendix. We test five structural and political variables that examine the context of nonviolent campaigns: country wealth (GDP per capita); population size; the level of democracy; election year; and recent state repression. From these tests we find no evidence that any of these five variables is correlated with dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns. On the one hand, these null results provide little guidance for understanding what facilitates dilemma actions during these campaigns. But on the other hand, we can be more confident that these contextual factors – democracy and state repression for example – are not confounding our subsequent analysis of whether dilemma actions boost campaign success.

Finally, there are a number of features of nonviolent campaigns themselves that may overlap with dilemma actions. For example, dilemma actions may be more prevalent in campaigns organized around existing political parties or we might more easily observe dilemma actions during campaigns that mobilize larger groups than smaller ones. Participation of political parties in a nonviolent campaign or the number of participants in a campaign might also influence campaign success. Thus, if key features of nonviolent campaigns that help determine its success are also correlated with dilemma actions, then our analysis of dilemma actions may simply be picking the effect of these other campaign features.

To understand the extent to which campaign-level characteristics are correlated with dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, we again test a series of econometric models, with the results reported in Appendix Figure A-1.⁴ We test the following campaign characteristics: campaign size; whether the campaign mobilized with political parties; whether the campaign had parallel institutions; campaign ideological diversity; campaign diversity along a rural/urban divide; whether the campaign is hierarchically structured; whether elites in the target state defected; and whether

⁴This analysis adjusts for campaign duration and we report cluster-robust standard errors. Data on campaign characteristics is from NAVCO 2.1, which contains data on 216 of 320 nonviolent campaigns in NAVCO 1.3.

the target government responded to the nonviolent campaign with repression. In this analysis, we find no evidence that dilemma actions are correlated with these features of campaigns, with one exception, state repressive response to the nonviolent protest campaign. We find that dilemma actions are less likely to occur during nonviolent campaigns where the state responds to campaign activity with repression.

How dilemma actions boost nonviolent campaign success

Dilemma actions contain several key components: they tap into widely-shared beliefs or norms; they force opponents into a “response dilemma”; and they rely on irony or humor to expose illegitimate actions by their opponents. Further, nearly all dilemma actions elicit some form of media coverage, which is overwhelmingly sympathetic to the group deploying the action.

Dilemma actions may, theoretically, increase nonviolent campaign success through multiple, perhaps complementary, micro-mechanisms: enhancing group formation; changing perceptions of legitimacy; reducing fear; and breeding sympathetic media coverage. Our goal in this section is to articulate possible micro-mechanisms that are rooted in well-established theories of individual-level behavior. While we outline the ways through which dilemma actions shape individual beliefs and behavior that contribute to campaign success, we leave tests of these micro-mechanisms for further research.

Group formation First, dilemma actions, like many nonviolent protest strategies, can directly influence perceptions about norms by providing information about a group that pursues the action. For example, the dilemma action may inform observers that the group deploying the action is critical of the government but does not threaten observers because the action itself, while conflictual, is nonviolent (Sørensen and Johansen, 2016, 85-88). Observing this public behavior of group members conveys new information about the preferences of the group and may change norms about acceptable public behavior. For individuals who share a common group identity with some or all of the activist group members, such that the group pursuing the action serves as a common reference group, the action updates perceptions about norms (Miller and Prentice, 1996; Tankard and Paluck, 2016, 184), which in turn shape both perceptions of legitimacy and public behavior (e.g. Paluck and Shepherd, 2012). Social referents need not be public leaders of a group that deploys a dilemma action, but “other group members may influence perceived norms, particularly when their public behavior calls attention to existing norms” (Tankard and Paluck, 2016, 187).

Similarly, participants in dilemma actions may experience group emotions, which facilitate commitment to the group and enhance collective action in the future (Mackie and Smith, 1998; Becker and Tausch, 2015). When dilemma actions are humorous and/or rely on irony in targeting an opponent, participants in the action may experience *positive*, group-level emotions. Laughtivism, for example, is the strategic use of humor and mocking by nonviolent movements to undermine the authority of an opponent and build credibility (Popovic and Joksic, 2013). Shared laughter facilitates communication, strengthens social ties, and is a behavioral manifestation of joy, a positive emotion (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005; Kashdan et al., 2014). Laughter breeds feelings of intimacy and belonging among strangers (Ujlaky, 2003; Thonus, 2008) and can therefore contribute to the formation and sustainability of group identities. In contrast to negative group emotions, such as fear or disgust, positive group emotions boost group productivity and task performance (Menges et al., 2011; Knight and Eisenkraft, 2015). Indeed, there is a long history of humor facilitating social protest (Davies, 2007; Hart, 2007; Sørensen, 2016). Dilemma actions, more than other nonviolent strategies, may thus contribute to group formation and help sustain groups based on a new identity

aligned with the group's goals.

Dilemma actions may also facilitate feelings of empowerment because these tactics produce short-term adverse reactions from opponents, which are easily interpreted as tactical success. Empowerment, in turn, produces positive emotions such as joy and pride (Tausch and Becker, 2013) and boosts feelings of efficacy (Drury and Reicher, 1999, 2005). These positive emotions further develop long-term commitments to group mobilization (Barr and Drury, 2009).

Legitimacy Second, successful dilemma actions provoke a “lose-lose” response from the target where all opponent responses to the action reflect negatively on the opponent (Lakey, 1987; Duhamel and Pearson, 2004). The dilemma action forces the opponent to make a choice between various options, but “no choice by the opponent can be obviously better by all criteria or according to all decision-makers” (Sørensen and Martin, 2014, 79). The opponent's response is ‘lose-lose’ precisely because any response (or a lack of response) will publicly demonstrate that the opponent is either weak (no response) or violates a widely-held social norm. This process assumes the presence of a widely-held norm; and activists design a protest action to provoke a target response that transgresses this norm (Popovic and Miller, 2015; Popovic and McClennen, 2020). For this reason, the strategy of dilemma actions entails a complete understanding of the norm, including knowledge about the spectrum of opponent responses that could be widely perceived to violate the norm. Opponents transgress widely-held norms when they deploy an excessive and disproportionate response or when the response itself highlights the illegitimacy of the opponent and undermines the opponents' credibility. Either kind of response influences observers' beliefs about the legitimacy (and strength) of the opponent as well as, potentially, the relative efficacy of protest itself (e.g. Lohmann, 1994).

Norm-violating behavior can be excessively repressive or disproportionate, simply ridiculous or ironic, signal opponent weakness, or combine elements of all three. For example, if the opponent first opts not to respond publicly to a dilemma, citizens observe this non-response and may interpret the initial non-response as opponent weakness, increasing resistance to the opponent.⁵ Increasing participation in the dilemma action may boost the legitimacy of the group and, likewise, decrease the perceived legitimacy of the target.⁶ Once resistance grows, however, the opponent may use excessive, even violent, force to stem the tide of mobilization before it grows even larger. Excessive force – particularly when targeting a quickly expanding or in-group social referent – publicly demonstrates the opponents' willingness to violate a widely-held norm or belief. In this example, the dilemma action provokes both initial non-response (weakness) and excessive force (norm violation), only at different moments of the response. Just as forming perceptions of norms is often dynamic (Miller and Prentice, 1996; Paluck and Shepherd, 2012), so too is the response of the opponent, including behaviors that violate norms.

