

GANDHI'S GIFT: LESSONS FOR PEACEFUL REFORM FROM INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

We examine the potential and limitations of nonviolent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India's struggle for democratic self-rule. We summarize evidence consistent with a theoretical framework that highlights two key challenges faced by nonviolent movements in ethnically diverse countries. The first challenge, that of forging a mass movement, was met through the brokering of a deal that took advantage of an external shock (in this case, the Great Depression) to align the incentives of disparate ethnic and social groups toward mass mobilization in favor of democracy and land reform. The second 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 1919-23. These innovations took the movement from one dominated by a rich elite to one organized on the principle of self-sacrifice. This permitted the selection of future leaders who could then be trusted to maintain nonviolent discipline in pursuit of the extension of broad rights and public policy objectives.

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 new technology of political organization—that of mass nonviolent 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 favor of nonviolent resistance was 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, nonviolent civil resistance can also fail. 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 the 1950s and 1960s U.S. civil rights movement, and the 2011 Arab spring and the battles in Cairo's Tahrir Square demonstrate, movements that begin peacefully can be prone to rapid breakdown into violence that further facilitates repression.

In this overview article, we summarize research in progress that examines the potential and limitations of nonviolent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India's struggle for democratic self-rule.³ We begin by sketching a theoretical framework to delineate conditions under which nonviolent mass movements can succeed and when they may fail. We show that even in environments conducive to nonviolent effectiveness, such as when policymakers face greater costs to violent crackdowns of nonviolent movements relative to their nonviolent counterparts, there remain two key challenges faced by nonviolent movements. The first is the challenge of mass mobilization: Nonviolent movements, more so than violent movements, are only effective when they are large in scale. This problem 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 toward mass mobilization in favor of democracy and land reform. The second challenge, that of keeping the mass movement peaceful, was met through organizational innovations introduced by Mohandas Gandhi in his reforms of the constitution of the Congress movement in 1919-23. These took the 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 nonviolent discipline in pursuit of the extension of broad rights and public policy objectives. We characterize 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.⁴

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 conclude by arguing that a key, but hitherto mostly neglected, aspect of Gandhi's Gift—the example of nonviolence applied to India's independence struggle—lies in understanding these organizational innovations. We discuss how these findings relate to contemporary movements for democracy.

Theoretical framework

It is useful to sketch a theoretical framework to help understand the potential and limitations of nonviolent civil disobedience as a technology, and the role played by mobilization and leadership. Suppose that individuals in a society differ in their "type," defined as 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

We examine the potential for and limitations of nonviolent civil disobedience through the lens of the evolution of an iconic success: India's struggle for democratic self-rule. We identify two key challenges: First, that of forming a nonviolent mass movement in the first place and, second, how to keep it nonviolent once formed. We find that both unexpected external events as well as organizational innovation within Gandhi's mass movement were important. We employ unique datasets and draw tentative lessons for cases other than India.

honor that make it more costly for some to "turn the other cheek" when confronted with violence. Also assume that individuals can choose at some cost to join a movement, and subsequently, whether within a movement or not, to engage in violence.⁵

Further, assume that a movement becomes more intense if more people are mobilized and if they possess commonly accepted organizational leadership. The benefits to movement intensity from having a leader are relatively small when few people are mobilized, but increase as the numbers rise. Thus, leaders complement followers in forging a more intense movement, be it through directing individuals toward common objectives, organizing logistics, or other relevant activity.

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 *permits* 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. In contrast, define a nonviolent movement—one that *prohibits* violence—as different from other movements only in that its strategy either requires its leader to expel members who engage in violence or imposes sufficient penalties on violent members to check their behavior. Both types of movements may allow some private gains to members, such as status benefits within the organization. However, all other things being equal, movements that permit violence have greater potential for private gains than those that constraint violence.

Finally, suppose that after these private gains are realized, an external decisionmaker seeks to minimize the cost imposed by the movement either by granting a policy concession, by ignoring the campaign, or by violent repression. In our motivating case, the decisionmaker encompasses the British government, of course. 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 of engaging in violent repression are not fixed but are increasing in a movement's intensity, with doing nothing being the lower cost option for dealing with small movements, and violent repression becoming cheaper for the decisionmaker when confronted with larger and more intensive movements.

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

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 cheaper to violently suppress groups committed to nonviolence than those who are willing to retaliate. In contrast, in the audience state, greater reputational costs or other penalties imposed on the decisionmaker may exist for violently suppressing a nonviolent campaign as opposed to one that has committed violence.

