Does Violent Secessionism Work?

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that nonviolent resistance is generally a more effective means of achieving political goals than violent mobilization, especially where anti-regime and anti-occupation campaigns are concerned. However, that finding does not extend to secession campaigns, where the strategic use of violence may increase a group´s chance of gaining independence. That violent secessionism may work is an unsettling proposition, one that suggests a dangerous incentive structure where the pursuit of independence is concerned. We critique and extend these claims by arguing that there are strong selection effects in regard to the strategies adopted by secessionists. Not all secessionist movements are the same, and many have legal and/or institutional routes to independence that raise the relative cost of using violence. It is only among groups that lack access to these routes that violence becomes an increasingly attractive strategy. Using original data we define these different categories of secessionist movements and examine their success rates for using nonviolence and violence. We then use information drawn from case studies, fieldwork, and personal interviews to shift focus from the structure of secessionism to the issue of choice: to what extent do secessionists actually choose between violent and non-violent methods?

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Introduction

Recent research suggests that nonviolent resistance is a more effective means of achieving political ends than its violent counterpart. In their exhaustive study on this topic, Chenoweth and Stephan (CS) found that such nonviolent (“civil resistance”) methods are more effective than violent means for both anti-regime and anti-occupation campaigns.[1] However, they noted that this dynamic does not extend to secession campaigns, where the strategic logic of using violence appears more effective than nonviolent extra-institutional conflict in pursuit of territorial gains. This finding contributes to a developing literature on the strategy of secessionism,[2] and it raises an unsettling question: are secessionists better off using violent methods if they want to become independent?

Secessionist ambition is clearly a major cause of violent conflict, implicated in about 50% of the civil wars in modern times.[3] We calculate that there has been an average of 15 secessionist conflicts per year since 1945.[4] Indeed, Walter has argued provocatively that secessionism is the chief source of violence in the world today.[5] It is easy to see why secessionism can be dangerous. It forces the state to defend its territorial integrity and demonstrate its commitment to its secessionist opponents, as well as other audiences, regarding how far it will go it keep it. As Abraham Lincoln argued, secession forces the state to choose between dissolution and blood.[6]

Although we know that violence is a common consequence of secessionist activity, we know little about its strategic value and the degree to which nationalist groups may

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[1] Chenoweth and Stephen 2011.
[2] Toft 2003; Walter 2006; Cunningham 2013; Fazal and Griffiths 2014.
[3] Secessionism-driven civil wars are usually differentiated from civil wars aimed at taking over the center of power. Fearon and Laitin 2003 estimated that 52 percent of the civil wars between 1945 and 1999 involved secessionism. Similarly, Sorens (2012, 3) claims, “since the 1980s, at least half of all ongoing civil wars in any given year have been secessionist.”
[4] This calculation uses the threshold of twenty-five battle deaths as identified by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Themnér and Wallensteen, 2012).
[5] Walter 2009, 3.
[6] Lincoln 1953, 427.

actually choose violent methods because they are perceived to be effective.[7] There is of course an extensive literature examining the logic of violence in varied contexts, arguing for its strategic value in some cases.[8] There is also a substantial literature on social movements and resistance. But this literature is typically focused on social and/or regime change or opposition to a foreign occupier.

Secessionism may involve different dynamics for a host of reasons. For example, one factor that pertains directly to secession and not anti-regime and anti-occupation campaigns, is the strategic importance and necessity of international recognition. Secessionism may draw international attention and, under the right conditions, generate pressure on the home state to negotiate with the breakaway region and even to permit independence.[9] This is a critical factor that shapes the incentive structures independence movements encounter, and one that we return to below.

Our investigation into this crucial topic proceeds as follows. We begin by revisiting the CS findings and the classification schemes used in their Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) 1.1 data set. Because the CS study does not evaluate the emergence of violent and nonviolent extra-institutional resistance, but rather the efficacy, they do not address the issue of selection into the dataset. Furthermore, CS present only a partial picture of the universe of secessionist movements – one which the original data presented below expands upon – thus enabling more nuanced analysis of the emergence of different strategies in pursuit of secessionist objectives.[10]

[7] Lawrence (2010) is one notable exception, arguing that violence by anti-colonial nationalists is the product of inter-group competition.
[8] Toft 2003; Merom 2003; Kalyvas 2006; Kuperman 2009; Walter 2009; Lyall and Wilson 2009; Cunningham 2013.
[9] Paquin 2010; Fazal and Griffiths 2014.
[10] Chenoweth and Stephan's "study is not concerned primarily with *why* these campaigns emerge but with *how well* they perform relative to their competitors that use different methods of resistance." (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 15)

We posit that the choice of method (violence or nonviolence) is partially endogenous to the conditions in which secessionists operate. Secessionist strategies are shaped by their legal and administrative status as well as the institutional possibilities that exist in their state. It is only for groups that lack access to these possibilities that violence becomes an increasingly attractive strategy. After re-categorizing the CS set of cases and combining them with a larger set of secessionist movements, we find that violence is more common among secessionist movements that have fewer legal and/or institutional routes to independence. Essentially, violence appears to be more likely when secessionists have fewer alternative options, suggesting secessionist strategies are shaped by the structure in which they operate.