Further, an opponents' over-reaction to a non-violent dilemma action may stem from a psychological response rooted in a fear of a loss among the actions' targets. For example, we might conceptualize activists who employ dilemma actions as “attackers” and their opponents as “defenders” in an asymmetric conflict, wherein the attackers seek system change while the defenders attempt to preserve the status quo (De Dreu and Gross, 2019). Using this framework, once attackers deploy a dilemma action in a conflict, the defenders may respond to the action out of fear of losing power. The threat of loss taps into loss aversion psychological mechanisms (Tversky and

⁵See, for example, Lohmann (1994) and Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (1998) on information cascades and protest mobilization. In global coordination games, learning about others' protest can shape propensity to protest, often dubbed “strategic complementarity” (e.g. Chwe, 2000; Edmond, 2013; Bursztyn et al., 2021).

⁶Increasing participation by different groups can also increase a sense of collective identity among otherwise distinct groups, further enhancing collective action (Simon et al., 1998).

Kahneman, 1974, 1991), causing the defenders to respond disproportionately to the dilemma action to preserve their power. When this over-reaction violates a social norm, dilemma actions succeed in delegitimizing the opponent (Popovic and McClennen, 2020).

Fear A third causal mechanism linking dilemma actions to campaign success involves the psychology of fear. While laughter is a positive emotion that enhances group formation and collective action, fear does the opposite. Fear may create feelings of isolation and apathy by inducing pessimistic perceptions of risks (Johnson and Tversky, 1983; Lerner and Keltner, 2001) and boost risk aversion (Druckman and McDermott, 2008) – two mechanisms that reduce participation in protest (Young, 2019). By increasing individual-level assessment of being targeted by government repression, fear should raise the perceived costs to individuals of dissent. Further, fear may negatively shape beliefs about others’ willingness to protest, which, in turn, decreases individual propensity to protest – a second-order negative consequence of individual-level fear.

If dilemma action reduce fear among the activists who deploy this tactic, these participants and members of their group should be more likely to dissent, now and in the future. Perhaps even more importantly, dilemma actions that produce public reactions from the opponent that are absurd or illogical, may reduce fear among non-participants (Popovic and McClennen, 2020); and this decrease in fear may induce them to join future protests against the opponent or to replicate the dilemma actions in a different time or place with a different audience.

Media Finally, dilemma actions may spur sympathetic media coverage of the action, which in turn, both provides *summary information* about the group deploying the dilemma action and serves as an *institutional* source of normative information (Tankard and Paluck, 2016), particularly when the media description of the event documents the norm-violating behavior of the opponent. Achieving sympathetic media coverage allows campaigns using dilemma actions to disrupt typical media coverage of activism which tends to rely on negative stereotypes and to stick to paradigms that describe protests as “deviant, threatening or impotent” (Bashir et al., 2013; Lee, 2014). A media report might convey summary information about the group employing the dilemma action (e.g. the size and composition of the group) as well summary information about allied groups that support or are sympathetic to the dilemma action. This summary information, in turn, can widen the reference group so that more citizens change their perceptions about the legitimacy of the group and its goals.

If citizens perceive the media source as credible and legitimate source of information, then media coverage of the dilemma action conveys institutional information about the action and the group employing action, further legitimizing the groups goals and updating beliefs about the target. Even if citizens do not align with the media source, they may perceive the media to reflect the sentiments of elites, the mass public, or a large, dominant in-group (Zaller, 1992). In short, those who receive sympathetic information about a dilemma action from a media source may infer that the action and the group deploying the action are publicly supported.

Data and design

Data

The original NAVCO 1.3 data contains over 600 campaigns, both violent (289) and nonviolent (320) (Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a). The success rate varies substantially across these two types of resistance campaigns: 54 percent of nonviolent campaigns succeed while only 29 percent of violent

ones meet with success. Our analysis of dilemma actions examines the 320 nonviolent campaigns, the first of which occurs in 1905 and the last of which started in 2019. For each of these cases, we followed a holistic case study method, where we first determined whether a campaign employed the tactic of a dilemma action by consulting scholarly resources, media resources and social media sources, where relevant. When we initially found no evidence of a dilemma action, we triple checked to confirm evidence of absence. When there was a dilemma action, we first identified the dilemma and the widely held belief for confirmation by a team member. We then wrote a descriptive narrative of the action and coded a range of descriptive and evaluative features of the dilemma action.

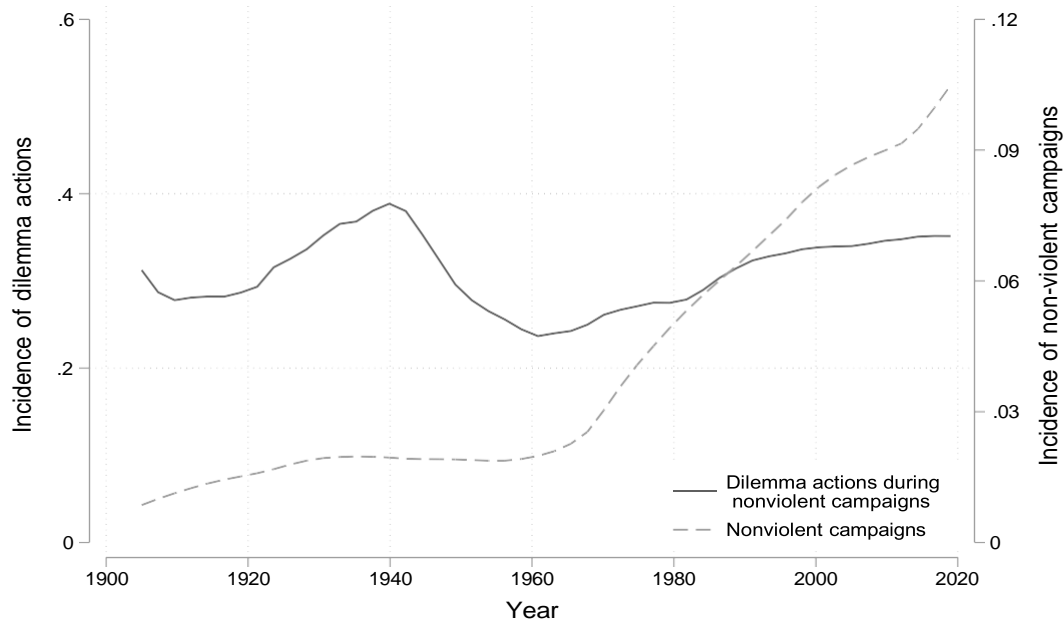


Figure 2: Dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns

Figure 2 shows the incidence of dilemma actions within nonviolent campaigns over time and compares this frequency with incidence of nonviolent campaigns. The horizontal axis marks the calendar year and the vertical axes display the incidence of dilemma actions on the left and the incidence of nonviolent campaigns on the right. The average incidence of dilemma actions, which is calculated only among the 320 nonviolent campaigns recorded in NAVCO 1.3, is just under one-third. The incidence of nonviolent campaigns is much lower, on average, because it is calculated from a sample of all countries and territories.

The raw data suggest two patterns. First, nonviolent campaigns are increasing in number. Before 1960, these campaigns occurred in less than 2 percent of countries and territories. Since 1990, in contrast, nonviolent campaigns have mobilized in over 5 percent of countries. Thus, the incidence of nonviolent campaigns has more than doubled over the second half of the 20th century. This might reflect the fact that nonviolent campaigns are, in fact, more likely in later years; or this trend may reflect the possibility that researchers more easily observe these types of campaigns in later decades when more information is available. We do not know.

