



Stanford
Center for International
Development

Working Paper No. 517

**Gandhi's Gift: Lessons for Peaceful Reform from India's Struggle
for Democracy**

by

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March 2014



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Gandhi's Gift: Lessons for Peaceful Reform from India's Struggle for Democracy

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March 11, 2014

Abstract

In this overview article, we summarize recent research in progress that examines the potential and limitations of non-violent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India's struggle for democratic self-rule. We present a theoretical framework that highlights two key twin challenges faced by non-violent movements in ethnically diverse countries. The first is the challenge of mass mobilization across ethnic lines. The second challenge lies in overcoming the enhanced temptations faced by members of large mobilized groups to turn violent, whether to secure short-term gains from mob action or in response to manipulation by agents who stand to gain from political violence. We show how these challenges appear to match general patterns from cross-campaign data.

Motivated by these patterns, we discuss how these challenges were overcome during the Indian Independence Struggle. We argue that the first challenge— that of forging a mass movement— was accomplished through the brokering of a deal that took advantage of external shocks— in this case, the Great Depression— to align the incentives of disparate ethnic and social groups towards mass mobilization in favour of democracy and land reform. The second key challenge— that of keeping the mass movement peaceful— was accomplished through organizational innovations introduced by Mohandas Gandhi in his reforms of the constitution of the Congress movement in 1919-20. These organizational innovations took the Congress movement from one dominated by a rich elite to one organized on the principle of self-sacrifice, selecting future leaders who could then be trusted to maintain non-violent discipline in pursuit of the extension of broad rights and public policy objectives. We conclude by arguing that a key, but hitherto mostly neglected, aspect of 'Gandhi's Gift'— the example of non-violence applied to India's independence struggle— lies in understanding these organizational innovations.

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We have a power, a power that cannot be found in Molotov cocktails, but we do have a power.

Power that cannot be found in bullets and in guns, but we do have a power.

It is a power as old as the insights of Jesus of Nazareth and as modern as the techniques of Mohandas K. Gandhi.

– Dr. Martin Luther King¹

There were moments in the twentieth century when activists believed that a technology of political organization—that of mass non-violent civil disobedience—yielded a new ‘power’ for affecting institutional change around the world. Drawing upon age-old religious traditions common to many of the major faiths of the world, the idea of eschewing violent action in favour of non-violent resistance is not new. Yet, modern techniques of civil disobedience incorporated new organizational ideas that have been credited with a number of remarkable successes. These include the ceding of democratic rights to 30 million South Asians by the British Empire in the 1930s and the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the late 1950s and the 1960s.

However, non-violent civil resistance has also often failed. Modern scholars of civil resistance point to the issue of maintaining ‘nonviolent discipline’ in the face of provocation as an important missing piece in our understanding of how to make civil resistance work.² And on the ground, as historic episodes such as the violence of the 1942 ‘Quit India’ movement, the race riots that followed in the wake of the US Civil Rights movement, as well as the Arab Spring and the battles in Tahrir Square demonstrate, movements that begin peacefully are often prone to rapid breakdowns into violence that further facilitates repression.

In this overview article, we summarize recent research in progress (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014, book project, in progress) that examines the potential and limitations of non-violent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India’s struggle for democratic self-rule. We begin by sketching a simple theoretical framework to delineate the conditions under which non-violent mass movements can succeed and when they may fail. We show that even in environments conducive to non-violent effectiveness, such as when policymakers face greater costs to violent crackdowns of non-violent movements relative to their non-violent counterparts, there remain two key twin challenges faced by non-violent movements. The first is the challenge of mass mobilization: non-violent movements, more so than violent movements, are only effective when they are large in scale. This problem

¹Transcribed from “King: Montgomery to Memphis: A Digital Archive”, 1970, Kino.

²See, for example, the very useful overview in Schock (2013, pg.284) and Chenoweth and Cunningham (2013). On civil disobedience more generally, see Helvey (eg 2004), Sharp (eg 2005), Schock (eg 2005), Shaykhutdinov (eg 2010), Chenoweth and Stephan (eg 2011).

becomes even more challenging when attempting to mobilize across ethnic groups, which often differ in their policy preferences and suffer from weakened abilities to communicate, coordinate and sanction across ethnic lines. The second challenge lies in overcoming the enhanced temptations faced by members of large mobilized groups to turn violent, whether to secure short-term gains from mob action or in response to manipulation by agents who stand to gain from political violence. We provide general patterns from cross-campaign data which are consistent with these challenges.

Motivated by these patterns, we discuss how despite the fact that both these challenges were particularly accentuated in the South Asian case, they were overcome. We argue that the first challenge— that of forging a mass movement— was accomplished through the brokering of a deal that took advantage of external shocks— in this case, the Great Depression— to align the incentives of disparate ethnic and social groups towards mass mobilization in favour of democracy and land reform. The second key challenge— that of keeping the mass movement peaceful— was accomplished through organizational innovations introduced by Mohandas Gandhi in his reforms of the constitution of the Congress movement in 1919-20. These organizational innovations took the Congress movement from one dominated by a rich elite to one organized on the principle of self-sacrifice, selecting future leaders who could then be trusted to maintain non-violent discipline in pursuit of the extension of broad rights and public policy objectives. We characterise these reforms in light of the economics of club goods, describing how Gandhi’s reforms created incentives that ironically mimic those used by terrorist organizations and extreme religious cults to develop within-group trust (Iannaccone, 1992, Berman and Laitin, 2008).

We then outline new and emerging evidence documenting the historical importance of organizational innovations and incentives in shaping the nature and success of the Indian independence movement, drawing upon a range of hitherto largely untapped sources, including recently released intelligence reports gathered by the British, as well as internal Congress correspondence. We finally conclude by arguing that a key, but hitherto mostly neglected, aspect of ‘Gandhi’s Gift’— the example of non-violence applied to India’s independence struggle— lies in understanding these organizational innovations. We discuss how these findings relate to contemporary movements for democracy.

1 Theoretical Framework

It is useful to sketch a simple theoretical framework to help understand the potential and limitations of non-violent civil disobedience as a technology, and the role played by mobilization and leadership (for details, please see Bhavnani and Jha (2014) and Bhavnani and

Jha (book project, in progress)). Suppose that individuals in a society differ in their ‘type’, which is the cost to them of engaging in violent action. Factors such as military training and combat experience may lower such costs, or conversely there may be ‘cultures of honor’ that make it more costly for some to ‘turn the other cheek’ when confronted with violence (eg Akerlof and Kranton, 2000, Grosjean, 2010, Jha and Wilkinson, 2012). Let us also assume that with some cost, individuals can choose to join a movement, and subsequently, whether in a movement or not, to engage in violence.

Let us assume that a movement becomes more ‘intense’ if there are more people mobilized, as well as if they possess commonly accepted organizational leadership. Furthermore, the benefits to movement intensity from having a leader are relatively small when there are not many people mobilized³, but increase as the numbers rise. Thus, leaders complement followers in forging a more intense movement, whether through directing individuals towards common objectives, organizing logistics and so on.

Suppose there are two possible types of potential benefit from increasing the intensity of movements: private benefits that only accrue to movement members, and public benefits that accrue to all. Further suppose that leaders of a movement, if they exist, can decide whether to permit or penalize violent acts within the movement. A more intense movement that allows violence can be used both to influence public policy and public goods provision, but also allows local private gains to both its leaders and followers through the ability to loot the property of other individuals or groups more effectively. Let us define a ‘non-violent’ movement, in contrast, as only different from other movements in that the strategy either requires the leader to expel members who engage in looting or violence or imposes sufficient penalties on members that violence is not a preferred choice. Both violent and non-violent movements may allow some private gains to membership, such as status benefits within the organization etc. Note that, all things being equal however, movements that allow violence have greater potential for private gains than those that impose constraints upon it.