We then turn to a closer look at the actual choice of secessionist methods to answer the deeper question: to what extent do secessionists actually choose between violent and non-violent methods? There is after all a danger in inferring these choices from only looking at the structure of outcomes. It may be that such choices are not so rational or utilitarian, and that the actual "menu" of options is limited by other environmental factors. Using longitudinal case studies, fieldwork, and interviews we attempt to answer this question by getting inside the head of secessionists.

The Structure of Secessionism

In their study of resistance campaigns, CS argue persuasively for the strategic value of nonviolent conflict.[11] They contend that nonviolent resistance has certain advantages over violent resistance. It tends to generate higher participation rates because there are fewer physical and moral barriers to participation, fewer commitment problems for participation, and it easier to spread information regarding the campaign. Higher participation rates create a more diverse and complex group, leading to greater tactical diversity and innovation and

[11] Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.

potentially more ways in which the participants can apply pressure to advance the cause. Nonviolent campaigns also increase the cost for the target regime of responding with violent repression because it can generate sympathy for the resistance group both domestically and internationally. CS find that nonviolent methods are more successful, defined as the full achievement of the campaign´s goals.[12]

CS examine 323 cases between 1900 and 2006 that are divided into three types: campaigns aimed at domestic regime change (anti-regime), self-determination or independence campaigns against a foreign occupier or colonial power (anti-occupation), and secession from an existing state for a territory internationally recognized as part of the target state (secession).[13] They find that nonviolent resistance is significantly more efficacious than its violent counterpart in anti-regime campaigns, in particular, and also in anti-occupation campaigns. However, that pattern does not extend to secession campaigns where only four of the 45 cases in CS succeeded, all four of which used violent methods. While CS caution that this is a weak finding, they do highlight the notable implication that violent secessionism may work.[14]

Our concern is that this finding suffers from endogeneity. CS are well aware of this danger and note that their "findings would be endogenous if nonviolent resistance proved to be the *symptom* of a high probability of campaign success rather than the *cause* of success."[15] Although they go to great lengths to remove concerns over this problem, they concede that it could still be a factor. The key issue is whether or not the strategic playing field is the same for each secessionist movement, or at least not different in a qualitatively important way. According to Schock, the key factors in the dynamics of civil resistance are mobilization,

[12] Full achievement must occur within a year of the peak of activities and the campaign must have a discernible effect on the outcome. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 14.
[13] Taken from online appendix for NAVCO (Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes) 1.1 dataset and codebook.
[14] Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 72-73.
[15] Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 63.

resilience, and leverage.[16] Does the ability of a secessionist movement to mobilize, to endure (be resilient), and apply leverage on its opponent (the state) vary in accordance with conditions in some systematic way?

We contend that there is endogeneity in their model where secessionism is concerned. Independence movements come in all shapes and sizes and the strategies they adopt are shaped in part by the international norms and legal principles guiding the recognition of breakaway regions, the administrative distinctiveness of the region in question, as well as the availability of institutional pathways in the state from which the region wants to exit. These are structural conditions that shape secessionist behavior, but they are absent in the CS analysis because it takes on a specific topic – the relative efficacy of violent versus non-violent extra-international conflict – and thus misses many of the more nuanced factors that influence secessionist activity broadly speaking.

CS argue that secession campaigns should be more difficult for insurgents to win relative to efforts aimed at the regime or an occupying force. They are more likely to be perceived as "maximalist (fundamentally altering the political order)" and "the stakes for governments are high because of the military, political, and reputational costs of losing large sections of their territories."[17] However, recent research suggests that governments show considerable variation in how they respond to secessionist demands, and that their position is often far from maximalist.[18] When the British Government permitted Scotland to hold a legal referendum on independence in 2014, it clearly calculated that the United Kingdom would endure as a healthy if reduced state. The context in which secessionists operate varies, and this influences their strategies.

[16] Schock 2013, 282.
[17] Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 69.
[18] Griffiths 2015.