The second pattern in Figure 2 is the trend for dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, which remains relatively constant across time: the annual trend hovers near the sample average of 32 percent. This data pattern suggests that there is no discernible time trend in dilemma actions

during nonviolent campaigns: dilemma actions are not more or less common in later decades.⁷ Thus the trends in Figure 2 indicate that while there may be some recency bias in observing nonviolent campaigns, we find no evidence of a time trend in dilemma actions among the nonviolent campaigns recorded in NAVCO 1.3.

Each case in the NAVCO 1.3 data set is coded as either a failure, partial success or a full success. Success entails the campaign achieving “some of its stated goals within a year of the peak of activities,” while partial success means the target of the campaign “makes concessions to the campaign or significant reforms short of complete campaign success” (Chenoweth and Shay, 2020b, 11). For example, non-violent uprisings against Communist rule in Poland (1980) and Hungary (1989) were successful, as were more recent protest campaigns that ousted presidents in Burkina Faso (2014) and Tunisia (2010). In contrast, protests against Daniel Ortega’s repression in Nicaragua (2018) and the al-Sisi government in Egypt (2019) failed. Comparing campaigns within countries is also useful: anti-apartheid protests in South Africa failed in 1952 but succeeded in the 1980s; meanwhile anti-government mobilization in Sudan during the Arab Spring uprisings failed (2011) but protests against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 succeeded. Of the 320 nonviolent campaigns in NAVCO 1.3, 38 percent are failures, 47 percent are successes, while the remaining 15 percent are partial successes.

Estimator

After examining the raw data patterns, we estimate a series of econometric models to test whether dilemma actions are correlated with nonviolent campaign success. Because the outcome is an ordered variable, with three ordered outcomes (Fail, Partial success, and Success) we estimate an ordered logit model. We adjust for the duration of the campaign because we may be more likely to observe dilemma actions during longer campaigns and campaigns often endure past initial stages when they are unsuccessful. Thus, campaign duration is likely related to both dilemma actions and campaign success. We also adjust for a non-linear time trend because the success rate among nonviolent campaigns appears to vary over time and we know that campaigns are more likely to be observed in later decades.

Further, we model country-level differences – in both success rates and the incidence of dilemmas actions during campaigns – using a correlated random effects (CRE) approach (Wooldridge, 2002, 487).⁸

$$Pr(Success_{i,t}) = \alpha_{j[i]} + \beta_1 DA_{i,t} + \delta_1 \bar{DA}_i + \beta_2 X_{i,t} + \delta_2 \bar{X}_i + \varepsilon_{i,t}; \quad \alpha_j \sim N(0, \sigma_\alpha^2) \quad \varepsilon \sim N(0, 1)$$

In this equation, the outcome is the probability of observing a successful campaign ($Pr(Success)_{i,t}$) and the treatment variable is $DA_{i,t}$, or dilemma actions. Adjustments for campaign duration and non-linear time trend are denoted by $X_{i,t}$; and differences across countries are modeled with the “within” transformation by adjusting for the unit means of all explanatory variables (\bar{X}_i), including the treatment (\bar{DA}_i). Finally, a random intercept, $\alpha_{j[i]}$, captures any remaining unit heterogeneity. The coefficient estimate of interest is the marginal effect for the treatment, β_1 .

The CRE approach addresses bias from omitted factors that vary substantially by country. For example, population size could boost protest opportunities and shape campaign success (Chenoweth

⁷Econometric tests also indicate no statistically significant time trend in dilemma actions.

⁸We adapt the often-used CRE probit to estimate marginal effects with an ordered logit link function using a generalized linear model (GLM) that adjusts for unit means of all explanatory variables and models any additional unit heterogeneity with random effects.

and Ulfelder, 2017); and, further, population size might shape whether we observe a dilemma action during a campaign because larger countries tend to have more news sources. Therefore, population size, a relatively static feature of most countries, may influence both dilemma actions and campaign success, introducing bias. Other relatively static differences across countries include: colonial history, legacies of prior autocratic rule, geographic region, great power status, population size, level of economic development and economic dependence on natural resource wealth. That said, in the Appendix we report results from tests that adjust for an additional 20 variables that, if omitted, might lead to biased estimates.⁹ We find relatively stable results for dilemma actions in all of these tests.

Finally, there may be unobserved *selection* effects insofar as some omitted factor such as the availability of media in the country causes us to observe more dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns in countries with a diversity of media sources or where news reporting is more extensive, than in other countries. Further, the selection based on media sources of a country could influence the likelihood of campaign success if these same media are useful in disseminating information about how dilemma actions work to undermine government legitimacy. In the Appendix we address potential unobserved selection effects using a Heckman model, and find similar results to those reported here.¹⁰

The evidence

Data patterns

First, we examine the data patterns among the 320 cases of nonviolent campaigns. To do this, we compare campaign success rates for those with dilemma actions and those without. Recall that, across all nonviolent campaigns, the success rate is roughly 54 percent. The left plot in Figure 3 shows that this average varies considerably by whether a dilemma action occurs. Just under 50 percent of nonviolent campaigns lacking a dilemma action are successful. In contrast, nonviolent campaigns with dilemma actions succeed, on average about 64 percent of the time. This difference is statistically significant at conventional levels. The raw data pattern therefore indicates that dilemma actions are associated with a 14 percent increase in the nonviolent campaign success rate.

The right plot in Figure 3 shows how this difference in campaign success rates changes over time. The horizontal axis marks the calendar year while the vertical axis measures the nonviolent campaign success rate. The success rate – measured as a three-year moving average – for each type of nonviolent campaign (i.e. those with and without dilemma actions) is shown in the two trend lines. In the decades prior to the end of the Cold War, including the period from the 1920s through the 1940s, the success rate for campaigns with dilemma actions is substantially higher than the success rate for campaigns lacking a dilemma action. During the past three decades of the post-Cold War period, however, the difference in success rates has narrowed considerably. In fact, when looking at data from 1905 to 1988, we find that the difference in success rates is roughly 25 percent. In the decades since 1988, in contrast, the difference in success rates is much lower: roughly 9 percent. This smaller advantage for the post-1988 period is not the result of a lower overall success rate: prior to 1989 the overall success rate for nonviolent campaigns is 52 percent; and for the post-1988 period, the overall rate is 55 percent (unreported).

⁹These include: GDP per capita, population size, democracy level, civil liberties, state-led repression, elite support for the regime, rule by military junta, election year, various measures of prior civil society violence, repression, and mobilization, coups, the size of the military, and internal and external conflicts.

¹⁰The Heckman approach models selection into non-violent campaign based on a sample of all independent countries. The selection parameter is statistically significant, suggesting the presence of unobserved selection effects.