Finally, suppose that after these private gains are realized, there is a ‘decisionmaker’ who seeks to minimize the cost imposed by movements either by granting a policy concession, ignoring the campaign or by violent repression. In our motivating case, the ‘decisionmaker’ encompasses the British government. Suppose that the decisionmaker gets the same fixed payoff from a policy concession– such as granting the democratic franchise. In contrast, the costs of both ignoring a campaign and engaging in violent repression are increasing in a movement’s intensity, with doing nothing the lower cost option for small movements, and violent repression becoming cheaper for the decisionmaker when confronted with more intensive movements.

³This would correspond to the case of ‘too many *netas*, not enough Indians’.

A crucial condition on the relative effectiveness of violent and non-violent campaigns comes from the relative cost to a decisionmaker from choosing to violently repress a campaign as that campaign's intensity rises. We will say the environment is in the 'audience' state when the cost of violently repressing a non-violent campaign becomes relatively higher than violently repressing violent campaigns as campaign intensity rises, and in the 'isolated' state when repressing non-violent campaigns violently becomes cheaper than repressing violent campaigns as campaign intensity rises.

These audience and isolated states can be thought of as corresponding to the role played by the international system and the media. In 'isolated' environments where no one outside the movement and the State are aware of violent repression, it is arguably actually cheaper to violently suppress groups committed to non-violence than those willing to retaliate. In contrast, in the 'audience' state, there may be greater reputational costs or actual penalties imposed on the decisionmaker for violently suppressing a large non-violent campaign versus one that has committed violence.⁴

An audience state may be more likely when there are pro-democracy international hegemons (Boix, 2011) or where individuals have access to freer media, as has been increasingly the case with social networking technologies. In our motivating case of Indian independence, the British, particularly during the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Second World War, were able to censor much of the Indian media but were deeply concerned about American opinion as well as some of their own constituents.⁵

This simple setup makes explicit a number of the assumptions necessary for a non-violent campaign to work, and suggests some of the challenges that it may face. Working backwards,

⁴For example, many police services limit and face public outcry for 'first use' of lethal force against unarmed civilians, but are allowed broad discretion when acting in 'self-defense'.

⁵See for example, the February 5, 1930 confidential dispatch from Gerard Campbell, British Consul-General in San Francisco, to Sir Esme Howard, the British Ambassador in Washington early in the Civil Disobedience Movement (IOR L/P& J/6/1989):

... I am sincerely convinced that the more friendly relations which have recently been established between Great Britain and the United States may be endangered if irresponsible Indians are allowed to go around the country telling half-educated Americans of the oppression and brutalities suffered by their fellow countrymen, for these stories will be believed unless someone who can rightfully claim to have the requisite knowledge is at hand to check or deny them. If the Indian extremists follow up their campaign with a plea for financial assistance, there is no knowing how much they may be able to collect from the sort of people who seem to derive enjoyment from subscribing to any unworthy cause and especially from those who, from their youth up, have been taught to be hostile, rather than friendly disposed towards anything British. ...

. For similar concerns during the Quit India movement, 11 August 1942, see Sir R. Campbell to Mr Eden, Telegram L/PO/6/102s: f 7, (op cit. Mansergh, 1976, pg.659). Many accounts also emphasise the role of the presence of the world media in mitigating British repression of the Dandi Salt March in 1930, and of television in shaping broader public opinion on the violent repression of Civil Rights activists in the US.

notice first that, in this set up, the only advantage that non-violent campaigns have over campaigns that tolerate violence arises in the higher costs decisionmakers face in violently repressing them rather than granting policy concessions. This is only true if the campaign is sufficiently intensive (i.e. sufficiently large and organized) that, had the campaign been violent, the decisionmaker would prefer to violently repress the campaign over ignoring it or granting the policy concession *and* if the decisionmaker faces ‘audience’ costs that make suppressing non-violent campaigns costlier than suppressing campaigns that permit violence.

Thus, non-violent movements require both sufficient scale and the presence of audience costs to repression to be more effective at influencing public policy than movements that permit violence. However, notice that, in our framework, non-violent campaigns also face *greater* difficulties in both recruitment and organization relative to similar campaigns that do not penalize violence. First, non-violent movements lack some of the private gains that violence can permit. From the perspective of private gains, a movement that does not penalize violence will be more favourable to leaders and potentially more attractive to a broader range of types of followers than an otherwise similar non-violent movement, as a non-violent movement limits the private gains from looting or expression that can be had through violent action. In essence, it is easier to mobilize a mob that contains opportunists who use a movement to settle scores and loot than to mobilize a group that is willing to ‘turn the other cheek’ and give up violence despite provocation and the prospect of short-term gain.⁶

Another aspect to note is that keeping movements peaceful becomes harder as they grow. Notice that as movements increase in size and intensity, both leaders and followers of large movements have an increasing incentive to allow violence for private gains, even if this may compromise the chances of subsequently gaining a public policy concession. Thus leaders of movements seeking to impose non-violent discipline must not only forego their own temptations to allow violence, these leaders are increasingly necessary for organizing penalties for violence in their followers as movements grow as well.

This is particularly hard as non-violent leaders actually have few options in penalizing violence. While leaders that permit violence can also potentially use the threat of violence to impose discipline, the worst a non-violent leader can do to any specific individual is to make that member indifferent between participating or not— i.e. ‘expel’ them. But because the policy gains are public goods, members in large movements may have an incentive to turn to violence knowing that even if they are expelled from the movement, they will benefit

⁶We build upon but differ in this respect to prominent works in the civil resistance literature, which posit the opposite— that non-violent movements are cheaper to join than violent movements, and thus are likely to become larger (eg Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). Violent movements in those works are thought of more as armed insurgencies.

from any policy concessions regardless. What individuals stand to lose therefore are private benefits from staying within the movement.

The other penalty available to a non-violent leader for violent action is to simply refuse to direct the movement as a whole. Since there is complementarity between leaders and followers, this will reduce the intensity of the movement and may reduce the probability of public policy gains for all. If there are few “commonly-acceptable” leaders and the complementarity between leaders and followers is sufficiently large, this otherwise weak threat may shift marginally ‘violent’ type followers from preferring violence to maintaining non-violent discipline. As we shall see, this approach was one exercised on a number of occasions by Mahatma Gandhi.

With such weak penalties available for those who choose to engage in violence, personnel selection becomes critical for non-violent movements. A key challenge for sustaining a non-violent movement are to identify and mobilize enough of a select group of followers that are willing to forego temptations for violence in favor of national objectives, and even more select group of leaders that can forego even greater such temptations, so that the movement is sufficiently intensive while still being able to maintain non-violent discipline.

Ethnic differences make it particularly difficult to support these incentives. First, ethnic groups may have different policy preferences (eg Alesina, Baqir and Easterly, 1999), thus reducing the benefits from a single policy concession and thus to a cross-ethnic movement as a whole. This also makes it difficult for any movement to grow in scale beyond an ethnic group. Differing policy preferences can also accentuate the challenge of followers accepting a common leader. The lack of a replacement, as we have just discussed, however, may strengthen the power of those leaders that do emerge.⁷

To summarize: non-violent movements can be more successful than violent movements at achieving policy outcomes, but only if they are large and in environments where decisionmakers face audience costs. However, leaders and followers in movements that become large also have heightened private temptations to exploit a movement through its heightened capacity for violence. Thus non-violent movements must depend more heavily than other movements on the selection of leaders, as well as followers, that are willing to forego temptations with large movements. Finally, the problems of finding such recruits and developing commonly acceptable leadership to discipline them are accentuated in ethnically divided societies.