An audience state may be more likely when a pro-democracy international hegemon exists or where individuals have access to freer media, as has been increasingly the case with today's 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 yet were deeply concerned about American opinion as well as that of some of their own constituents.⁶

This setup makes explicit a number of the assumptions we believe necessary for a nonviolent campaign to work and suggests some of the challenges that such campaigns may face. Working backwards, note first that, in this setup, the only advantage that nonviolent campaigns have over campaigns that tolerate violence arises in the higher costs decisionmakers face in violently repressing them rather than granting policy concessions. This advantage holds only if the campaign is sufficiently intensive (i.e., sufficiently large and organized) so that, had it 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 nonviolent campaigns costlier than

suppressing violent campaigns.

Thus, nonviolent 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. In addition, in our framework, nonviolent campaigns also face greater difficulties in both recruitment and organization relative to similar campaigns that do not penalize violence. First, nonviolent 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 favorable to its leaders and potentially more attractive to a broader range of types of followers than an otherwise similar nonviolent movement, as a nonviolent 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 to loot than to mobilize a group that is willing to give up the prospect of short-term gain and willing to "turn the other cheek" despite provocation.⁷

A second aspect to note is that keeping movements peaceful becomes harder as they grow. As movements increase in size and intensity, both leaders and followers 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 nonviolent discipline must not only forego their own temptation to permit violence; increasingly they must organize effective penalties on their followers to prevent a nonviolent movement from unraveling into violence.

This is particularly hard as nonviolent leaders actually have few options for penalizing violence. While leaders that permit violence can also potentially use the threat of violence to impose discipline, the worst a nonviolent leader can do to any specific individual is to make that member indifferent between participating or not, i.e., to expel him or her. But because the policy gains are public goods, members of large movements may have an incentive to turn to violence, knowing that even if they are expelled from the movement, they will benefit from any policy concessions regardless. All that individual members stand to lose are the private benefits from staying within the nonviolent movement.

But another penalty available is for a leader to refuse to (continue to) direct the movement. Given the complementarity between leaders and followers, this will reduce the movement's intensity 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 a marginally violent type of follower from preferring violence to maintaining

nonviolent discipline. Indeed, this approach was one exercised on a number of occasions by Mahatma Gandhi.

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

Ethnic differences can make it particularly difficult to support these incentives. Ethnic groups may have different policy preferences, reducing the benefits from a single policy concession and thus to a cross-ethnic movement as a whole. This makes it difficult for a movement to grow in scale beyond an ethnic group. Differing policy preferences can also accentuate the challenge of followers accepting a common leader. The potential lack of a replacement, stemming from the threat of resignation we just discussed, may however strengthen the power of any leaders that do emerge.⁸

To summarize: Nonviolent movements can be more successful than violent movements at achieving policy outcomes. But this depends upon their ability to mobilize *en masse* and on whether external decisionmakers face audience costs. Moreover, leaders and followers in movements that become large face heightened private temptations to exploit a movement through its increased capacity for violence. Thus nonviolent movements must depend more heavily than other movements on the selection of leaders, as well as followers, who are willing to forego the temptations that an increase in the size of a movement brings. Finally, the problems of finding such recruits, and of developing a commonly acceptable leadership to discipline them, are accentuated in socially divided societies.

General patterns

Using cross-campaign data, it is a useful first check to see whether our theoretical framework matches general patterns of success and failure of violent and nonviolent campaigns. Thus,