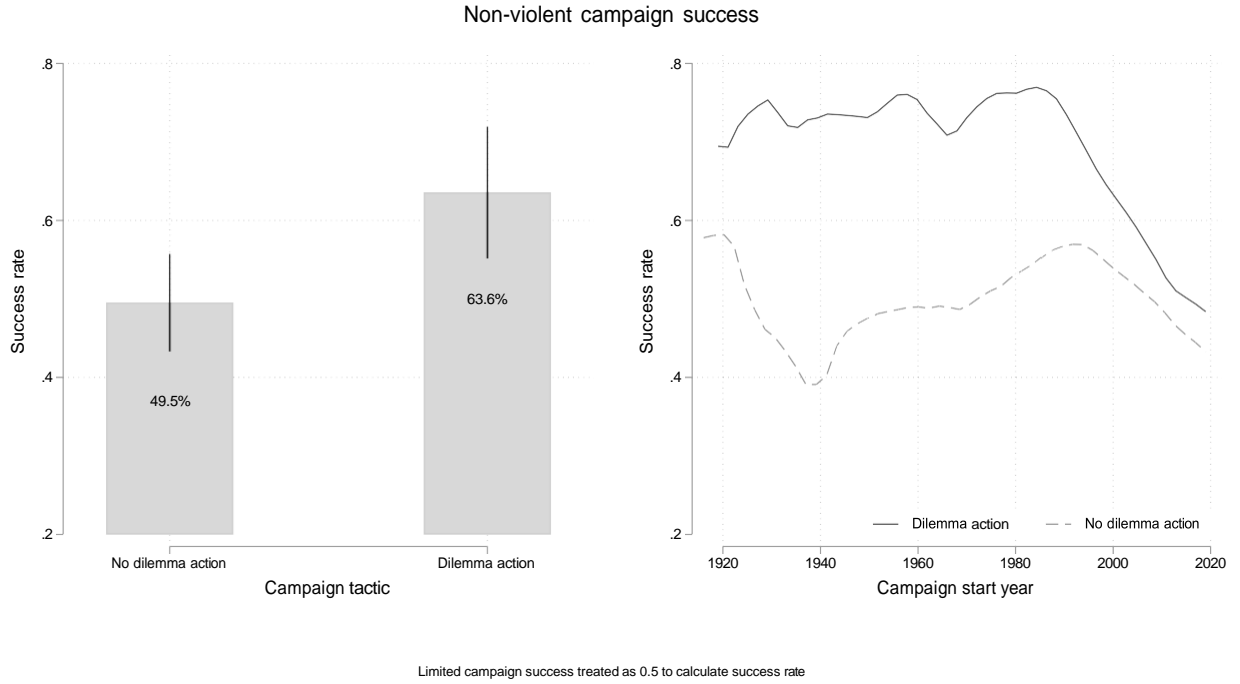


Figure 3: Dilemma actions boost likelihood of campaign success

Results

The results of the baseline CRE ordered logit model are reported in the first column of Table 2.¹¹ The estimate for *Dilemma actions* is positive and statistically significant, indicating that dilemma actions are associated with an increased likelihood of campaign success. This estimate translates into an increased probability of campaign success of 16 percent, which is slightly larger than the average difference in success rates for campaigns with and without dilemma actions of 14 percent, as shown in the left plot of Figure 3.

Next, we test a different estimator, kernel least squares, but employ a similar ‘within’ transformation of the data to model unit heterogeneity. There are several advantages of this estimator. First, this estimator does not make functional form (e.g. linear or logistic) assumptions and thus helps protect against mis-specification bias (Hainmueller and Hazlett, 2014, 143-144). Second, this approach directly estimates an interpretable marginal effect. And finally, the estimator allows the derivation of point-wise marginal effects for each observation in the sample, which makes it easy to show how an average marginal effect estimate varies across time and space.

The second column of Table 2 reports the estimate for the kernel approach. The estimate for dilemma actions is positive and significant, suggesting that dilemma actions are associated with a 10 percent increase in probability of campaign success. This estimate of 10 percent is lower than the prior estimate of 16 percent but comes from an estimator that is often less sensitive to outlier observations. In short, both estimators suggest that, on average, dilemma actions during a nonviolent campaign increase the probability of campaign success by 10-16 percent, which is similar to the raw data difference in success rates.

¹¹Cluster-robust standard errors reported.

Table 2: Dilemma actions and nonviolent campaign success

Estimator	CRE ordered logit (1)	Kernel least squares (2)
Dilemma action	0.71* (0.33)	0.11* (0.05)
Cut 1	4.09 (1.72)	
Cut 2	4.78 (1.73)	
Non-linear time trend	✓	✓
Campaign duration	✓	✓
Unit means	✓	✓
Random intercepts	✓	

Dependent variable is nonviolent campaign *success*;
NxT=320; standard errors clustered on 125 countries;
1905-2019. * $p < 0.05$.

When and where do dilemma actions boost nonviolent campaign success

To better interpret the results, we plot the point-wise marginal effects for the KRLS estimate across the values for theoretically interesting variables. First, the patterns in the right plot of Figure 3 show that the difference in campaign success among cases with and without dilemmas actions shrinks over the course of time. We therefore examine whether the estimated marginal effect of dilemma actions varies across time, recalling that estimate of the average effect for the entire sample period is roughly 10 percent.

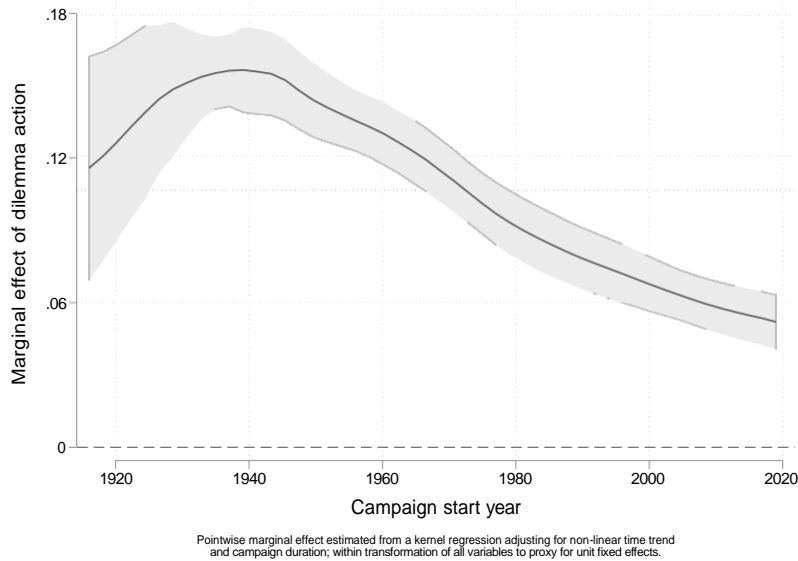


Figure 4: Dilemma action effectiveness weakens over time

Figure 4 shows that marginal effect of dilemma actions is declining over time. The horizontal axis marks years while the vertical axis measures the estimated effect of dilemma actions on the

probability of campaign success. We find that prior to 1960, the effect of dilemma actions is greater than 10 percent, but this effect declines after 1960 to roughly 5 percent in the past decade. Thus, the effectiveness of dilemma actions appears to be decreasing over time, even though the effect is still positive (5 percent) and statistically significant in the past decade. Below we discuss possible reasons for the apparent decline in the effectiveness of dilemma actions.

Dilemma actions in democracies and autocracies Next, we examine whether the dilemma action is more effective against certain types of governments. In democracies citizens typically have opportunity to peacefully express political demands and hold governments accountable because elections tend to be competitive and relatively fair and free; and democratic states tend to protect citizens' civil and political liberties. Thus, institutional channels of expressing political demands in democracies, such as voting, lobbying and even contacting local officials may be effective avenues for influencing policy and implementing accountability. When citizens are ruled by a non-democratic government, in contrast, elections are less likely avenues of accountability and thus voting and lobbying efforts may not yield policy influence or political accountability. Thus, less institutional channels of expressing political demands such as protest campaigns, either violent or nonviolent, may be the only possible methods to effectively hold public officials accountable or influence policy. These differences among autocracies and democracies suggest that protest mobilization could be more prevalent in autocracies.

That said, the costs of mobilizing of dissent, especially nonviolent dissent, are often substantially higher in autocracies than in democracies. Precisely because democracies are more likely to protect civil liberties – including mobilization and association rights – the costs to citizens of mobilizing nonviolent campaigns should be substantially lower in democracies. In contrast, in autocracies citizen mobilization is more likely to be met with state-repression, raising the costs of citizen mobilization in these political regimes.