⁷A final issue is that when there are ethnic groups with differing policy preferences, individuals may choose to join different movements with competing policy objectives. There may also be strategic complementarities: mobilization and violence by one ethnic movement may increase the incentives to mobilize by other members of ethnicities to avoid being ‘caught off-guard’. In such competitive environments, members of ethnic movements that permit violence may once again see growths in membership that non-violent cross-ethnic movements do not. For examples of this type of ethnic ‘security dilemma’ from the Balkans, South Asia and elsewhere, see Posen (1993), Kaufmann (1996), Fearon (1998), Jha and Wilkinson (2012).

2 General patterns

It is useful to see whether our framework matches the general patterns of success and failure of violent and non-violent campaigns using cross- campaign data. Figure 1 exploits the NAVCO 2.0 dataset of 250 non-violent and violent campaigns between 1945 and 2006 (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013). It compares campaigns within the same country, showing how different sizes of violent and non-violent campaigns in a year affect the probability that a campaign successfully achieves its policy objectives. Notice that, consistent with our framework, looking across all campaign-years (L), the probability that a campaign achieves 100% of its stated objectives is, if anything, lower for non-violent campaigns than for violent campaigns when less than 100,000 or so members, but the relative effectiveness of non-violent campaigns rises with the scale of the campaign and begins to dominate. Notice, that again, consistent with our framework, if we separate campaign-years within the same country that attracted large international media coverage from those with less coverage, it becomes clear that while the probability of success rises with scale for large non-violent campaigns on average (L), the relative advantage of non-violence versus violence is insignificant with little or moderate media coverage (R), but non-violent campaigns are strikingly more likely to be successful than violent campaigns when they exceed 500,000 or so members *and* the international media takes an active interest (M).

Thus, consistent with our framework, the relative policy effectiveness of non-violent campaigns appears to rise with size and to the audience costs imposed by the international media. Yet, as our framework also outlines, this may be only part of the picture: though increased scale may make a non-violent campaign more effective *if* it is able to maintain non-violent discipline, it may also lead to an increased temptation for members of non-violent campaigns to turn violent. Table 1 compares campaigns from the same country-year in their relative probability of turning violent. Notice that large non-violent campaigns, and campaigns that start off with attempts to embrace groups across ethnic lines are also more likely to turn violent.

3 The example of South Asian independence

The broad patterns above make the achievements of the Independence movement in South Asia even more remarkable. The independence of the countries that would become India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1947 represented the first major reversal of a process of colonization by Europeans that had been continuing since the liberation of the states of Latin America in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (Figure 2), making it a prominent example

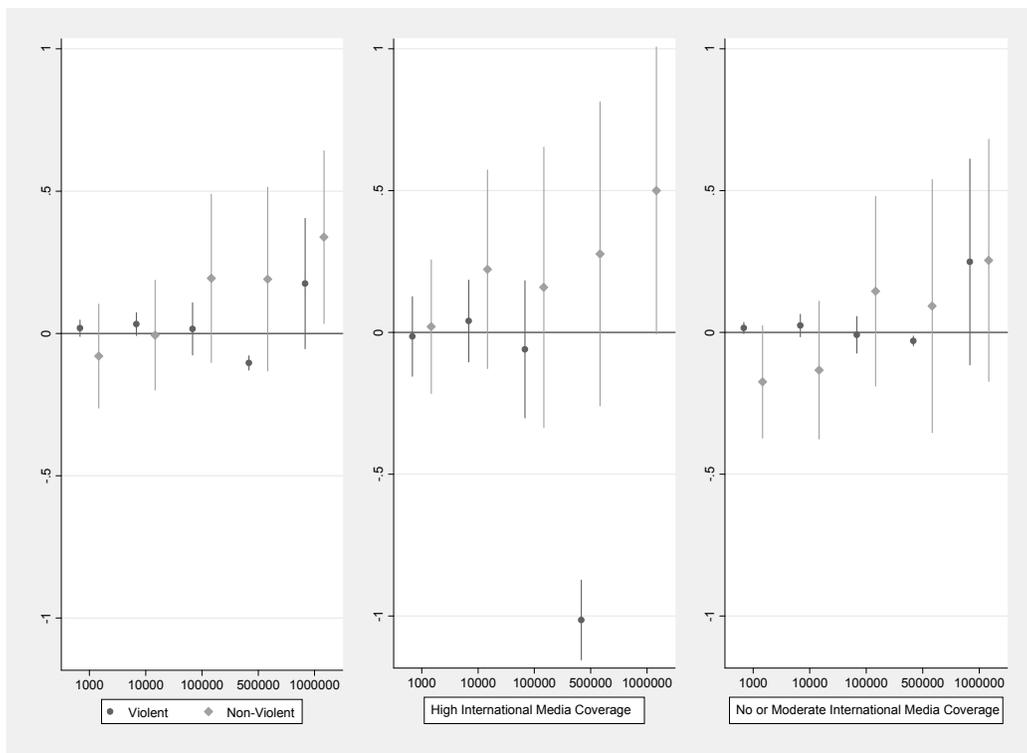


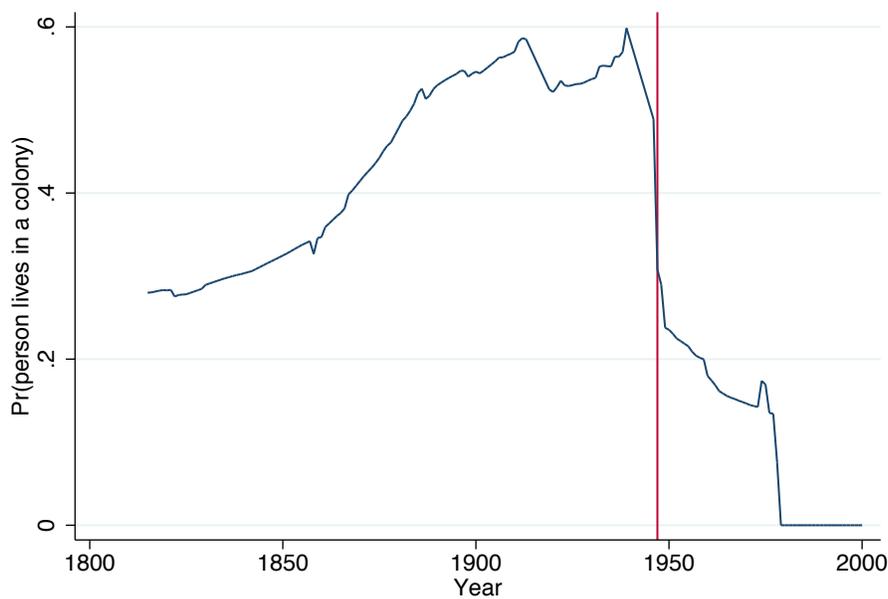
Figure 1: Effectiveness of Violent and Non-Violent Campaigns, by Size and International Media Coverage, 1945-2006

source: own calculations based upon NAVCO 2.0 dataset (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013). Estimated coefficients of size on the probability of success, controlling for country fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the country level. N=1594 campaign-years, spanning 250 campaigns with >1000 members that held goals of regime change, independence or self-determination. “Success” defined as campaign achieving 100% of stated goals. Size is a lower bound estimate. L: all-campaign years; M: Campaign-years that attracted high international coverage; R: Campaign-years that attracted no, low or moderate international coverage.