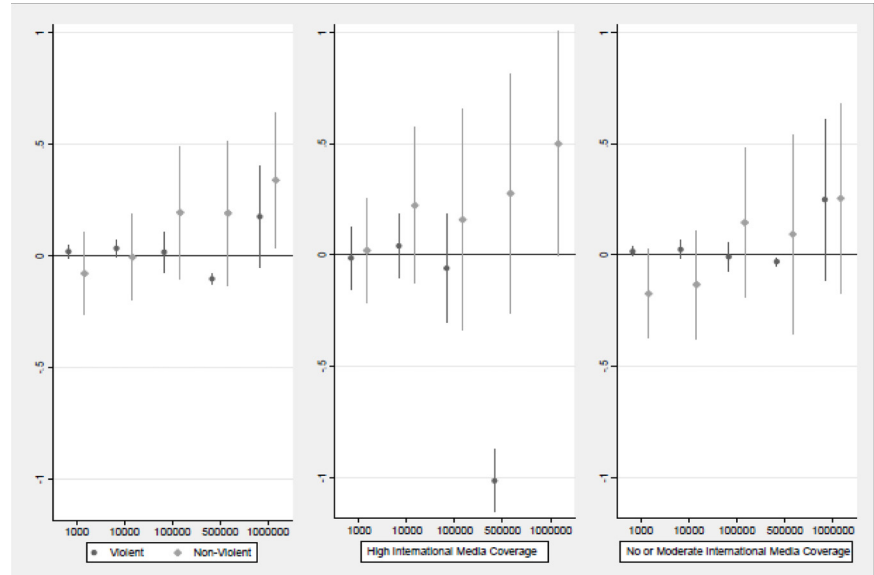


Figure 1: Effectiveness of violent and nonviolent campaigns, by size and international media coverage, 1945-2006. *Notes:* Estimated coefficients of size on the probability of success, controlling for country fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the country level. N=1594 campaign-years, spanning 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. Left: All-campaign years; Middle: Campaign-years that attracted high international coverage; Right: Campaign-years that attracted no, low, or moderate international coverage. *Source:* Authors’ calculations based on NAVCO 2.0 dataset (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013).

Figure 1 employs the NAVCO 2.0 dataset of 250 nonviolent and violent campaigns between 1945 and 2006. It compares campaigns within the same country, showing how different sizes of violent and nonviolent campaigns in a year affect the probability that a campaign successfully achieves its policy objectives. Campaign sizes are measured on the horizontal axes of the three-panel figure.

The panel on the left differentiates between violent (darker vertical bars) and nonviolent (lighter vertical bars) movements. The probability that a campaign achieves 100 percent of its stated objectives is, if anything, lower for nonviolent campaigns than for violent campaigns with less than 100,000 or so members. But an increase in scale brings a rise in their relative effectiveness.

When one separates campaign-years (within the same country) between those that attracted high international media coverage (middle panel) from those with less coverage (right panel), nonviolent movements are no more successful than violent ones under little or moderate media coverage but strikingly more likely to be successful when they exceed 500,000 or so members *and* the international media take an interest.

Consistent with our theory, then, the relative policy

effectiveness of nonviolent campaigns appears to rise with movement size and the audience costs imposed via international media. Yet, as our theory also outlines, this may be only part of the overall picture: Although increased scale may make a nonviolent campaign more effective, if it maintains discipline, it may also lead to an increased temptation for members of nonviolent campaigns to turn violent. Table 1 compares campaigns from the same country-year in their relative probability of turning violent and shows that large nonviolent campaigns, and campaigns that start off with attempts to embrace groups across ethnic lines, are more likely to turn violent.

The example of South Asian independence

The broad patterns discussed thus far make the achievements of South Asian independence movements even more remarkable. The 1947 independence of what would become today's India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh was 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). This made South Asia a prominent example for civil rights and independence movements yet to come around the world.

How and why then did a broad coalition of South Asians from across ethnolinguistic and economic lines push for democratic self-determination? How was this coalition largely successful at maintaining a nonviolent mass movement and why did it also, at times, fail? In Bhavnani and Jha (2014a) 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 nonviolent mass movements in favor of democratic self-government. We exploit a range of hitherto largely untapped subnational (administrative, district-level) data, assembling novel data on mobilization, including terrorist acts between 1893 and 1936, votes and turnout in the first provincial elections in 1936, newly declassified intelligence reports on violent insurrection and nonviolent protest during the civil disobedience movement in 1930 and the Great Rebellion of 1942 against British rule, and internal Congress party 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-

Table 1: Size, cross-ethnic campaigns, and transitions from nonviolence to violence

Outcome:	(1) Campaign turns violent = 1	(2) Nonviolent to violent = 1 No change = 0 Violent to nonviolent = -1	(3)
	<i>Probit</i> <i>dF/dX</i>	<i>OLS</i>	<i>Ordered</i> <i>Probit</i>
Campaign size >100,000	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	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Country-years with variation	Full	Full
R-squared		0.15	
Observations	217	1,594	1,589