While there may be less need to mobilize large, nonviolent protest campaigns in democracies, the costs of doing so are much lower than in autocracies; and thus, there is not a clear-cut theoretical prediction suggesting that nonviolent protest campaigns should be more likely to occur or more likely to succeed in democracies than autocracies – or vice versa.

But the logic of dilemma actions suggests they may be more likely to work where governments are less legitimate. Because dilemma actions, by definition, tap into a widely held belief among citizens about appropriate government behavior and use irony to expose abuses of power by the state, these actions tend to be more effective against opponents with less legitimacy. The intrinsic structure of a dilemma action, which creatively puts the opponent in a lose-lose position, reveals that the government's claim to power is repressive – making dilemma actions a highly effective tactic against opponents who are already perceived as less legitimate.

Further, governments that are less legitimate tend to have higher media censorship, which often frustrates the public and opens avenues for the quick transmission of and public engagement with a dilemma action. For example, during the #ThisFlag protest against Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe, a pastor in Harare, the capital city, posted a social media message suggesting that the flag no longer represented him. This post turned into an "avalanche" on social media, as it was shared and replicated, leading to 25 days of digital activism. Zimbabweans engaged in the campaign suggested that participating via social media allowed them to express "the feelings that they were too scared to vocalize" (Allison, 2016). The Mugabe regime's lack of legitimacy made it an easy target for what we describe as an "accidental" dilemma action, in which a spontaneous act that incorporates the core elements of a dilemma action mobilizes citizens even though the action was not deliberately planned by an activist.

Democratic governments tend to be more legitimate (e.g. Easton, 1965; Gerschewski, 2018), particularly when social polarization is low (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012, 428; McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018, 25). Citizens who believe the conduct of democracy – particularly elections – is fair and that the government protects civil liberties are more likely to assess the government as legitimate, even if their preferred candidate or party loses (e.g. Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Lagos, 2003). And democracies tend to have fairer elections and better protect civil liberties than autocracies, producing more government legitimacy.

Thus, if dilemma actions are more likely to be effective during nonviolent campaigns that target ‘illegitimate’ governments, we should expect these actions to be more successful in autocracies, where government legitimacy is lower than in democracies.

To examine this possibility, we plot the estimated marginal effect of dilemma actions by the level of democracy for the targeted government. The horizontal axis in Figure 5 displays the level of democracy for the target government and the vertical axis marks the marginal effect of dilemma actions. In this analysis we only have data for 304 of the 320 nonviolent campaigns (1905- 2019) because some campaigns occur in territories for which there are no data for the measure of democracy, which comes from the Varieties of Democracy project (Coppedge et al., 2022). Thus the average marginal effect of dilemma actions among these cases is slightly smaller – a 7.5 percent increase in the likelihood of campaign success – than the previously reported estimate (10 percent increase). We mark this average with the horizontal line at 0.075 on the vertical axis.

The pattern in the figure indicates that the marginal effect of dilemma actions is highest in more autocratic countries than in democratic ones: when campaigns target the most autocratic governments, marked on the horizontal axis with democracy levels between 0 and 0.2, the dilemma action effect is above average or close to 9 percent. In contrast, for the most democratic target governments, with score ranging from 0.6 to 0.9, the dilemma action effect is less than 6 percent. In short, when nonviolent campaigns target more autocratic governments, dilemma actions are more likely to boost campaign success than when these campaigns target more democratic governments.

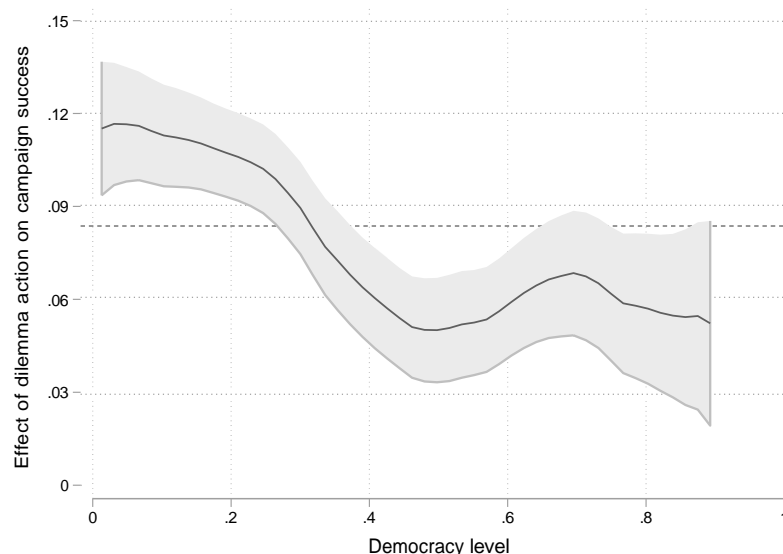


Figure 5: Dilemma actions are more effective when targeting autocratic governments

We corroborate the intuition that dilemma actions are more likely to produce campaign success when the target government is ‘illegitimate’ by examining whether the dilemma action effect is

stronger in closed autocracies – those that do not hold elections – than in electoral autocracies.¹² If elections provide some legitimacy in autocracies, then we should expect that even in autocracies – which typically have less legitimacy than democracies – dilemma actions should be more effective when the government does not hold elections (closed autocracies) than when they do (electoral autocracies). We conduct a difference of means test for the marginal effect of dilemma actions and find that, historically, these actions are twice as effective in closed autocracies (11.4 percent) than in electoral autocracies (5.8 percent).¹³ This suggests that dilemma actions are most closely related to nonviolent campaign success in closed autocracies, which tend to be the most illegitimate forms of government.

Discussion

Even when civil resistance campaigns fail, they more frequently lead to long-term reforms than violent campaigns do (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). In fact, nonviolent campaigns were about 10 times more likely to transition to democracies within a five-year period compared to countries in which there were violent campaigns (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). Thus, within the set of campaigns designated as failures in the NAVCO set, those that used DAs still had high success across a number of critical metrics such as reframing the narrative, increasing segment appeal, or reducing fear for the activists themselves. Each of these positive outcomes has the potential to help unravel repressive power in the future. Once an autocrat's image has been tarnished by an effective dilemma, it can often be hard for them to recover.

We end by noting a few important caveats with the data on dilemma actions. Despite attempting a thorough review of the tactics used by a campaign, we only register those tactics that were written about. Therefore, it is possible that we still overlooked dilemma actions that were not noteworthy; and failed dilemma action may not be as newsworthy as successes. Further, even though our method was to research local news sources, we still relied primarily on English-language sources, which means we may miss some dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns that are only recorded in non-English language sources.

Second, there are important limitations to the data on nonviolent campaigns. We employ the NAVCO 1.3 data set because this provides us with a pre-defined set of cases, ensuring that our search for dilemma actions did not depend on our prior knowledge of well-known (and successful) dilemma actions. However, there still exists a strong time trend in the number of nonviolent campaigns in the NAVCO data: there are many more cases in the past three decades than in the three decades prior to the end of the Cold War, and even fewer nonviolent campaigns that predate the period of decolonization following WWII. Indeed, many of the missing cases of nonviolent campaigns may not only occur prior to 1960 but are also more likely to be failed campaigns (Lehoucq, 2016).

Finally, there are limits to what we can learn from observational data, such as that collected for this paper. While we can propose causal mechanisms linking dilemma actions to nonviolent campaigns success – e.g. enhancing group formation, reducing fear or delegitimizing the target – we cannot test these possible mechanisms with this data and empirical analysis. Thus, another component of this project aims to examine these micro-mechanisms using survey experiments.