Table 1: **Size, Cross-Ethnic Campaigns and Transitions from Non-Violence to Violence**

Outcome:	(1) Campaign Turns Violent=1	(2) Non-Violent to Violent= 1	(3) No Change = 0 Violent to Non-Violent = -1
	Probit dF/dX	OLS	Ordered Probit
Campaign Size > 100000	0.293* [0.145]	0.038* [0.017]	0.454* [0.226]
Campaign Spans Ethnic Lines	0.003* [0.001]	0.001 [0.001]	0.002 [0.003]
Country FE	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Sample	Country-Years with Variation	Full	Full
R-squared		0.15	
Observations	217	1594	1589

Notes: source: own calculations based upon NAVCO 2.0 dataset (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013). Column 1 includes only campaigns in country-years in which there some campaigns transition from primarily non-violent agitation to violent agitation and other campaigns in the same country and year do not. Columns 2 and 3 includes all campaign-years. Column 3 re-parameterizes the outcome to rank campaigns that transition to non-violent practices (-1), retain existing practices (0) or turn violent (+1). Standard errors clustered at the country level. * significant at 10%; ** 5%; *** 1%



Source: Own calculations based on Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive.

Figure 2: **World Trends in Decolonization**

The vertical line marks the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947.

for future civil rights and independence movements around the world.

How and why then did a broad coalition of South Asians form across ethnolinguistic and economic lines to push for democratic self-determination? How was this coalition largely successful at maintaining a non-violent mass movement and why did it also, at times, fail? In “Forging a Non-Violent Movement: Economic Shocks and Organizational Innovations in India’s Struggle for Democracy”, we provide the first systematic evidence on the relative importance of economic, cultural and organizational factors in mobilizing the Indian subcontinent’s remarkably diverse population into one of the world’s first non-violent mass movements in favor of democratic self-government. We exploit a range of hitherto largely untapped subnational (administrative district-level) data sources, assembling novel data on mobilization, including terrorist acts between 1893 and 1936, votes and turnout in the first provincial elections in 1936, newly declassified secret intelligence reports on violent insurrection and non-violent protest during the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the “Great Rebellion” of 1942 against British rule, and internal Congress accounts of membership and mobilization. Our work draws upon original archival correspondence and records from the Indian Office Records and National Archives in the United Kingdom, the National Archives of India in New Delhi and the papers of the All-India Congress Committee and Bombay Pradesh Congress, both now housed in the Nehru Memorial Library.

While this work is still in progress, the emerging evidence points to an intriguing set of patterns that motivate a major re-evaluation of the lessons to be learned from India’s freedom struggle. As discussed above, our theoretical framework points to two key challenges of non-violent mobilization in the South Asian context: mobilizing sufficient followers across ethnic and societal lines, and selecting leaders and followers that can impose and accept non-violent discipline. In our paper and broader book project, we argue and provide evidence that economic shocks from the Great Depression (1930-1933) were important for encouraging mobilization across ethnic lines, while Gandhi’s reforms of the Congress movement (1919-23) were particularly important for the selection of leaders that could be trusted to subsequently impose non-violent discipline.

A common view of the history of India’s independence struggle is shaped by its ultimate success— that of a sequence of successful mobilizations, masterminded by Gandhi, that build upon themselves and culminate with Independence in 1947. Yet, the policy recommendations are less clear: “first find another Gandhi”, seems unsatisfactory. In contrast, Table 2 summarizes our re-interpretation of the struggle and suggests the generalizable lessons it provides. First, we observe that non-violent mass mobilization in India was only truly successful in achieving substantial policy concessions in one campaign: the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1932) that began with a tax revolt in the form of Gandhi’s ‘Salt March’,

Table 2: **Economic Shocks and Organizational Reforms in India’s Independence Struggle**

Movement	Leadership and Organization	Incentives for Mass Mobilization	Achieves Aims
Nationalism before Gandhi, 1885-1918	No: Leaders Selected by Elite Status	No: Ethnic Movements; Elite Movements	No: No Policy Concessions; Violent Repression (Sedition Act 1919)
Mobilization Attempt 1: Khilafat/ Non-Cooperation Movement, 1919-1922	Yes: Gandhi's Reforms: Leaders Selected by Costly Sacrifice for Non-Violent Action	No: Aims Mis-Aligned with Agricultural Sector and across Ethnic Movements	No: No Policy Concessions; Hindu-Muslim Violence
Mobilization Attempt 2: Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-1932	Yes: Non-Violent Leaders Selected	Yes: Great Depression allows Coalition Formation with Agricultural Sector	Yes: Gandhi- Irwin Pact 1932; Govt India Act 1935 Provides Local Autonomy and Extends Franchise
Mobilization Attempt 3: Quit India Movement: August, 1942	No: Comprehensive Detention of Non-Violent Leaders	Yes: Coalition Established	No: Campaign Turns Violent; Violent Repression; No Further Policy Concessions

Notes: source: Bhavnani and Jha (book project, in progress).

and was called off only after the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, agreed to a “Pact” that allowed salt concessions, released civil disobedience prisoners, recognized the Congress as a key interlocutor for the political fate of India and paved the way for the Government of India Act of 1935. This Act granted the first broad democratic franchise in South Asian history— expanding the number with the right to vote from 0.65% in 1934 to 14% of the adult population, or 30.1 million people, the year later. The Act also provided substantial autonomy over local public goods to new provincial legislatures. This victory arguably also made subsequent concessions, including Independence, become much more likely. We argue that the Civil Disobedience Movement benefited from having solved both the key challenges of non-violence: incentives for mass mobilization were created by economic shocks that swayed a key constituency— agriculturalists— in Congress’ favour, and Gandhi’s reforms, that helped impose non-violent discipline.

In contrast, attempts by Indian nationalists to influence British policy prior to Gandhi, and Gandhi’s own other great mobilization attempts— the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1919-22 and the Quit India Movement of 1942— failed to achieve any policy concessions. These failures are however, deeply informative, about the conditions under which non-violent movements can achieve success.

Prior to 1919, it was unclear how important the Indian National Congress would be for

Indian politics. The Congress was an elite group, financed and dominated mainly by affluent English-speaking professionals, particularly lawyers and businessmen (Krishna, 1966). This elite group pushed for greater Indian consultation on government within the British Empire. In parallel with this organization were regional groups of more extreme nationalists, whom through newspapers and terrorist acts, conducted a campaign for Independence. A number of these regional nationalist groups were following the playbooks of European nationalism. For example, the prominent nationalist “Lokmanya” Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Poona used his newspaper *Kesari* (Saffron) to propagate nationalism, most notably by adopting Hindu symbols, such as promoting a minor festival for the god Ganesha into a major religious and political event, and promoting the exemplar of the Maratha ruler Shivaji Bhosle, who had fought the Mughal empire. Both of these symbols appear to have been aimed at forging a Hindu ‘imagined community’ and coincided with Hindu- Muslim rioting (eg Anderson, 1983, Jaffrelot, 2005). The newspaper’s circulation remained limited regionally. Even among Hindus, Tilak’s attempts to propagate Shivaji, a local ruler, as a symbol of nationalist resistance in Bengal, on the other side of the sub-continent, met with little success (Sedition Committee, 1918, pg.19). Bengal itself was viewed by the British as a key center for nationalism in this period, mainly focused upon an urbanized affluent elite, known as the *bhadralok*, or “respectable ones”. In fact, of the 276 ‘seditious’ incidents recorded in the Sedition Committee (1918) Report between 1893 and 1918, 71% occurred within a single province, Bengal, with the provinces of Punjab (12%) and Bombay (4%) the nearest rivals. The vast majority (more than 90%), involved attempted or actual violence, including armed theft, murder and bombs, while other acts included seditious speeches, and the dissemination of articles.⁸