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

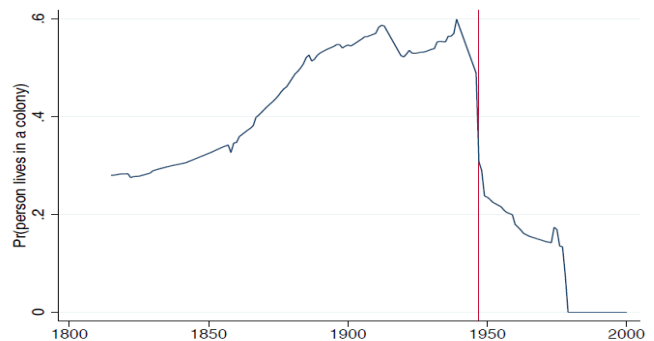


Figure 2: World trends in decolonization. *Note:* The vertical line marks the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. *Source:* Authors' calculations based on Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive.

evaluation of the lessons to be learned from India's freedom struggle. As discussed, our theoretical framework points to two key challenges of nonviolent mobilization in the South Asian context: mobilizing sufficient numbers of followers across ethnic and societal lines, and selecting leaders and followers

that can impose and accept nonviolent discipline. In our working paper and broader book project (2014a; 2014b), we argue, and provide evidence, that economic shocks from the Great Depression (1929-1933) 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 nonviolent 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 built upon themselves and culminated with independence in 1947. Table 2 summarizes our contrasting reinterpretation of the struggle and suggests the generalizable lessons it provides. First, we observe that nonviolent 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, 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 party 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 of people with the right to vote from 0.65 percent in 1934 to 14 percent of the adult population, or 30.1 million people, in elections that began to be implemented a 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 benefitted from having solved both of the key challenges of nonviolence: first, incentives for mass mobilization were created by economic shocks that swayed agriculturalists—a key constituency—in Congress' favor, and second, Gandhi's organizational reforms, which helped impose nonviolent discipline.

Table 2: Economic shocks and organizational reform in India's independence struggle

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Leadership & organization</i>	<i>Incentives for mass mobilization</i>	<i>Achieves aims</i>
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: <i>Khilafat</i> /non-cooperation movement, 1919-1922	Yes: Gandhi's Reforms: Leaders selected by costly sacrifice for nonviolent action	No: Aims misaligned with agricultural sector and across ethnic movements	No: No policy concessions; Hindu-Muslim violence
Mobilization attempt 2: Civil disobedience movement, 1930-1932	Yes: Nonviolent leaders selected	Yes: Great Depression allows coalition formation with agricultural sector	Yes: Gandhi-Irwin Pact 1932; Gov't India Act 1935 provides local autonomy and extends franchise
Mobilization attempt 3: Quit India movement: August 1942	No: Comprehensive detention of nonviolent leaders	Yes: Coalition established	No: Campaign turns violent; violent repression; no further policy concessions

Source: Bhavnani and Jha (2014b).

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 nonviolent 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 by affluent English-speaking professionals, particularly lawyers and businessmen. This group pushed for greater Indian consultation on government within the British Empire. In parallel with this organization were regional groups of more extreme nationalists who, 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. *Kesari*'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 subcontinent, met with little success. Bengal itself was viewed by the British as a key center for nationalism in this period, mainly focused on an urbanized affluent elite, known as the *bhadralok*, or “respectable ones.” In fact, between 1893 and 1918, of the 276 seditious incidents recorded in the Sedition Committee report of 1918, 71 percent occurred within a single province, Bengal, with the provinces of Punjab (12 percent) and Bombay (4 percent) the nearest rivals. More than 90 percent of the events involved attempted or actual violence, including armed theft, murder, and bombings, while other acts included seditious speeches and the dissemination of articles.⁹

Gandhi's reforms

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 were perpetrated, mainly by those outside the Congress organization—lasted until around 1919. This was a period when 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 report, the government imposed a series of laws aimed at curtailing “sedition” and limiting public assembly (Sedition Act, 1919).

It was then that Gandhi returned from South Africa and introduced the techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience to the subcontinent 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 that in 1919 was dominated by elites, particularly lawyers (65 percent), to one that by 1923 was representatively elected from district Congress committees that had emerged to span British India

Table 3: Composition of delegates to the All-India Congress Committee, 1919-1923

Year	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
Members	160	162	163	338	338
% Lawyers	65.0	64.8	50.9	23.1	21.3
% Journalists	7.5	7.4	11.7	6.2	8.6
% Businessmen	6.9	7.4	8.6	5.6	4.4
% Doctors	4.4	3.7	4.3	4.7	4.7
% Landowners	4.4	4.9	2.5	2.4	1.5
% Teachers	3.8	3.1	4.3	3.0	3.0
% Others	5.0	5.6	6.1	6.8	6.5
% Congress workers	0.0	0.0	0.6	4.4	8.0
% Unknown	3.1	3.1	11.0	43.8	42.0

Source: Authors' calculations based on Krishna (1966, p. 424). During Gandhi's reforms of the Congress movement, the proportion of lawyers fell considerably while those not classified (likely non-elites) rose.