¹²Both a t-test and a 2-way fixed effects regression indicate that closed autocracies have less ‘rational-legal’ legitimacy than electoral democracies.

¹³We use the Varieties of Democracies coding for electoral and closed autocracies.

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1 Appendix A: Data on Dilemma Actions

Dilemma action coding procedure To determine if dilemma actions have a measurable impact on the success outcomes of nonviolent campaigns we use the 320 nonviolent campaigns in the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) Dataset, a benchmark source for studying nonviolent campaigns. We investigated and collected sources for each of these 320 campaigns to determine whether campaigns that use dilemma actions (DAs) have different outcome metrics than those that do not. To conducted to following research procedure to assess whether each campaign utilized a DA.

1. General Search in Google for the following:
 - year of campaign
 - the name of the campaign
 - the name of person/state entity being ‘targeted’
 - country the campaign took place in
 - name of group leading the movement
2. Overview of campaign history and country history: we consulted the Swarthmore Global Nonviolent Action Database, Encyclopedia Britannica, media outlets like BBC, as well as scholarly sources such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and WorldCat. We collected information from these sources on the following:
 - Campaign dynamics
 - Important people involved in campaign
 - Additional movement names
 - Important events during campaign
 - Groups with creative tactics
3. Overview of Tactics used by campaign: we then focused on the types of tactics used by the campaign. To do this we followed the following steps:
 - Search for tactical keywords like boycotts, hunger strikes, media art, strikes or other DA tactics commonly used.
 - Search for the name of the campaign and the words tactics, strategy, or actions
4. Search for Dilemma Actions
 - Search keyword from above, campaign, year and country on google, google scholar, academia.edu, and worldcat
 - Also search for youth group, particular person tied to campaign, specific protests connected to the campaign
5. Check Media Sources: if a DA was found, then media sources were consulted to check if/how the tactic was covered.
 - International media
 - Domestic media

- Academic sources
- Worldcat
- Jstor
- Lexis/Nexus

6. Dilemma Action analysis

- Gather at least 6 sources that focus on the action, its opponents, and its goals.
- Find the widely held belief of the campaign
- Identify when the D.A. took place, its location, and the activist or activist group that created the action
- Pinpoint the type of struggle
- Write up the dilemma action narrative: Issue and Opponent, Characteristics of the DA, and Outcomes
- Log all collected materials and information in shared spreadsheet
- Wait for another member of the team to internally vet the new case
 - If rejected once: add necessary information to create a case on why the action was a dilemma action
 - If rejected twice: Ask a member of the team for perspective and consider whether or not the action is truly a dilemma action or not.
 - If accepted, wait for Srdja Popovic to review the case and grant final approval. Add information as needed if requested by Popovic.
- Code case according to guidelines outlined in our research codebook.

7. Recheck: After the first round of checking for DAs within a campaign, we then rechecked the cases that did not have a DA. This process was repeated until every campaign presumed to not have used a DA had been rechecked by **three** different researchers.

- DA NOT FOUND
 - Use native language of where the campaign took place to search for tactics and actions used by the campaign
 - Example: The Strike of Fallen Arms case in El Salvador. Use Spanish terms in search engines to see if more sources become available
- After exhausting all research methods and tactics without locating a specific DA with the necessary amount of sources, drop the campaign and place a corresponding 0 in the appropriate spreadsheet column.

Research procedure diagnostics As part of the coding procedure researchers documented a pre-determined number of sources for each case in which a DA was identified. Thus, all nonviolent campaigns with identified DAs have 6 sources to document to the DA and support the DA analysis. We also collected data on the time spend per case, for both campaigns with a DA (107) and those without (213).

The top panel of Table A-1 reports the average time spent for different parts of the research procedure. For all phases of the research procedure the team spent less time on cases where they found evidence of a DA than they spent on null cases where there was no evidence of a DA. Overall, researchers spent roughly 50 percent more time on establishing the absence of evidence (no DA, 178 minutes per case) than on documenting evidence for a DA (112 minutes per case). This difference is statistically significant and should not be surprising because the research team had to continue to research cases in which they did not find evidence of a DA early in the process.

The bottom panel of Table A-1 shows the average research time for successful, partially successful, and failed cases. Overall, researchers spent more time on failure than on successful campaigns, in part because there is generally less historical information on failed nonviolent campaigns, which means these cases require more research time. That said, the only statistically significant difference in time spent on research by campaign success is for the initial search for successful cases (81.2 minutes): this figure is significantly less time than that spent on partial successes and failures.

Table A-1: Average time spent per case

By Dilemma Action	DA found (107)	No DA found (213)	Difference
Identify (initial search)	55.0	100.8	45.8*
1st round recheck	36.7	49.4	12.7*
2nd round recheck	20.3	28.7	8.3*
TOTAL time	112 minutes	178 minutes	66 minutes

By Campaign Success	Success	Partial success	Fail
Identify (initial search)	81.2*	91.5	88.9
1st round recheck	46.6	50	46.5
2nd round recheck	26.6	27.1	29.7
TOTAL time	154 minutes	169 minutes	165 minutes

Equally important, the differences in average time for DA and non-DA cases does not vary substantially by outcome (not reported in the Table): the difference in research time (by DA) for successful campaigns (46 minutes) is almost the same as the difference for failed campaigns (45 minutes). These research procedure diagnostics indicate that researchers spent more time on research to establish the absence of a treatment condition (no DA) and more time on failed campaigns than on successful ones. These differences should give us some confidence that the research team did not systematically miss DAs.

Limitations of the research procedure

- Missed Dilemma Actions: despite attempting a thorough review of the tactics used by a campaign we only register those tactics that were written about. Therefore, it is possible that we still overlooked dilemma actions that were not noteworthy.
- Reliance on English sources: Though our team incorporated sources in the native language of where these actions took place, a majority of the data for this database was drawn from English-language news sources.

Research assistants We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following researchers:

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
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Correlates of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns To understand the extent to which observed factors correlate with DAs during nonviolent campaigns, we estimated a probit model where DAs are the outcome and the factors listed on the horizontal axis of Figure A-1 are the correlates, estimated in separate models. All models adjust for campaign duration (log) and estimate clustered standard errors. The vertical axis in the Figure reports the estimate for the correlate and the 95 percent confidence interval. Only one of the variables tested in this manner, namely state repression of the nonviolent campaign, is strongly correlated with DAs. All the other variables do not correlate with DAs. The main potential confounding factor is there likely to be state repression. That is, there is more likely to be an identified DA during a nonviolent campaign when the NAVCO 2.1 data set codes the absence of state repression of the campaign.¹⁴