Data

To conduct our analysis we revisit the CS dataset and augment it with additional data taken from Griffiths´ list of secessionist movements.[19] The result is a set of 315 secessionist movements between 1900 and 2006 (see Appendix). We begin with Griffiths´ definition: a secessionist movement is a nation that actively seeks to obtain independence from the larger state.[20] To count, the movement must last at least one week, include at least 100 people, lay claim to a territory not smaller than 100 square kilometers, possess a flag, and declare independence. Importantly, Griffiths takes a broad conception of secessionism that includes instances of decolonization and dissolution, arguing that it is better to begin with a base category of independence efforts rather than select on the outcome of those efforts.[21] Such designations do matter, of course, and we discuss them in the analysis.

According to Griffiths´ terms, there are 86 cases of secessionism in the CS dataset (see Appendix). Interestingly, nine of these cases were coded as anti-regime by CS, including the Slovak split from Czechoslovakia in 1992, the Slovene, Estonian, Latvian, Belarusian, and Kyrgyz movements that began in 1989 and resulted in independence, the Bougainville secessionist movement of the 1990s, the Moro Islamic Liberation Movement of the 1970s, and the Ukrainian revolt from 1946-1953. This discrepancy is mostly the result of CS´s broader focus and the fact that most of these movements began as antiregime causes that transformed into secessionist movements. One exception is Bougainville, which is a classic case of secessionism and began as such.

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[19] Griffiths (2015) identifies 403 secessionist movements between 1816 and 2011.

[20] Griffiths 2015, 733. Griffiths adds that a movement begins when: (1) A declaration of independence is made; (2) A secessionist conflict begins and a declaration follows later; or (3) Secessionists begin nonviolent political action and a declaration follows later. A movement ends when: (1) The group formally renounces its independence claim; (2) An agreement is struck granting independence or some other concession short of independence, or (3) Five years pass without secessionist activity.

[21] We drop cases of what Griffiths calls “graduation,” such as Palau, Australia, or Barbados where the metropole was actively assisting in the birth of a new state and there was no need for an independence campaign (Griffiths 2016).

The second category in the CS dataset is anti-occupation, defined as self-determination or independence campaigns against a foreign occupier or colonial power. The 75 campaigns that CS identify can be sorted by a basic and crucial distinction given in the definition: is the campaign directed at a foreign occupier or a colonial power? Thirty-three campaigns are opposed to an occupation group, including wartime resistance groups like the Norwegian, Polish, Greek, Italian, and French resistance movements against the Nazis during World War II. The adversary in these cases is a military force that does not have legal sovereign ownership over the region in question.

In contrast, the other 42 cases are independence movements aimed at foreign power that is regarded in some sense as "colonial", but yet does have legal ownership over the region. It thus includes many classic cases of decolonization such as the efforts against Portugal in Angola and Mozambique during the 1970s, and other independence efforts from contiguous territories that some would say are not true cases of colonialism, such as East Timor, Tibet, Eritrea, West Papua, and the Second Boer war. For the moment we will sidestep the thorny issue of what counts as "colonial" and conclude that all 42 cases count as secessionist movements given our terms.

The secession category in the CS dataset includes 45 campaigns. However, ten of these do not count as secessionist given our criteria, including the May Fourth Movement in Yunnan in 1917/1918, the unrest in Buganda in 1966, and the Croatian effort for greater autonomy in 1970/71. Most of these were autonomy movements in one form or another that fell short of full demands for independence. The other 35 cases were secessionist movements. Notably, CS identify four secessionist success cases: Bangladesh, Croatia, Aceh, and the Tigrean Liberation Front on Ethiopia. In our view only the first two of these achieved their full aim of becoming a sovereign state. Aceh and the Tigray nation won a measure of autonomy in their respective states, but neither has fully seceded.

In sum, 86 of the CS campaigns were secessionist and all of them are located in the Griffiths dataset of secessionist movements. In addition, there were 229 secessionist movements in the Griffiths dataset that are not in CS (during the period 1900-2006), bringing the total set up to 315 cases (see Appendix). In the sections to come we discuss the variation in these cases with respect to the strategic environment in which they operate and sort them accordingly.

Mapping the Strategic Playing Field

We begin our analysis by examining the success rates and the related use of violence across all 315 cases. We first divide the set into three categories depending on whether the demand for independence was made from: (1) A nation that qualified for decolonization; (2) A nation from an overseas territory that did not meet the criteria for decolonization; and (3) A nation that claimed a territory that is contiguous with the larger state. The first category includes demands for independence from nations that claimed an overseas, 1st order administrative unit of a "saltwater" empire from 1960 onward. This is a rather configured set of criteria, but that is the way decolonization worked. Beginning with the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in 1960, the United Nations determined that overseas colonial units had a legal path to independence.[22] The principle of *uti possidetis* (as you possess) was used to determine who should count as a legal nation, privileging the groups that claimed a 1st order administrative region, however new or artificial, and disqualifying the many nations and ethnic groups whose territorial claims were inconsistent with colonial boundaries. The second category consists of the secessionist groups declaring independence from an overseas government, but failed to qualify for decolonization either because they made their bid before 1960 (e.g. Malaya) or because they were simply

[22] Jackson 1990; Fabry 2010.

disadvantaged by the legal emphasis on *uti possidetis* (e.g. Buganda). The third category includes the remaining groups who claimed contiguous territory.