(Table 3).¹⁰ The organization extended down to the *taluk* (an administrative subdivision) 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 nonviolent civil disobedience could lead to arrest and prison time, often involved hard labor, and became an organization-specific investment.

Important work, beginning with Laurence Iannaccone, has pointed to costly investment in group-specific identity, such as sacrifice, 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 particularly applicable to violent mobilization along ethnic and religious lines, including among organized crime and terrorist organizations. Violent acts and crimes that reduce a member's outside options often play the role of a group-specific investment. In contrast, we suggest that civil disobedience provides a dimension of public sacrifice, including incarceration and “turning the other cheek” when faced with brutal law enforcement, that has a similar clubs good structure but can transcend sectarian and ethnolinguistic differences and also facilitate nonviolence. In India, 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 3.1 percent to 42.0 percent over a five-year period.¹¹

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

Having a cadre of leaders is beneficial to nonviolence, but, as discussed, nonviolent 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 nonviolence. Congress leaders and volunteers were also enjoined to spend at least an hour every day spinning cloth.¹²

The Khilafat and non-cooperation movements, 1919-1922

The reorganization of the Congress coincided with Gandhi's first attempt at mass mobilization in India. This occurred in part to challenge the Sedition Act that made protests illegal, but also to create solidarity with the Muslim community, which 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 of 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?" As we discuss in Bhavnani and Jha (2014b), despite having developed a subcontinental organization, the combined non-cooperation—*Khilafat* movement was small-scale, particularly compared to those that came after, and although Gandhi himself attracted large crowds, the movement itself failed to attract much concrete civil disobedience outside India's towns.¹³

An important test of the Congress organization came on 4 February 1922. A joint *Khilafat*/non-cooperation movement nonviolent protest in the town of Chauri Chawra was fired upon by police, leading to the deaths of three protestors. The demonstrators became a mob, which burned down the police

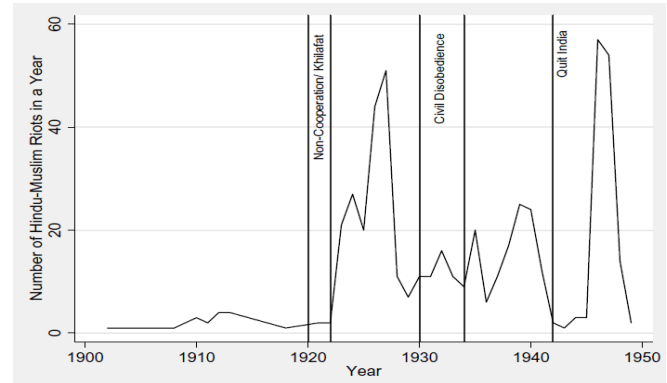


Figure 3: Satyagraha movements and Hindu-Muslim riots. Source: Jha (2013) and Wilkinson (2005).

station, 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.¹⁴ 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 this led to the first major wave of civil Hindu-Muslim rioting in South Asian history (Figure 3).

While Congress, under Gandhi's influence, developed the basic organization and techniques for nonviolence in this first attempt at nationwide mass civil disobedience, an underlying lack of aligned incentives, both between the *Khilafat* and Congress movements, and between the non-cooperation movement and many that it had 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 at first met success.

The civil disobedience movement, 1930-1932

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 benefitted from the higher relative prices for agricultural goods available abroad under Britain's policy of trade openness as compared to the platform of protectionism promised by the industrialist-supported Congress.