This first phase- combining a small and almost exclusively elite-led Congress agitating peacefully even while low level violent sedition, bomb-throwing and other acts of terrorism was being perpetrated mainly by those outside the Congress organization, lasted until around 1919. This was a period when arguably grievances were particularly accentuated, since the British reneged upon Viceroy Lord Montagu’s declaration that India would receive dominion status (i.e. self-government) in return for military support during the First World War. Instead, in response to the Sedition Committee (1918) Report, the government imposed a series of laws aimed at curtailing ‘sedition’ and limiting public assembly.

It was then that Gandhi returned from South Africa and introduced the techniques of non-violent civil disobedience to the sub-Continent as well as pushing for, and obtaining a broad reform of the Congress organization. The Congress went through a large scale reorganization during the period 1919-23, adopting a new constitution that changed its steering body, the *All-India Congress Committee* from one dominated mainly by elites,

⁸Own calculations based upon Sedition Committee (1918).

Year	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
Members	160	162	163	338	338
% Lawyers	65.00	64.81	50.92	23.08	21.30
% Journalists	7.50	7.41	11.66	6.21	8.58
% Businessmen	6.88	7.41	8.59	5.62	4.44
% Doctors	4.38	3.70	4.29	4.73	4.73
% Landowners	4.38	4.94	2.45	2.37	1.48
% Teachers	3.75	3.09	4.29	2.96	2.96
% Others	5.00	5.56	6.13	6.80	6.51
% Congress Workers	0.00	0.00	0.61	4.44	7.99
% Not Known	3.13	3.09	11.04	43.79	42.01

Table 3: **Composition of Delegates to the All-India Congress Committee, 1919-24**

Source: Own calculations, based upon Krishna (1966)(pg424). During Gandhi’s reforms of the Congress movements, the proportion of lawyers dropped considerably, while those not prominent to be classified (likely non-elites) rose.

particularly lawyers (65%) in 1919 to one that was representatively elected from district Congress committees which had emerged to span British India by 1923 (Table 3 and Krishna (1966)). The organization extended down to the *taluk* and village level, where each village with more than five Congress members was entitled to a committee and to send delegates to the taluk and district committees. Following Gandhi’s reforms in 1920, members of these committees of the Indian National Congress were required to give up any positions that they enjoyed with the British government and lawyers in the leadership had to give up the practice of law in British courts. Engaging in non-violent civil disobedience that could lead to arrest and the accompanying prison time, often involved hard labour, became an organization-specific investment.

Important work beginning with Iannaccone (1992) has pointed to costly investments or ‘sacrifices’ in group-specific identity as a form of screening device in cults and clubs, where a key objective is to maintain small group size and screen for trustworthy members. This logic has been found to particularly applicable to violent mobilization along ethnic and religious lines, including among organized crime and terrorist organizations (eg Berman and Laitin, 2008). The challenge can be to find a group-specific investment, with violent acts and crimes that reduce a member’s outside option often playing that role. We suggest that civil disobedience provides a dimension– public sacrifice, including incarceration and ‘turning the other cheek’ when faced with brutal law enforcement– that ironically has a similar clubs good structure but *can transcend sectarian and ethno-linguistic differences and also facilitate non-violence*. Political incarceration provided a movement-specific investment that was potentially open to all, regardless of their initial cultural and resource endowments. As Table 3 suggests, the number of members whose professions were not identifiable (and thus were more likely to be non-elites) increased from 3.13% to 42.01% over a four year period.

The selection of leaders, rather than being based upon status as an elite, became instead, one based upon sacrifice. In the language of our framework, Gandhi's reforms created a process for screening of potential leaders who either are 'non-violent' types, receive sufficient private gains from being within the movement or internalized its public policy objectives. These leaders, in turn, could be later entrusted with large-scale mobilization despite its temptations.

Having a cadre of leaders is beneficial to non-violence, but, as discussed above, non-violent leaders' ability to maintain discipline is weak. Thus, selection of followers is also important. The costly signals that even the lowest level Congress volunteer had to provide begin to make more sense in this context. In November 1921, the Congress sought to centralize the process of volunteer recruitment, issuing general instructions which required all volunteers to give up any military-style uniforms, banned the carrying of any weapons, ruled out the enlistment of any 'known to be a bad character', and required volunteers to make a pledge of obedience and of non-violence.⁹ Congress leaders and volunteers were also enjoined to spend at least an hour every day spinning cloth.

The reorganization of the Congress accompanied the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi's first attempt at mass non-cooperation in India. This occurred in part to challenge the Sedition Acts that made protests illegal, but also to create solidarity with the Muslim community, who feared for the fate of the Ottoman Sultan—the titular Caliph of Sunni Islam. Pan-Islamic nationalists, many of whom were concentrated in India, formed the *Khilafat* (Caliphate) conference to pressure Britain into maintaining the Caliph's authority. Arguing that national unity required mass mobilization on both Hindus and Muslims on this issue, Gandhi asked "how can twenty-two *crore* (ten million) Hindus have peace and happiness if eight *crore* of their Muslim brethren are torn in anguish?" (Lelyveld, 2011, p.157). As we discuss in our book project (Bhavnani and Jha, book project, in progress), despite having developed a sub-continental organization, the combined Non-Cooperation - Khilafat movement was small scale—particularly compared to those that came after—and though Gandhi himself attracted large crowds, the movement itself failed to attract much concrete civil disobedience outside India's towns.

An important test of the Congress organization came on February 4, 1922. A joint Khilafat / Non-Cooperation Movement non-violent protest in the town of Chauri Chawra was fired upon by police, leading to the deaths of three protestors. The demonstrators

⁹The pledge reads: "I shall faithfully and diligently carry out all instructions received from my superiors. I shall observe pledge of non-violence in word and in deed, and shall inculcate spirit of non-violence amongst others. I shall regard this pledge as binding upon me so long as policy of non-violence is continued by Nation. I shall run all risks attendant upon performance of my duty." IOR/L/PJ/6/1778, File 7359 *Decision of the All India Congress as to organisation and control of national volunteers.*

became a mob, which burned down the police station with the police inside, killing 22 policemen. Gandhi immediately called a halt to the non-cooperation movement, and was effective in implementing this nationwide.

Ultimately, however, the non-cooperation movement and the Khilafat agitation failed to achieve significant reforms.¹⁰ Further, there was a breakdown of cooperation between the Muslim Khilafat movement and the mainly Hindu Congress. Consistent with our framework, local politicians appeared to have taken advantage of the new era of mobilization, and towns that led to the first major wave of civil Hindu-Muslim rioting in South Asian history (Figure 3).