Table 1 shows the success rates for each category to the use of violent or non-violent methods. Like CS, we code success as achieving full independence within a year of the peak of activities.[23] However, unlike CS we use a lower violence threshold of 25 battle related deaths because we think that the higher threshold of 1,000 deaths may mistakenly code smaller but violent secessionist efforts as non-violent.[24] The results are interesting. All 58 movements that classified as decolonization were successful, and only five of them were violent (see Appendix). Meanwhile, the overseas category showed more mixed results. Thirteen of the 54 cases were violent, but the success rate was slightly higher than the nonviolent cases (46% versus 39%). The final category includes 203 cases, roughly split between violent and nonviolent efforts, and here the nonviolent movements were more successful (22% versus 14%).

Table 1: Success Rates by Type of Movement

	Decolonization		**Overseas**		**Contiguous**	
	Violent	Nonviolent	Violent	Nonviolent	Violent	Nonviolent
Success Rate	100%	100%	46%	39%	14%	22%
N	5	53	13	41	111	92

One might object that these results are unsurprising given that the rules of decolonization effectively paved the way to independence for some groups and it rendered it unnecessary and even counterproductive to take up arms in most circumstances. Moreover, it makes sense that geographically distant nations have a better chance of winning independence, even if they do not count for decolonization, because the state can take a less maximalist position when responding to demands. But that is our point. Decolonization is an

[23] Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 14.
[24] Data taken from Themner et al 2012.

extreme form of an independence movement, considered legal since 1960, and it shaped the strategic environment for aspiring nations. The methods that secessionists employ are endogenous to the international legal practices surrounding recognition,[25] and the way in which the aspiring nation is positioned administratively and institutionally in the larger state.[26]

The results point to two additional considerations. First, overseas secessionist groups using violence were slightly more successful than their nonviolent counterparts. The difference in success is not so great and the numbers are small – six of the 13 violent cases were successful – so it is hard to make too much of this finding. All six success cases were violent upheavals prior to the full consolidation of decolonization: Afghanistan in 1919, Indonesia in 1945, Palestine/Israel in 1948, Indochina in 1953, Tunisia in 1956, and Malaya in 1957. Second, contiguous secessionist movements were more successful when they were non-violent. This contradicts CS´s claim regarding the potential utility of violence. However, our finding utilizes a broader set of secessionist movements and many of them could have had incentives to avoid the use of violence.

The strategic playing field can be mapped out in other ways. Another aspect is the administrative distinctiveness of the break-away region. Several scholars have highlighted the issue of precedent-setting, and how concerns over domino effects may force a central government to take a firm position against secession in a given instance as a way to deter other potential secessionists.[27] In this situation of strategic interaction, secessionists calibrate their behavior in anticipation of the government´s response. It is thus argued that peaceful secession is more likely in binary states like Chechoslovakia because the exit of one member

[25] Fazal 2016.
[26] Griffiths 2016.
[27] Toft 2002; Walter 2009; Griffiths 2105.

of the dyad does not risk further fragmentation, and the state can afford to take a less maximalist position.

Restricting our analysis to just the 203 secession cases discussed above, and using Griffiths´ coding of unique administrative regions, we can identify four secessionist movements that took place in a binary state: Norway from Sweden in 1905, Syria from the United Arab Republic in 1961, Slovakia from Czechoslovakia in 1993, and the contemporary Flemish movement in Belgium. All four of these have chosen non-violent methods and three of them are regarded as instances of peaceful divorce. Only Flanders remains non-sovereign, and the chief obstacle to seeking full independence is not the Belgian state (partly composed by Flanders itself) but rather the internal division among the Flemish as to what political association is best. The strategic playing field in these cases did not (and does not) encourage the use of violence.