As Figures 4 and 5 suggest, the Great Depression had a large negative effect on a key benefit of Empire: the benefits from trade.¹⁵ Farmers began to switch from growing non-food crops for export to growing food. In this manner they reduced

their reliance on world demand and thus on their reliance on 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 farmers for British rule and promised them land redistribution from the now redundant landlord class. Jawaharlal Nehru became the first major politician to speak on the need for land reforms in 1929, a topic that became a key part of the Congress platform not long afterward. It was soon after the Great Depression struck—on 26 January 1930, and 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 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 to India's first elections with a substantial franchise in 1936.¹⁶

We can use the election outcome to check whether Congress mobilization did in fact respond to depression-era export shocks. Panels *a* and *b* of Figure 6 (on the next page) show the relation of the value of exports between 1923 and 1933 to the relative support for the Congress and the Muslim League. Note, in Panel *b*, that the Muslim League, the only other national party allowed to contest the elections (the Communists were not permitted to participate), has very low support even among Muslim constituencies, and does best among the winners from the Great Depression, i.e., in areas that saw only small adverse, or even positive, effects of the depression on the value of their export goods. The Congress, in contrast, did worst both among the relative economic winners and the extreme losers but garnered substantial support among communities in which the depression's adverse effects were more moderate. The voting outcome suggests that those hit worst by the depression, particularly those who had failed to change away from exportables, were not coordinated into support for the opposition. This is consistent with the lack of attraction that Congress' autarkic platform might yield to those who could not easily substitute away from export goods production. Instead of being a rebellion of those facing the hardest times, support for Congress came from districts that were more insulated from the depression or able to adjust more easily to domestic production.

The Quit India movement, 1942

One might expect that, having built a new mass coalition in

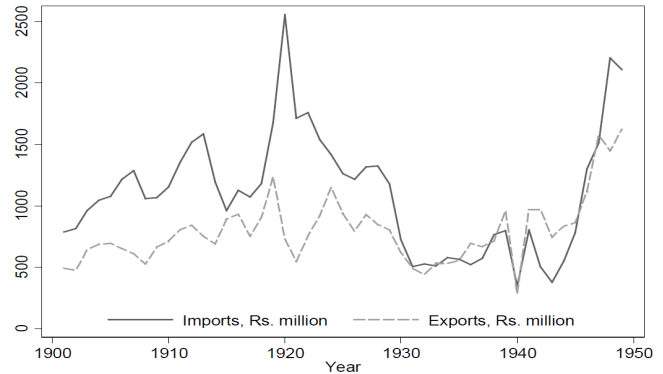


Figure 4: India's trade with the British Empire. Source: Data from Mitchell (2003).

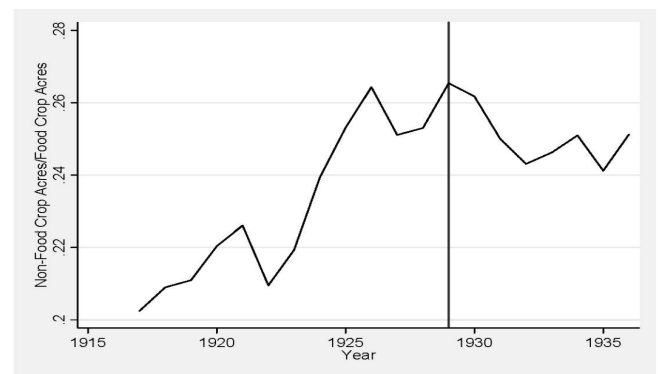


Figure 5: Ratio of non-food to food crop acreage. Source: Agricultural censuses, 1929-1935.

favor of independence—and a cadre of leaders committed to nonviolent discipline by 1932—the Congress would now enjoy great success. Indeed, Gandhi's third attempt at nonviolent mobilization was proclaimed on 9 August 1942, with the maximalist objective that the British should "Quit India."

However, the Quit India movement failed. Draconian British countermeasures were employed to decapitate the Congress organization. Ironically, these countermeasures now allow us to empirically evaluate the role of leadership in maintaining nonviolence. On 3 August 1942, a "most secret" telegram was dispatched to all Provincial Governors. It detailed that in the event that the Congress should pass the Quit India resolution at its upcoming 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." In a synchronized action, which commenced 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 exercised at the time has long concealed the full magnitude of the mobilization.¹⁷

By for the first time bringing together all declassified reports on the Quit India movement from each province, we believe that we can shed new light on its dynamics. While much work remains to be done, the basic patterns are illuminating. Figure 7 reveals that on the day of the Quit India resolution—8 August 1942—there was a spike in nonviolent protests across the subcontinent. The overnight arrest of much of the Congress leadership removed a key element in maintaining nonviolent discipline. Consistent with our theory, this led to an overnight spike in violent actions; actions that would continue to erupt intermittently for the next few months, even as there was a consistent fall in nonviolent mobilization.