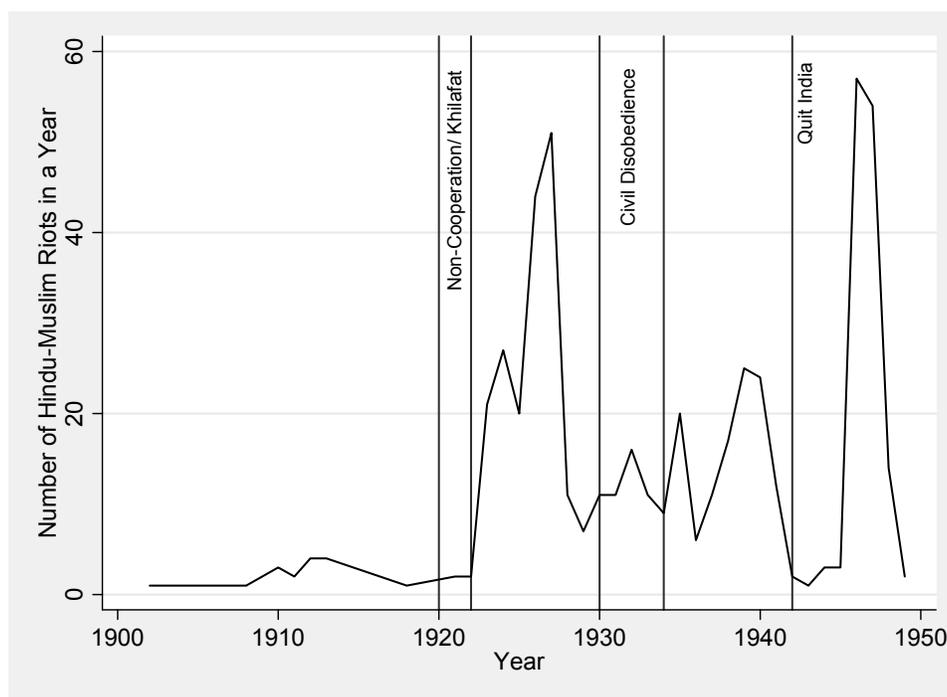


Figure 3: **Satyagraha Movements and Hindu Muslim Riots** Source: Jha (2013), and Wilkinson (2005)

We argue that though the Congress, under Gandhi’s influence, developed the basic organization and techniques for non-violence in this first attempt at nationwide mass civil disobedience. However, an underlying lack of aligned incentives, both between the Khilafat and Congress movements, and between the non-cooperation movement and many that it hoped to mobilize, may have played a key role both in the limited success of the movement and in the ethnic conflict that resulted where its mobilization efforts had met success.

¹⁰Kemal Ataturk would depose the Ottoman Sultan, relieving the British of the responsibility and removing the main reason for the Muslim mobilization.



Figure 4: **India’s Trade with the British Empire**

Source: Mitchell: Historical Statistics

Thus, what the Congress leadership needed was a set of incentives that would make self-rule attractive. One problem was that India’s abundant factor was agriculture, and thus the majority of Indians employed in the agricultural sector arguably benefited from the higher relative prices for agricultural goods available abroad under Britain’s policies of trade openness to the platform of protectionism promised by the industrialist- supported Congress.

As Figure 4 suggests, the Great Depression had a large negative impact on a key benefit of Empire– the benefits from trade. Farmers began to switch from growing non-food crops for export to growing food (Figure 5). By doing so, they reduced their reliance on world demand, and, therefore, both the trade and extension services provided by various intermediaries, including landlords, and the trade openness policy of the British. The Congress party appears to have seized upon the reduced enthusiasm of this group for the Raj, and promised them land redistribution from the now redundant landlord class. Jawaharlal Nehru became the first major political figure to speak on the need for land reforms in 1929, a topic that became a key part of the Congress platform not long afterwards (Malaviya, 1954). It was as the Great Depression struck, on January 26th 1930—thenceforth celebrated as Independence Day—that Congress officially changed its platform from self-government within the British empire to *Purna Swaraj*, and initiated its next great attempt at mass mobilization– the Civil

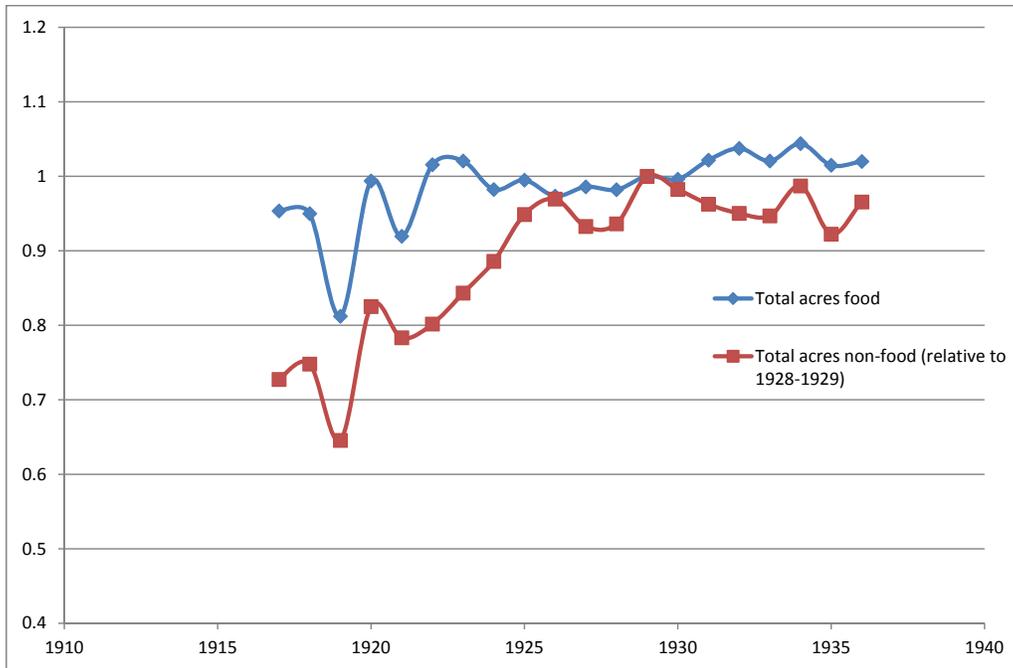


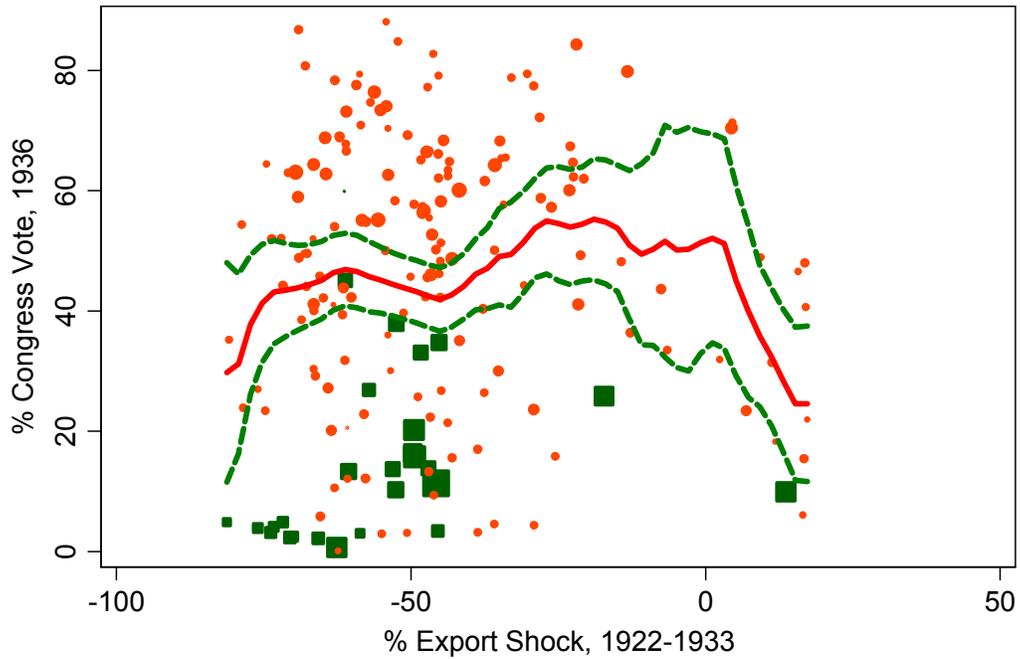
Figure 5: **Changes in Food vs Non-Food Crop Acreage**