We believe that a more significant and far-reaching aspect of the playing field is the institutional environment of the state. Consider that the CS study only contains a portion (86 of 315) of the cases that we look at. This exclusion is partially a function of the scope conditions for inclusion in that dataset – criteria that solely embrace extra-institutional conflict, violent, nonviolent, and "mixed".[28] Although some campaigns in the NAVCO 1.1 dataset also utilize channels of institutional politics alongside these extra-institutional strategies and tactics that result in their falling within NAVCO's scope conditions,[29] this aspect of their contentious behavior receives little to no systematic attention in the dataset. Additionally, secessionist campaigns that mainly or solely utilize institutional methods to

[28] As CS 2011 acknowledges: **"**Characterizing a campaign as violent or nonviolent simplifies a complex constellation of resistance methods." (12) NAVCO 2.0, unlike 1.1, contains measures aimed at capturing the mix of violent and nonviolent methods that many campaigns utilize. (See Chenoweth and Lewis 2013, 419: "NAVCO 2.0 also allows for mixed characterizations.") Wasser 2014 builds on the measures in NAVCO 2.0 to further investigate variation in extra-institutional conflict, with particular attention to investigating the degree to which campaigns mix violent and nonviolent actions.
[29] As Chenoweth and Stephan (2011, 12) themselves note, citing Kurt Schock, "Although institutional methods of political action often accompany nonviolent struggles… nonviolent action occurs outside the bounds of institutional political channels[.]"

advance their objectives would not fall within the scope of the NAVCO dataset, which thus presents only a partial picture of the universe of secessionist movements.[30]

We contend that the choice of methods is partly endogenous to the institutional environment in which secessionists operate. Contemporary secessionists in Scotland and Catalonia repeatedly claim that they will only pursue their aims in a democratic and non-violent manner. Such claims are far less common in less democratic and less institutionalized states like Myanmar and the Philippines, where secessionism is common. Domestic institutions are part of the explanation for this divergence.

To test this claim we use the contiguous movements discussed above, minus the four binary cases, and examine their success rates after sorting them into democracies and non-democracies (see Table 2).[31] This is a very general and imperfect way to gauge the institutional structure of each state, but it nonetheless shows aggregate patterns. Of the 199 cases under observation, 140 (70%) occurred in non-democracies. The data show that violence was more common in non-democracies, where 61% of the movements were violent compared with 42% in democracies.

Table 2: Success Rates by Regime Type

	Non-Democracy		**Democracy**	
	Violent	Nonviolent	Violent	Nonviolent
Success Rate	16%	30%	4%	3%
N	86	54	25	34

Interestingly, the success rate in democracies is low in both relative and absolute terms. There has been only one non-violent secession from a democracy: Montenegro in 2006. Similarly, there is only one instance of successful violent secession from a democracy:

[30] For instance, this seems to be the reason that republics during the Soviet breakup, as well as Slovenia, are in RG's data but not in NAVCO. NAVCO contains only one case of a secessionist movement against the USSR, which occurred in 1920 (Tambov Rebellion).
[31] We use the dichotomous measure provided by Boix et al 2013.

Ireland from the UK in 1919. Democracy may render secessionist violence less common, but it does not make full secession more likely.

The success rate in non-democracies is somewhat different. There were fourteen violent success cases, some 16% of the total, including well-known cases like Bangladesh, Eritrea, Croatia, and the Baltic states in 1918, and other less known cases like Panama in 1903 and Saudi Arabia in 1916. Notably, the success rate for those groups using non-violence is even higher at 30%. However, 14 of the 16 success cases came from the Soviet Union in 1991, an important event that skews the data considerably. If we removed the Soviet cases the success rate would be 5%, given that only two (Finland and Macedonia) of the remaining 40 non-violent cases seceded and formed a sovereign state.

Taken as a whole, the analysis in this section leads to several broad implications. First, there is variation in the strategic playing field, stretching from classic cases of decolonization to secessionist movements in contiguous regions that face governments who are more likely to see these demands as maximalist. The success rate and related use of violence of varies accordingly. Second, the institutional environment also shapes the methods and democracy appears to reduce the use of violence, though its effects on success are less clear. Third, CS may ultimately be correct in their warning about the potential value of secessionist violence, at least where the real hard cases are concerned. To be sure, there is endogeneity to secessionist methods as determined by the playing field on which they operate. But the strategic value of violence may increase in proportion to the degree that the state sees the secessionist demands as maximalist. We look closer at this crucial question in the next section and further consider the degree to which groups actually make these choices.

The Strategy of Secessionism

Contiguous Movements and Institutional Pathways to Independence

Why do some secessionist movements choose violent means to pursue their objectives, while others rely largely on nonviolent avenues? Much of the recent scholarly discussion on this issue has been influenced by Chenoweth and Stephan's (CS) 2011 claim, discussed above, that violent secessionists are more likely to succeed than their nonviolent counterparts. This claim, however, is based on a study of only a *portion of the universe of secessionist cases,* and on a more narrow conception of nonviolence than that employed here.