In internal war-time Congress correspondence, the role that the arrest of leadership played 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 (PCC) 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 1942.¹⁸

The change in the nature of the Quit India protests from nonviolent to violent following the arrests of the Congress leadership likely reduced the costs to the British to respond 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.¹⁹ American and Chinese nationalist pressure to grant concessions abated, and Congress leaders would spend the rest of the war in jail. They would emerge four years later to find that their support, particularly among Muslims, had eroded and their position to speak for all ethnicities diminished. While the

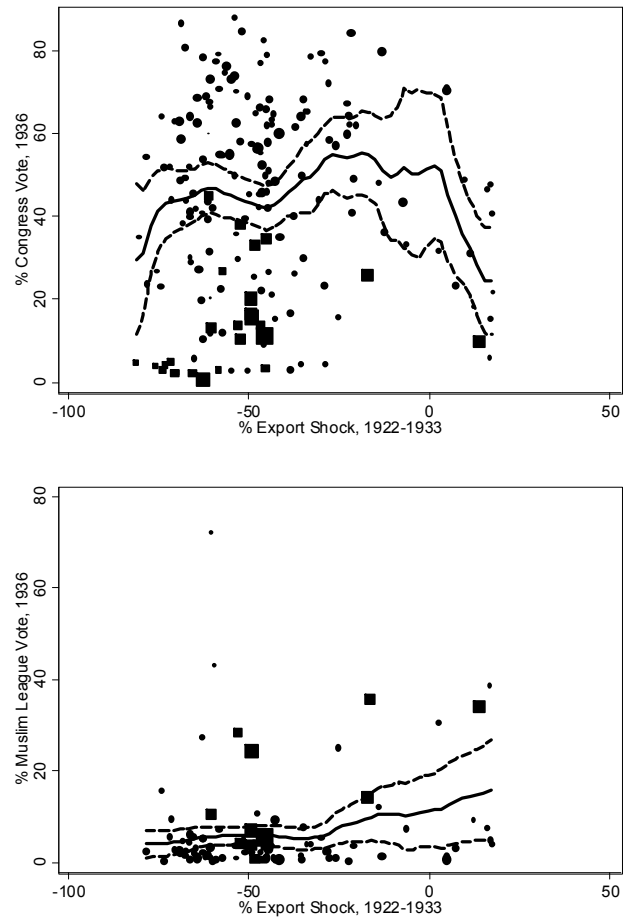


Figure 6: Export shocks and votes, 1922-1933. *Notes:* Local polynomial smooths (solid lines) weighted by district populations, with 95% confidence intervals (dashed lines). Marker sizes denote relative populations. Square markers are for Muslim-majority districts. *Source:* Bhavnani and Jha (2014b).

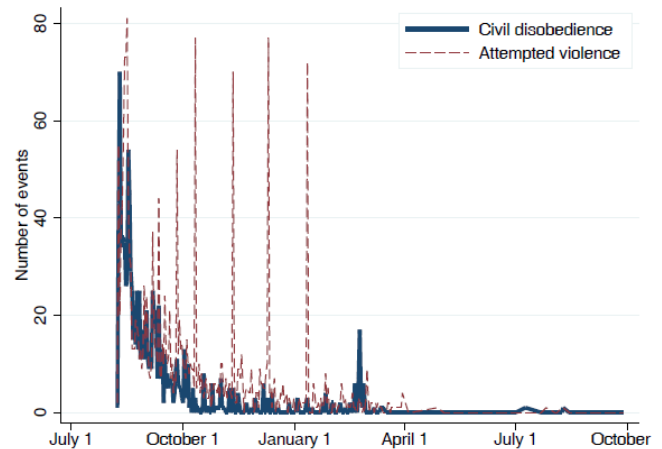


Figure 7: Nonviolent and violent protests, 1941 and 1942. *Source:* Authors' calculations based on intelligence reports for each province.

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 subsequent partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan.

Discussion

This article summarizes some of our research in progress that examines both the potential and the limitations of nonviolent 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 those who would use violent repression of nonviolent movements, as well as on two key challenges faced by nonviolent movements in ethnically diverse countries, even if such audiences do exist. The first is the challenge of mass mobilization across ethnic lines. The second 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.

Sustaining a nonviolent movement requires identifying and mobilizing sufficient numbers of potential followers willing to forego temptations to engage in violence in favor of national objectives as well as leaders who forego even greater such temptations so that the movement is sufficiently intense while still maintaining nonviolent discipline.