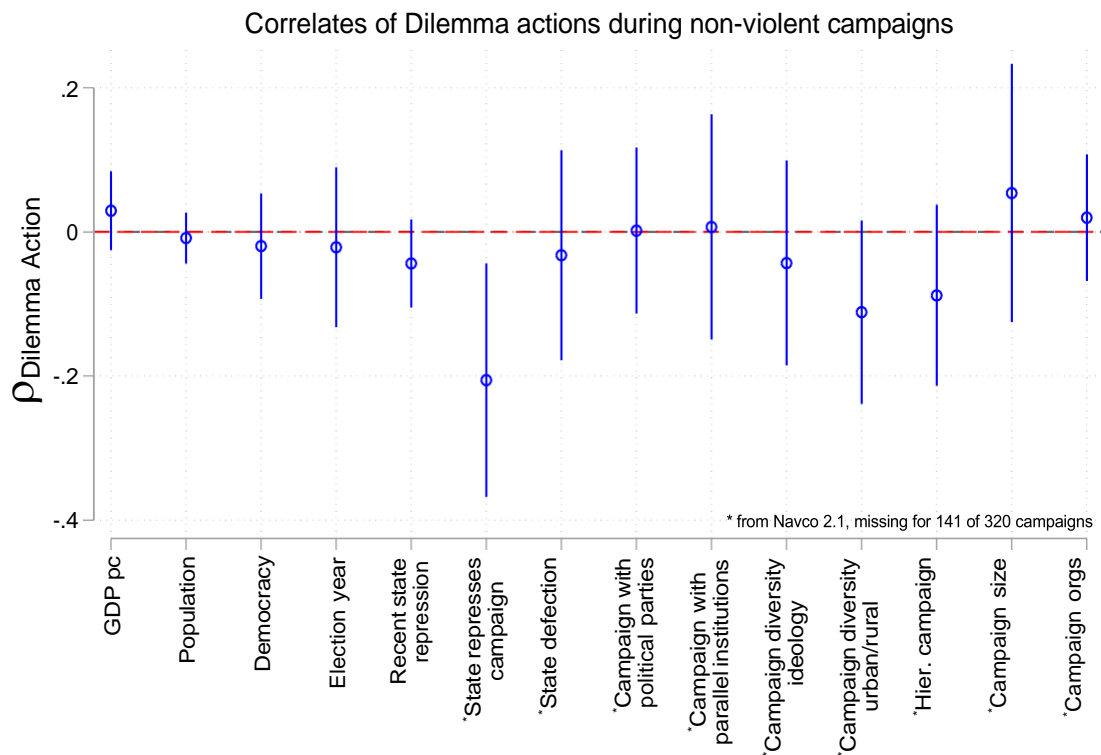


Figure A-1: Correlates of dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns

¹⁴In reproduction files, we show that including the NAVCO 2.1 variable for state repression in the specification only changes the estimate for DAs due to reducing the sample size (missing data for NAVCO 2.1 repression variable) and not due to adjusting for the repression variable. We also show that imputed data on state repression does not substantively alter the estimate for DAs.

2 Appendix B: Additional Empirical Results

This Appendix reports additional empirical results of the main finding linking dilemma actions to nonviolent protest campaign. First, we build the model specification using an ordered logit function. Second, we retest the baseline specification reported in the main text (column 1, Table 2), each time adding a potential confounding variable to the specification. Third, with correlated random effects models, we examine different time periods and different ways of coding the outcome variable. Third, we report estimates from a series of linear probability models using various methods of addressing unit heterogeneity.

Building the baseline model Table B-1 reports results from ordinal logit models. The first column reports a specification that only includes the treatment variable, *Dilemma actions*; and the second and third column add campaign duration (log) and a non-linear time trend (second order polynomial of time) to the specification. In columns (4)-(6) we repeat these specifications but model unit heterogeneity by adding unit-means of all explanatory variables to the specification (where country is the cross-section unit). We do not report the estimates for the unit-means (or between effects) but only report the estimates for the ‘within’ parameters. In all these tests, the estimate for *Dilemma actions* is positive and statistically significant, with the estimated marginal effect ranging from 14 percent to 24 percent. Recall that in the raw data, the estimate is 14 percent as well. Thus, the estimate in column (1) confirms the size of the raw data estimate.

Table B-1: Ordered probit results

				Correlated random effects		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dilemma action	0.583*	0.663*	0.676*	0.893*	1.066*	1.053*
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.43)	(0.45)	(0.43)
Campaign duration (log)		-0.286	-0.276		-0.472	-0.440
		(0.15)	(0.15)		(0.36)	(0.32)
Time			0.037			-0.005
			(0.02)			(0.03)
Time ²			-0.000*			-0.000
			(0.00)			(0.00)
Average marginal effect	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.21	0.24	0.24
cut1	-0.284	-0.453*	0.248	2.775*	2.841*	3.327*
	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.72)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.74)
cut2	0.323*	0.161	0.874	3.775*	3.851*	4.386*
	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.73)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.75)
N × T	320	320	320	320	320	320
# countries	125	125	125	125	125	125

Dependent variable is nonviolent protest campaign success; 1905-2019. Within estimates reported; between estimates not reported. * $p < 0.05$.

Potential confounders Next, we re-estimate the baseline specification (a CRE ordered logit model) and add potential confounders to the specification. We separately adjust for 20 covariates: GDP per capita; population size; democracy (lagged one year); state repression (year the campaign starts); civil liberties protections (lagged one year); state repression (lagged one year); judicial independence (lagged one year); elite support group for the regime in power (lagged on year); military government; election year; non-state violence (lagged one year); civil society associations

(lagged one year); state repression of civil society (lagged one year); non-state social mobilization (lagged one year); pro-democracy mobilization (lagged one year); coup attempt; size of the military; civil conflict; and international conflict. We lag some variable by one year because we want to ensure the variable captures the target in the year of the start of the campaign. For example, for the protest campaign against Indonesian president Habibie in 1999 we want to record the level of democracy in Indonesia during the last year of his presidency (1998) and not the level of democracy for the elected government that followed the June 1999 election.

Figure 1 reports the results. The horizontal axis displays the names of the covariate we add to the baseline specification, while the vertical axis marks the estimate for *Dilemma actions* when adding the covariate to the specification. The red dashed line at the bottom marks 0 while the black horizontal dashed line at 0.71 marks the size of the estimate from the baseline specification with no added covariates. The blue circles are the estimates for the *Dilemma actions* and the blue vertical lines of the error intervals for this estimate. For all added covariates named on horizontal axis, the estimate for *Dilemma actions* remains positive and statistically different – and nearly the same size as the baseline estimate. This suggests that the result reported in the main text is unlikely to be biased from observed but omitted variables.