As detailed previously, the dataset presented here includes a wider spectrum of secessionist movements and, importantly, a broader conception of nonviolent secession. Those cases falling under the rubric of "nonviolent movements" in Griffiths' data should include those pursuing independence through *institutional mobilization* (and thus, if not accompanied by extra-institutional conflict, violent and/or nonviolent, movements that would fall outside the scope of CS's study). With this in mind, we can ask: *What factors underlie variation in the choice of violent and/or nonviolent strategies in pursuit of secession, as well as differences in their relative success rates, explored above?*

To answer this question, in this section we conduct a detailed analysis of those movements in the "contiguous" category that had their first year of significant secessionist activity in 1900 or thereafter, excluding the four binary cases. Doing so enables more fine-grained evaluation not only of the relationship between strategy and success, but also of the roots of strategic choice. This subset of movements provides the best category of cases to investigate the interplay between institutional conditions for participation in formal politics and the form and success of secessionist strategies.

Why focus on these movements, and what are our theoretical expectations? Contiguous secessionists' strategic choices appear at least partially endogenous to the

institutional context such movements operate within, as argued above. It is for these cases that the links between the political systems of targets states and the actions of secessionist movements should be most direct.

Formal political systems offer different potential routes to movements pursuing independence from contiguous states. We expect that the shape of the political systems that movements operate within will impact the strategies they adopt in pursuit of secession – strategic choices not just inside of formal political institutions, but also outside of them.[32]

Why should the prevalence of violent and nonviolent contiguous secession vary along with level of democracy in a target state? As Dunning 2011 points out, although "protests or violent mobilization can often be a strategic complement to formal claim making through voting or petitioning… protests and violent mobilization can also serve as substitutes for voting and other kinds of formal claim making." (330)

Providing an example of a substitution-oriented perspective regarding such issues, it may be that more anemic democratic institutions cause groups to utilize potentially-violent "alternative political technologies"[33] in place of institutional participation, as argued by Machado et al. 2011 (one of the pieces reviewed in Dunning 2011).[34] Through this lens, the likelihood that secessionist movements will solely or largely utilize extra-institutional conflict in pursuit of independence is inversely proportional to the degree to which the political system this movement operates within offers institutional options to advance its objectives. On the other side of the coin, the more democratic the political institutions in a state, the more that we might expect secessionist movements to pursue independence through the

[33] "A different set of alternatives, which we have dubbed *alternative political technologies*, or APT for short (Scarascini and Tommasi 2009) includes actions such as blocking roads, burning tired, picketing, and threatening violent action." (Machado et al. 2011, 344-5)

[34] "Our claim is that the strength and relevance of formal political institutions are key determinants of the individual and collective choice of channels of political participation. When institutions are strong, actors are more likely to participate through institutionalized arenas. When they are weak, however, protests and other unconventional means or [sic] participation become more appealing." (Machado et al. 2011, 342)

channels offered by the formal political system of the states they operate within – for example, referendums and/or legislative action, among other means of advancing secessionist objectives within formal political institutions.

However, it is possible that secessionist groups with institutional options might still utilize (violent and/or nonviolent) extra-institutional methods, either solely or in conjunction with institutional channels of contention. The links between institutional options and extra-institutional force are not necessarily straightforward; the relationship between degree of institutional options and the degree to which secessionists treat these two categories of contention as "complements" (e.g., Dunning 2011) might, for instance, take the shape of an inverse u-shaped curve.

Are institutional and extra-institutional contention best understood as "substitutes" or "complements"? This is an empirical question that requires a good large-N measure of the degree to which secessionists participate in institutional politics – a measure that is lamentably lacking, as discussed below. Whatever the shape of this relationship, however, it seems clear that variation in the extent of democratic options for advancing secession should also alter the incentives for the use of extra-institutional strategies of conflict by secessionist actors (e.g., violent and/or nonviolent "resistance"[35]).[36]

In evaluating the strategic choices of secessionists, data limitations hinder the exploration of links between levels of democracy and the extent of institutional engagement by self-determination movements, an issue we will return to at the conclusion of this section. Fortunately, however, far fewer obstacles hinder study of the relationship between democracy

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[35] "The term *resistance* implies that the campaigns of interest are non institutional and generally confrontational in nature. In other words, these groups are using tactics that are outside the conventional political process (voting, interest-group organizing, or lobbying)." (CS 2011, 12)

[36] In his seminal 2003 study of "collective violence", for instance, Tilly identifies "democracy" (along with "governmental capacity") as one the two axes of variation regarding "[r]egimes… that significantly affect the character and intensity of collective violence within them[.]" (41)

and the use of violence by secessionists, as well as democracy's impact on the success independence movements achieve.