Our theory suggests two design elements for those who seek peaceful reform. The first design element is to choose the public objective that would be most attractive to large numbers of potential nonviolent types rather than attracting those that may prefer 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 nonviolent cadre of Indians in the successful civil disobedience movement in 1930 contrasts favorably to the ethnic mobilization and lack of aligned interest of the *Khilafat* movement and the parallel non-cooperation movement in the 1920s.

A second, oft-overlooked, key to ensuring nonviolent discipline lies in the organizational incentives of the

movement. We argue that in the early 1920s, although 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 to advance within the movement if they were willing to sacrifice potential private objectives for nonviolent public objectives. 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 obedience and engaging in hard labor in British jails—helped individuals signal their trustworthiness to accept nonviolent discipline and thus assume leadership within the movement. This signal, in contrast to similar screening devices by cults and terrorist organizations, was explicitly nonviolent and nonsectarian. 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 nonviolent 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 nonviolent discipline.²⁰

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 instead found a method to select nonviolent leaders and followers. While social movements often emphasize 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 private gains for long-term public ones. Furthermore, the dimension of visible sacrifice, particularly the use of courting arrest for acts of civil disobedience that Gandhi used are not India-specific but may provide avenues for finding trustworthy leadership elsewhere.

South Asia's struggle for independence has long been an example for freedom struggles around the world. There may yet be more that it can teach us.

Notes

1. Transcribed from King: A Filmed Record ... Montgomery to Memphis. Produced by Ely Landau, 1970, Library of Congress/Kino Lorber, 00:01:25-00:01:49.

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

3. Bhavnani and Jha (2014a).

4. Mimic: See Iannaccone (1992); Berman and Laitin (2008).

5. Theoretical framework: See Bhavnani and Jha (2014a; 2014b). Factors: See, e.g., Akerlof and Kranton (2000); Grosjean (2011); Jha and Wilkinson (2012).

6. Pro-democracy hegemon: Boix (2011). The British: See for example the 5 February 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, see Sir R. Campbell to Mr. Eden, Telegram L/PO/6/102s: f7 (Mansergh, 1976, p. 659). Many accounts also emphasize 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 United States.

7. We differ in this respect from existing scholarship (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011) that suggests that nonviolent movements are cheaper to join than are violent movements, as less is required of nonviolent agents. Our account instead emphasizes that effective nonviolent movements are both more difficult to mobilize and to organize, because committed followers do not stand to gain from the benefits of violent mobilization and movement leaders are unable to leverage the payoffs to violence to maintain nonviolent discipline.

8. Different policy preferences: See, e.g., Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly (1999). Another issue is that when there are ethnic groups with differing policy preferences, individuals may choose to join different movements with competing policy objectives. Here, strategic complementarities may exist: Mobilization and violence by one ethnic movement may increase the incentives to mobilize by members of other ethnicities to avoid being caught off-guard. In such competitive environments, members of movements that permit violence

may once again see growth in membership that nonviolent cross-ethnic movements may 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).

9. Congress was an elite group: Krishna (1966). Imagined community: See, e.g., Anderson (1983); Jaffrelot (2008). Met with little success: Sedition Committee (1918, p. 19). In fact: Authors' calculations based on Sedition Committee (1918).

10. Also see Krishna (1966).

11. Iannaccone (1992). Particularly applicable: See, e.g., Berman and Laitin (2008).

12. The pledge reads: "I shall faithfully and diligently carry out all instructions received from my superiors. I shall observe pledge of nonviolence in word and in deed, and shall inculcate spirit of nonviolence amongst others. I shall regard this pledge as binding upon me so long as policy of nonviolence 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.

13. Gandhi quote: Lelyveld (2011, p.157).

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

15. In Figure 4, note that following the repatriation of war materiel between 1918-1921, India returned to similar levels of imports and exports to the prewar period. Also note that relative to these benchmarks, trade with the British Empire took a sharp dip as the Great Depression struck in 1929-1930.

16. Nehru: See Malaviya (1954).

17. Quote: Government of India, Home Department to Secretary of State, Telegram, L/ P & J/8/597:118-19.

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

19. As 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 October 1942).

20. We have assumed that certain societies are likely to be in the audience state largely for exogenous reasons. However, as discussed, the presence of an audience is critical for nonviolent movements, and they may be able to influence such attention on some margin. In our book project (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014b), we discuss strategies famously employed by Gandhi to attract international media coverage, from the use of symbols, 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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