Source: Agricultural Censuses, 1929-1935

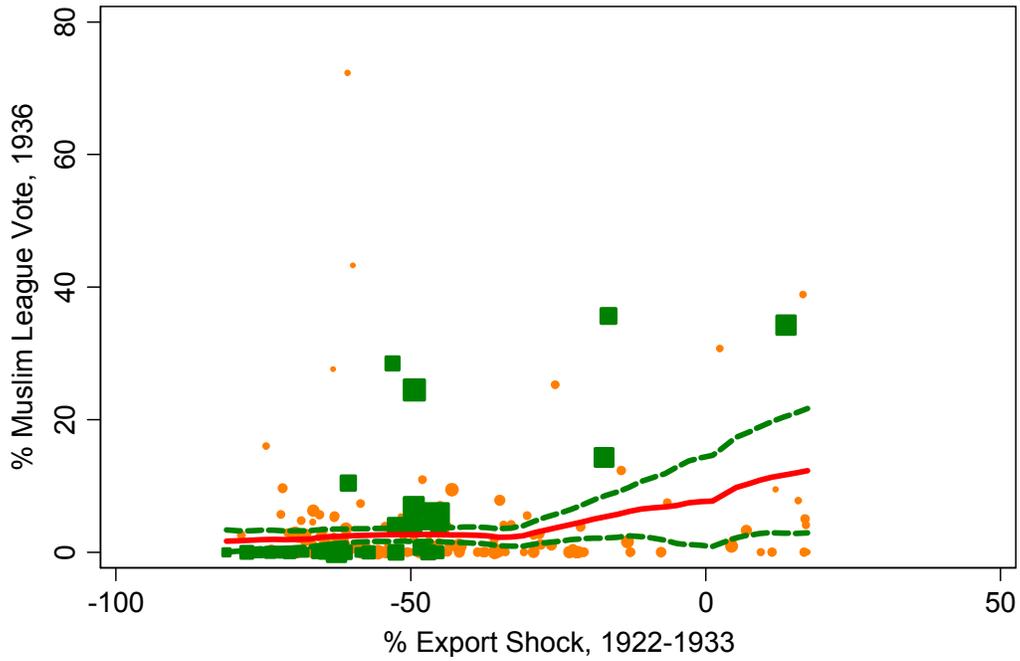
Disobedience Movement. It is this Movement, enjoying both the Congress’ organization, and for the first time, the aligned incentives of the poor in both rural and urban sectors, that proved the most successful of all of Gandhi’s campaigns. These led, as we discussed, to the granting of provincial legislatures and India’s first elections with a substantial franchise in 1936.

We can use the outcome of these elections to check whether Congress mobilization did in fact respond to Depression-era export shocks. Figure 6 shows how the relationship between shocks to the value of exports between 1923 and 1933 with the relative support in Indian constituencies for the Congress and the Muslim League in the first elections with a substantial franchise that followed in 1936 (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014). Notice that the Muslim League, the only other national party allowed to contest the elections, has very low support even among Muslim constituencies, and does best among the ‘winners’ from the Great Depression—i.e. areas that actually enjoyed positive shocks to the value of the export goods they produce.¹¹ The Congress, in contrast did worst among the ‘winners’ and the extreme ‘losers’ but garnered most support among communities that were moderately negatively affected. These patterns suggest that those worst hit by the Depression, particularly those who had failed to change their factors away from exportables, were not coordinated

¹¹The Communists were not allowed to contest the elections.



(a) Congress Vote Share, 1936



(b) Muslim League Vote Share, 1936

Figure 6: **Export Shocks (1922-33) and Vote Share, 1936**

source: Bhavnani and Jha (book project, in progress, 2014) Local polynomial smooths, weighted by district population (marker sizes denote relative population). Green boxes represent Muslim majority districts

into support for the opposition. This is consistent with the lack of attraction that Congress' autarkic platform might yield to those who could not substitute easily away from export goods. Instead of being a rebellion of those facing the hardest times, support for Congress came from intermediate districts that were relatively insulated from the Depression shock or able to adjust relatively easily to domestic production.

One might expect that, having built a new mass coalition in favour of independence, and a cadre of leaders committed to non-violent discipline by 1932, the Congress had 'figured it out', and thenceforth would enjoy success. Indeed, Gandhi's third great attempt at non-violent mobilization was proclaimed on August 9th, 1942 with the maximalist objective that the British should "Quit India".

However, the British engaged in draconian counter-measures that shed even more light on the importance of leadership in maintaining non-violence. On August 3rd, a 'Most Secret' Telegram was dispatched to all Provincial Governors. This telegram detailed that in the event that the Congress should pass the 'Quit India' resolution at its meeting, the Governors should "arrest ... *all individuals whom they consider competent and likely to attempt to organise and launch mass movement.* No individual will be arrested merely as a member of unlawful association general object being not to fill the jails but to limit the number of arrests to *those regarded as essential for dislocation of the Congress organisation.*"¹².

In Bhavnani and Jha (2014), we use this arrest policy to document the effects of leadership on non-violence by examining the patterns of mobilization that occurred in its aftermath. Indeed, in a synchronized action, within a few hours after the protests began, the British arrested and imprisoned an estimated 60,000 Congress cadres, including the entire national leadership. This process was made easier by the fact that many leaders had been gathered in Bombay at the All-India Congress Committee meeting. Heavy war-time censorship has long concealed the full magnitude of the mobilization. By bringing together all declassified secret reports on the Quit India rebellion from each province, we believe for the first time, we are able to shed new light on its dynamics.

While much work remains to be done, the basic patterns are themselves illuminating. As Figure 7 reveals, the day of the Quit India resolution, there was a spike in non-violent protests across the sub-continent. Consistent with our framework, the overnight arrest of much of the Congress leadership, removed a key element in maintaining non-violent discipline. This led to an overnight spike in violent actions that would continue to erupt intermittently for the next few months, even while there was a consistent fall in non-violent mobilization. In internal war-time Congress correspondence too, the role that the arrest of leadership played

¹²Government of India, Home Department to Secretary of State, Telegram, L/ P & J/8/597: ff 118-19, our italics.