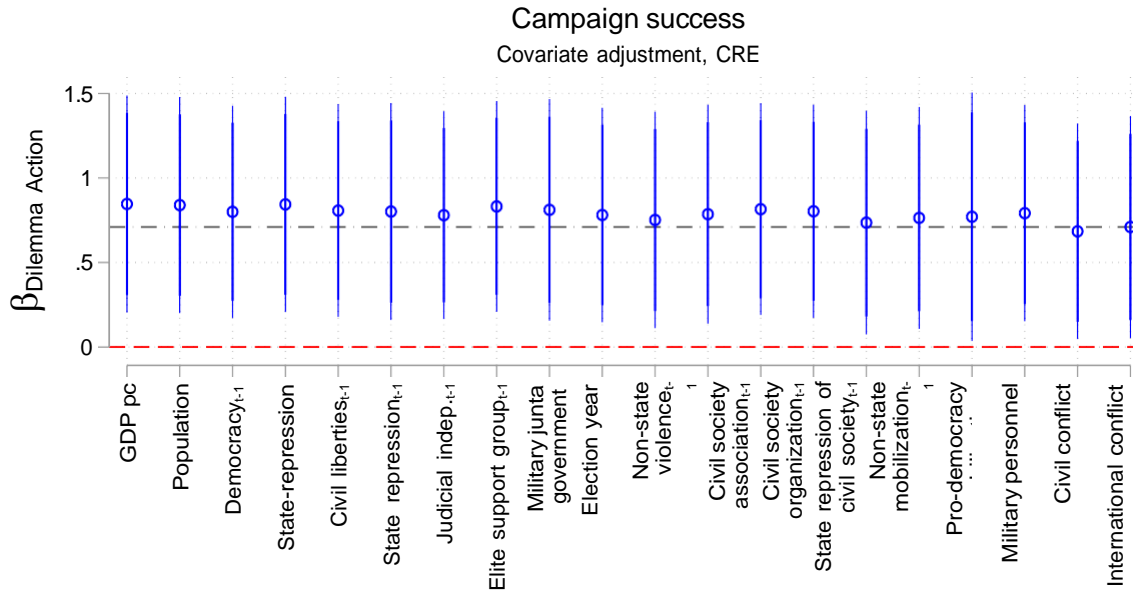


Figure 1: Digital repression, for autocratic regime cases

Time periods and outcomes The models in Table B-2 report estimates from correlated random effects logit models. The first column reports the CRE ordered logit estimate from the main text, which tests using a sample for all years in the data (1905-2019). The second and third columns report estimates for different time periods, before and after the cold war. The final two columns report estimates that treat partial campaign success as either a full success (column 4) or a failure (column 5). For these two we use binary logit models since the outcome is dichotomous rather than with more than two ordinal categories. While not all estimates for *Dilemma actions* are statistically significant at the 0.05 level those in columns (3) and (5) are significant at the 0.10 level. All the estimated average marginal effects of dilemma actions are within the range of 15 percent to 19 percent – with the exception of the estimate for the pre-1990 period, which is much higher. That

the estimate for the pre-1990 period is substantively large should not be surprising given the data patterns shown in right plot in Figure 3 in the main text: dilemma actions have a higher rate of success during most of the 20th century than in the period of the last 30 years.

Table B-2: CRE logit models

	All years (1)	pre-1990 (2)	post-1989 (3)	Partial success coded 1 (4)	Partial success coded 0 (5)
Dilemma action	0.710* (0.33)	1.959* (0.84)	0.795 (0.47)	0.763* (0.37)	0.621 (0.34)
Campaign duration (log)	-0.230 (0.21)	-0.078 (0.36)	-0.508 (0.34)	-0.108 (0.23)	-0.369 (0.23)
Time	-0.010 (0.03)	-0.048 (0.06)	-0.026 (0.54)	-0.012 (0.03)	-0.008 (0.03)
Time ²	-0.000 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)
(Intercept)				-3.496* (1.77)	-5.169* (1.93)
Average marginal effect	0.17	0.38	0.19	0.18	0.15
cut1	4.088* (1.72)	1.645 (1.95)	-2.423 (34.17)		
cut2	4.787* (1.73)	2.437 (1.97)	-1.767 (34.16)		
Var(Intercept)	0.368 (0.31)	0.213 (0.65)	0.241 (0.48)	0.344 (0.38)	0.249 (0.30)
N × T	320	125	195	320	320
# countries	125 ordered	74 ordered	95 ordered	125 binary	125 binary

Dependent variable is nonviolent protest campaign success; 1905-2019. Within estimates reported; between estimates not reported. * $p < 0.05$.

Linear probability models Table B-3 reports results from a series of linear models. We do this for two reasons. First, it is easy to compare estimates across OLS models when adjusting the approach to modeling unit effects. Second, in the next Appendix we test a Heckman selection model with a linear link function, so testing OLS models without selection provides a helpful comparison. The first column in Table B-3 reports estimates from an OLS model without any correction for unit effects. The second column tests a random intercept model, while the third column reports estimates from a country-fixed effects estimator. The final column reports estimates from a correlated random effects linear model: this approach directly includes unit means of all explanatory variables in the specification and models any remain heterogeneity with random effects. In all models the estimate for *Dilemma actions* is positive and statistically significant, with estimates ranging from 14 to 16 percent.

Table B-3: Linear probability models

	OLS (1)	RE (2)	FE (3)	CRE (4)
Dilemma action	0.163* (0.05)	0.157* (0.05)	0.146* (0.07)	0.146* (0.07)
Campaign duration (log)	-0.066 (0.03)	-0.065 (0.03)	-0.051 (0.04)	-0.051 (0.04)
Time	0.009 (0.00)	0.008 (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.002 (0.01)
Time ²	-0.000* (0.00)	-0.000* (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)
(Intercept)	0.379* (0.16)	0.411* (0.16)	0.825* (0.12)	-0.323 (0.32)
N × T	320	230	264	320
# countries	125	125	69	125

Dependent variable is nonviolent protest campaign success; 1905-2019.
Within estimates reported in column (4) between estimates not reported. * $p < 0.05$.

3 Appendix C: Selection model

This Appendix discusses selection issues. While there appears to be no discernable time trend in observing dilemma actions during nonviolent campaigns, the same cannot be said for the campaigns themselves. We observe more nonviolent campaigns in the past three decades (60 percent of the total) than in the eight decades prior to 1990 (40 percent). Further, we are much more likely to observe nonviolent campaigns in large rather than small countries. There are likely additional factors that cause selection into observing nonviolent campaigns. If any of these factors are correlated with campaign success, then the sample of nonviolent campaigns may be biased.

We therefore test a selection model in which we assume that only some nonviolent campaigns are observed, while some remain unobserved. We then attempt to model selection into nonviolent campaigns. In the most sparse specification for the selection equation, we predict observing a nonviolent campaign with four variables plus a nonlinear time trend. The four variables are population size; area of a country; level of democracy; and election year.¹⁵ The latter two variables, while each conceptually distinct are related to the other: countries with higher democracy scores tend to have election years.

The first column of Table D-1 reports the results of the selection equation: Large population countries and election years are positively correlated with observing a nonviolent campaign, while democracy levels and land area are negatively correlated with observing nonviolent campaigns. Further the nonlinear time trend is highly significant, as shown by testing the joint-value of both terms of the time polynomial.

The second column reports the outcome equation, where the outcome is campaign success for nonviolent campaigns. We only observe campaign success during observed campaigns. The estimate for *Dilemma actions* is positive and statistically significant while campaign duration and the time trend are not significant. The estimate for *Dilemma actions* is similar in size to that reported in other models throughout the main text and appendix, which range from 14 percent to about 20 percent.

The errors for the two equations are highly correlated: the estimate for ρ is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that this estimator is correctly modeling the selection into nonviolent campaigns; and that a Heckman selection model is appropriate for this data. That said, even correcting for this selection, the estimate for dilemma actions remains robust: dilemma actions increase the likelihood of campaign success by about 15 percent.

We tested a second selection model that also included GDP per capita and geographic region fixed effects in the selection equation. This result, found in the reproduction files, yields slightly larger (16 percent) and still significant estimate for *Dilemma actions*. Our last test is for a heckman probit model, with similar results: 14 percent increase in campaign success rate.

¹⁵We use the natural log of population size and the eighth root of land area to make skewed variable more normal.

Table D-1: Heckman selection model

Equation	Selection	Outcome
Dilemma action		0.159* (0.05)
Campaign duration (log)		-0.044 (0.04)
Population (log)	0.189* (0.03)	
Area (root)	-0.102* (-0.05)	
Democracy _{t-1}	-0.667* (0.13)	
Election year	0.134* (0.06)	
Time	0.006 (0.00)	0.007 (0.00)
Time ²	0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)
(Intercept)	-3.45* (0.24)	-0.220 (0.35)
p-value for the Joint test of the time polynomial	0.00	0.22
ρ		0.491* (0.164)
N×T	14,308	296
# Countries	180	114

Dependent variable in outcome equation is nonviolent protest campaign success; 1905-2019. * $p < 0.05$.