Analysis of Contiguous Movements

How, precisely, does level of democracy relate to the choice of violent and nonviolent secessionist strategies, as well as their relative success rates? Delving into the analysis of the "contiguous" movements reveals that while violent secession is more prevalent than nonviolent secession among these 199 cases (111, or 55.78%, are violent), the latter sorts of movements are more successful in both absolute and relative terms. Of the 88 nonviolent movements in this category, 17 (or 19.32%) succeeded, compared to the 15 of their 111 violent movements (or 13.51%).[37]

Table 3: Frequency of Violence and Success for "Contiguous" Cases (Binary Excluded)

		Success		
		No	Yes	*Total*
Nonviolent	**N.**	71	17	***88***
	(% total N)	**35.68**	**8.54**	***44.22***
Violent	**N.**	96	15	***111***
	(% total N)	**48.24**	**7.54**	***55.78***
Total	**N.**	***167***	***32***	***199***
	(% total N)	***83.92***	***16.08***	***100***

Is regime type related to the propensity of secessionist movements in contiguous states to utilize violent and/or nonviolent methods in pursuing their objectives? As seen in Table 4, the majority of these 199 movements were found in non-democracies (140, or 70.35%). Of these 140 movements, 86 (or 61.43%) were violent, while the remaining 54 were nonviolent. For those movements in democracies (59 of 199, or 29.65%), the majority relied on nonviolent means to pursue secession (34 of these 59, or 57.63%). In other words,

[37] As seen in Table 1, among the 203 contiguous secessionists movements (including the four binary cases), only 14% of violent movements succeeded, compared to 22% of their nonviolent counterparts.

secessionist movements operating in non-democratic contiguous states were more likely to rely on violent than nonviolent strategies, while their counterparts in democracies were more likely to utilize nonviolent strategies.

Disaggregating these cases by both strategy and regime type reveals sharp contrasts in success rates (see Table 2). Nonviolent movements in contiguous non-democracies have the highest success rates (16 out of 54, or 29.63%), followed by violent movements in non-democracies (14 of 86, or 16.28%) and in democracies (1 of 25, or 4%), respectively. Nonviolent movements in non-democracies had the lowest success rate of the four categories (1 of 34, or 2.94%).

Table 4: Frequency of Movements by Strategy and Regime Type (Boix et al. 2013)

Regime Type		Violence		Total
		NV	V	
Non-Democracies	N	54	86	**140**
	%	27.14	43.22	**70.35**
Democracies	N	34	25	**59**
	%	17.09	12.56	**29.65**
Total	N	88	111	**199**
	%	**44.22**	**55.78**	**100**

While the dichotomous democracy variable from Boix et al. 2013 is useful for a first cut regarding the interplay between regime, strategy, and success, we employ a variable from Polity IV to conduct additional, more fine-grained analysis of these relationships. Specifically, we use Polity IV's "Combined Polity Score" (CPS) as a measure of the level of democracy in a political system. We understand higher values of this measure to indicate higher levels of democracy in a political system, and convert the range of the variable to 0 to 20.[38] Dividing movements into groups by the CPS of their target states reveals a number of

[38] The "Combined Polity Score" (from Polity IV, here on a range from 0 to 20, rather than the usual -10 to 10; see Marshall et al. 2014, 16) for the countries where contiguous movements operated during the first significant year of the movement's secessionist activities. Polity IV data is available for 195 of the 199 contiguous cases being evaluated in this section.

patterns regarding the distribution of secessionist movements, as well as regarding their chosen methods and likelihood of success.

Figure 1: Histogram of Contiguous Secessionist Movements by Polity Score

As seen in Figure 1, a histogram of secessionist movements according to their polity score, both nonviolent and violent movements are scattered across the range– though each has their largest concentration of movements near the middle. But to what extent are increases in the level of democracy systematically associated with the use of violent or nonviolent secessionist strategies? Whether using the Boix et al. or Polity IV indicator of democracy, increases in democracy are associated with a decreased likelihood that a secessionist movement will employ violence. This is demonstrated in Table 5, containing results from logistic regressions using each democracy indicator as the independent variable, with violence as the dependent variable; estimates from both models are statistically significant at 95% confidence levels.

Table 5: Democracy on Violence

	Dependent variable:	
	Violence Logistic Regression	
	(1)	(2)
Boix	-0.773^{**}	
	(0.316)	
polity		-0.053^{**}
		(0.025)
Constant	0.465^{***}	0.810^{***}
	(0.174)	(0.307)
Observations	199	195
Log Likelihood	−133.557	−131.378
Akaike Inf. Crit.	271.115	266.757
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

To what extent are differences in the strategies chosen, violent or nonviolent, associated with an increased likelihood of success? For the contiguous movements (excluding the four binary cases), nonviolent movements experienced a 19.32% success rate, while violent movements had a 13.51% rate. Yet these success rates appear quite different when disaggregated by regime type, using Boix et al.'s 2013 dummy variable for democracy (shown in Table 2, and discussed above). We delve further into these differences through logistic regression analyses.