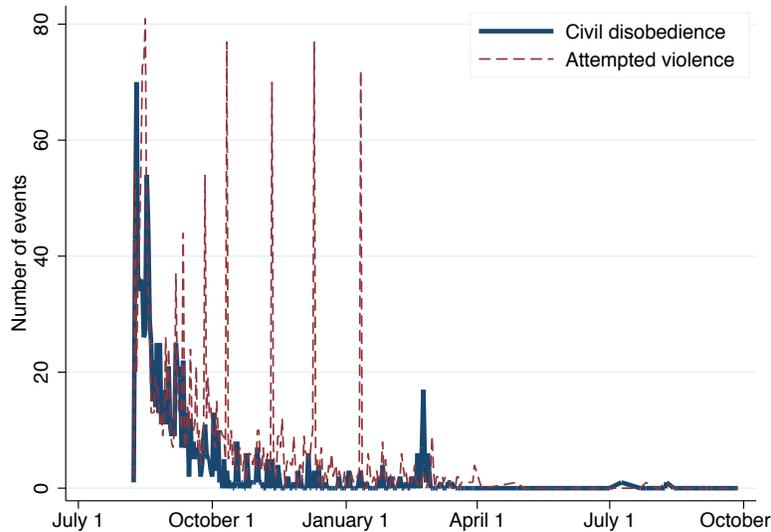


Figure 7: **Non-violent and violent protest in the Quit India “Rebellion” of 1942**

Approximately, 60,000 Congress organizers, including the entire national leadership, were arrested and sequestered in a nationwide sweep on August 9th, the day after the first protests. Despite heavy censorship of these actions, non-violent protests were immediately replaced by violent mobilization. Source: Own calculations, based upon secret intelligence reports for each province.

in causing the movement to turn violent is also evident. The internal *Report of August 1942 Struggle*, penned during war-time by an anonymous member of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee explains:

For the sake of proper understanding of the situation it must be made clear here that the Congress machinery that came to assume charge of affairs in the City was not appointed by the Provincial Congress Committee or by any other competent Congress authority. The PCC had not drawn out any plan since it had not instructions from the Working Committee. What subsequently happened was more accidental than a result of any previous planning. It is evident from what followed that those in charge of the Congress machinery had no special partiality for strict non-violence as interpreted by Mahatma Gandhi. This will explain some of the incidents that occurred during the campaign towards the end of 1942.¹³

The change in the nature of the Quit India protests from non-violent to violent following the arrests of the Congress leadership likely reduced the costs to the British to respond

¹³*Report of August 1942 Struggle*, Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee papers, Nehru Memorial Library Special Collections, 1942/BPCC/File 29

with violent repression. The suppression of the movement required 8 British Brigades and 57 Indian Battalions. The Royal Air Force even machine-gunned civilians from the air.¹⁴ American and Chinese nationalist pressure to grant concessions abated, and Congress leaders would spend the rest of the war in jail. They would emerge after four years in prison to find that their support, particularly among Muslims, had eroded, and their position to speak for all ethnicities diminished. While the successes of the Civil Disobedience Movement arguably made India's independence feasible and likely, the failure of the Quit India Movement may have done the same for the Partition.

4 Discussion

In this overview article, we summarize recent research in progress (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014, book project, in progress) that examines the potential and limitations of non-violent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India's struggle for democratic self-rule. Our theoretical framework highlights the need for an audience to impose costs on violent repression of non-violent movements, as well as two key twin challenges faced by non-violent movements in ethnically diverse countries even if such audiences may exist. The first is the challenge of mass mobilization across ethnic lines. The second challenge lies in overcoming the enhanced temptations faced by members of large mobilized groups to turn violent, whether to secure short-term gains from mob action or in response to manipulation by agents who stand to gain from political violence. These challenges appear to match general patterns from cross-campaign data.

Addressing these challenges for sustaining a non-violent movement, as we have argued, requires identifying and mobilizing sufficient numbers of select potential followers that are willing to forego temptations for violence in favor of national objectives. It also requires selecting leaders that can forego even greater such temptations, so that the movement is sufficiently intensive while still being able to maintain non-violent discipline. Our framework further suggests some design elements for those seeking peaceful reforms: among these are the choice of public objective and organizational incentives within the movement that can help select and retain such personnel.

The first choice lies in choosing the public objective that would be most attractive to large numbers of potential non-violent types rather than attracting those that may prefer

¹⁴As Linlithgow wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "If you have any trouble in the debate [in Parliament] about shooting from air, it may be worthwhile mentioning that in many cases this action was taken against mobs engaged in tearing up lines on vital strategic railways in areas which ground-floor forces could not reach . . . But this is not true of all cases in which firing occurred from aircraft. . ." - Viceroy to Sec. State (4 Oct. 1942).

violence. While sectarian and other ethnically-delimited objectives may be relatively more effective in mobilizing people, partly out of the threat that other ethnic groups may mobilize instead, such ethnic mobilization is also relatively conducive for violence, and limits scale to that ethnic group. In contrast, campaigns against the restrictions on political rights or the imposition of taxes that are common to all may encourage fewer potentially violent types to join, and have the potential to mobilize across ethnic lines. The Congress' use of common economic and political issues, using a platform of the salt tax, protectionism, land reform and democracy to mobilize a non-violent cadre of Indians in the successful Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 contrasts favourably to the ethnic mobilization and lack of aligned interest of the Khilafat movement and the parallel non-cooperation movements in the 1920s. The Congress succeeded in the 1930s, we argue, by seizing upon the opportunities posed by the Great Depression to make their post-independence economic promises more attractive, while using the combination of mass agriculturalist mobilization and democracy that would make these agriculturalists median voters to make such future redistributive policies credible.

A second, and often overlooked key to ensuring non-violent discipline lies in the organizational incentives of the movement. We argue that in the early 1920s, though lacking a broadly attractive public objective, Gandhi's reforms transformed India's independence movement. The Congress went from a group dominated by elites, many with strong ties to the existing regime and thus good outside options, to a new cadre structure that allowed leadership candidates from both existing elites and non-elites willing to sacrifice for non-violent public objectives to advance within the movement. While the required loss of offices within the existing regime reduced the benefits for defection, Gandhian requirements of self-sacrifice, from the mundane, such as yarn spinning, to the physically dangerous—such as the courting of arrest for civil disobedience and engaging in hard labour in British jails—helped individuals signal their trustworthiness to accept non-violent discipline and thus assume leadership within the movement. This signal, in contrast to similar screening devices by cults and terrorist organizations, was explicitly non-violent and non-sectarian. Those Congress members that made such organization-specific investments early—in the 1920s, when the Congress had little chance of assuming government—became leaders in the 1930s, permitting the key success of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The importance of this selection of leaders in keeping the movement non-violent was put into sharp relief in the final great mobilization of 1942, when the synchronized arrest of 60,000 Congress leaders led to a rapid breakdown of non-violent discipline.¹⁵

¹⁵So far, we have assumed that certain societies are likely to be in the audience state largely for exogenous reasons. However, as we have discussed, the presence of an audience is critical for non-violent movements and they may be able to influence such attention on some margins. In our book project, we also discuss strategies famously employed by Gandhi to attract international media coverage, from the use of symbols,

Early Indian nationalists sought to adopt the playbook of terror and sectarianism employed by nationalists in the West. Yet, a key part of Gandhi's gift may lie in his reorganization of a movement that took the screening devices of religious cults and terror organizations and found a method instead to select non-violent leaders and followers. While social movements often emphasise the importance of sheer numbers in attaining policy objectives, movements that seek peaceful reform may gain from trading off scale with the selection of followers that are willing to sacrifice short-term gains. Furthermore, the dimensions of visible sacrifice, particularly the use of courting arrest for acts of civil disobedience that Gandhi used are clearly not India-specific but may provide avenues for finding trustworthy leadership elsewhere as well. South Asia's struggle for independence has long been an example for freedom struggles around the world. Yet there may yet be more that it can teach us.

his own correspondence and publicity outlets, to the slow pace of the Dandi Salt March to allow media attention to grow.

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