Table 6: Logistic Regressions – Violence on Success

	Dependent variable:		
	Success		
	All	Dems	Non-Dems
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Violence	−0.427	0.318	−0.773*
	(0.387)	(1.439)	(0.417)
Constant	−1.429***	−3.497***	−0.865***
	(0.270)	(1.015)	(0.298)
Observations	199	59	140
Log Likelihood	−87.150	−8.710	−71.023
Akaike Inf. Crit.	178.301	21.420	146.045
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Pooling these 199 cases together, the relationship between violence and success is not immediately apparent, as demonstrated in Table 6. A logistic regression of the impact of violence on success for these cases yields a negative coefficient, though the direction changes within two standard deviations. The p-value, at .27, falls short of statistical significance. The results for the same logistic regression, conducted on the sample of cases meeting Boix et al.'s threshold for democracy, is even less illuminating. Although the sign of the coefficient indicates that violence increases the likelihood of success, the direction of the coefficient changes within one standard deviation, and the p-value is much higher than for all cases pooled together (.82). For non-democracies, however, we can be more confident that the use of violence is negatively correlated with success.

Table 7: Success Rate by Strategy and Range on CPS[39]

Combined Polity Scores (Range: 0 to 20)[40]	Percent Success	
	Nonviolent:	Violent:
1 to 5	5.26%	10.34%
6 to 10	50%	20.83%
11 to 15	0%	8.33%
16 to 20	3.23%	4.76%
Total	20%	13.64%

Breaking down the movements by their place on the Combined Polity Score range, as done in Table 7, seems to reinforce the notion that variation in regime type is related to propensity for success. It also suggests the possibility of a quadratic relationship between these polity scores and success.[41] Logistic regression analyses reported in Table 8 provide additional evidence in this direction, though further analysis is required to reach more definitive conclusions.

[39] Have polity data for 195 of the contiguous cases considered in this section.
[40] See footnote 38.
[41] It may make more sense to re-scale the Combined Polity Score back to -10 to 10 for the quadratic indicator. This will be explored in future analyses.

Table 8: Violence on Success, Fuller Logistic Regression Models

	Dependent variable:		
	Success		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Violence	−0.520	−0.983**	−0.694*
	(0.393)	(0.439)	(0.403)
polity	−0.035	1.174***	
	(0.034)	(0.304)	
polityEXP		−0.059***	
		(0.015)	
Boix			−2.203***
			(0.756)
Constant	−1.000**	−5.907***	−0.906***
	(0.451)	(1.539)	(0.296)
Observations	195	195	199
Log Likelihood	−85.806	−67.723	−79.989
Akaike Inf. Crit.	177.612	143.445	165.978
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

While the independent variables in Model 1 in this Table 8 – a dummy indicator for violence, as well as the Combined Polity Score – did not achieve statistical significance, inclusion of a quadratic term for the polity score (*polityEXP)* in Model 2 results in statistically significant coefficients for each of the explanatory variables included in this model. The differing directions of the coefficient estimates in Model 2 for the CPS indicator and its quadratic form indicates that while increases in the level of democracy captured by the polity score correspond to increased probability of success, movements at either extreme of the range were less likely to succeed than those towards the middle. In other word, violence may be most effective in-mid range regime types.

The Next Steps

Reaching a more complete understanding of the trade-offs between the different potential paths open for secessionist movements will require disaggregating the different components of secessionist activities by distinguishing between institutional and extra-institutional mobilization, both violent and nonviolent. In evaluating the strategic choices of secessionists, data limitations hinder the exploration of links between levels of democracy and the extent of institutional engagement by self-determination movements. Addressing these limitations is critical to a research agenda aimed at enhancing our understanding of self-determination movements' strategic decisions. Compiling and/or coding an indicator of secessionist movements' engagement in formal political processes that is comparable across cases will allow analysis of a dependent variable capturing the range of strategies employed by movements pursuing independence.

Drawing on Wasser 2014 – which outlines the contours of a dependent variable intended to capture the range of potential conflictual behavior by non-state actors (center-seeking and secessionist) through institutional and/or extra-institutional (violent and/or nonviolent) channels – moving forward we aim to measure and capture variation in secessionist behavior across the spectrum of potential strategies inside and outside of formal political institutions. This process will be conducted for all the contiguous cases, minus the four binary ones, if possible; alternatively, or in addition to this, in-depth efforts to capture the range of secessionists' strategies will be conducted for a limited number of these cases. These efforts will enable more fine-grained, complete analysis of the relationship between regime type and variation in secessionists' activities in pursuit of separation from contiguous states, as well as of the prospects for success offered by different strategies.

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