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Landon E. Hancock

*Kent State University*, lhancoc2@kent.edu

Anuj Gurung

*Kent State University*, agurung@kent.edu

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# Capturing the Flag: The Struggle for National Identity in Nonviolent Revolutions

## Abstract

One goal of nonviolent resistance movements is to legitimize themselves in opposition to governments by undermining the latter's leadership. We argue nonviolent groups that can 'own' the national identity are more likely to succeed, as they can assert the legitimacy of their vision for the state, and persuade other sectors of society to support their cause. Our argument is supported by the Arab Spring uprisings, where those resistance movements that were able to identify and claim ownership over a homogeneous national identity were more successful in pressing their claims. We view national identity as a component of symbolic power in both successful and unsuccessful nonviolent revolutions. We supplement our argument via a comparison of the Arab Spring uprisings featuring Egypt, Bahrain, and Libya, with nonviolent movements of the past: the 'early' cases (Northern Ireland, Iran, and the Philippines) and the color revolutions (Serbia, Georgia, and the Ukraine). We posit that the role of national identity, while not a determinant of success, can play an important role in the struggle for legitimacy, which may help determine the prospects of success for these movements.

**Keywords:** *Nonviolence, National Identity, Color Revolutions, Arab Spring*

## Author Bio(s)

Landon E. Hancock is an Associate Professor at Kent State's School of Peace and Conflict Studies, where he researches issues related to identity and agency in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. He is editor of *Narratives of Identity in Social Movements, Conflicts & Change* (2016) and co-editor (with Christopher Mitchell) of *Zones of Peace* (2007), *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace* (2012) and a forthcoming volume, *Local Peacebuilding and Legitimacy*. His articles have appeared in numerous journals including *Peacebuilding*, *National Identities*, *Ethnopolitics*, *Peace & Change*, and *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*.

Anuj Gurung is a PhD candidate in the Political Science Department at Kent State University. His dissertation research is on the resettlement of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in the U.S. His primary research interest lies in international migration, ranging from refugee issues to migrant identities. He has also earned an MA in Conflict Resolution from Georgetown University. His work on the link between human trafficking and natural disaster can be found in *International Area Studies Review*.

## **Capturing the Flag: The Struggle for National Identity in Nonviolent Revolutions**

**Landon E. Hancock and Anuj Gurung**

Why are some nonviolent revolutions more successful than others in ousting the incumbent? According to traditional theories of nonviolence, largely stemming from the works of Gene Sharp (1973), much of the problem stems from a failure of agency on the part of the insurgent group. This failure can come from a lack of organization, an inability to connect with and undermine the incumbent's pillars of support, or a failure to reach out to the wider population. In contrast to this view on agency, Lucan Way (2008, 2010) argued structural elements, namely the availability of national identity, are crucial for the success of nonviolent movements. Put differently, if the national identity is commonly shared by both elites and masses, and can be framed in anti-incumbent terms, the nonviolent movement is more likely to prevail.

By concentrating on national identity as a key variable, we seek to understand the tension between the structural and agency-driven views. Is the national identity in question involved in the nonviolent conflict, and to what extent has it been captured by insurgent or incumbent parties? Answering this question allows us to chart a conceptual path that improves our understanding of structural and agency-driven elements that can increase (or reduce) the likelihood of success of nonviolent movements. In essence, we seek a middle path. This paper illustrates that the structural condition of having or building a national identity is generally linked to the success or failure of a nonviolent movement. To a lesser extent, we also argue there is a need for nonviolent agency to actively contest the legitimacy associated with said national identity.

### **Traditional Views of Nonviolence and Success: Agency and Organization**

Nonviolence is largely viewed as a methodology of agency, or a series of strategies and tactics that allow organized groups to challenge oppressive systems and overthrow dictatorships. Nonviolence has been practiced throughout written history, though before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was largely confined to spiritual traditions of both eastern and western religions and religious movements (Nepstad, 2015).

Nonviolence has become accepted as a popular form of resistance against repressive regimes. There were hundreds of major nonviolent campaigns in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that attempted

to overthrow dictatorships (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). With time, nonviolent campaigns have become more organized and strategic, making them more likely to succeed in comparison to violent, and often opportunistic, armed insurrections (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008). The growing popularity of nonviolent resistance was mirrored in the recent proliferation of scholarship (Coy, 2013). Not every nonviolent attempt has been successful in overthrowing the repressive incumbents. However, nonviolent movements, especially the successful ones, continue to provide relevant lessons and inspiration for future campaigns, as shown by the diffusion of color revolutions (Bunce & Wolchik, 2012; Nikolayenko, 2012), and the Arab Spring uprisings (Anderson, 2011; Nepstad, 2013, 2015).

Like peace and conflict studies, nonviolence is associated with the goals of social justice and transformation. Research, scholarship, and especially advocacy on peace and conflict studies have focused on the role of nonviolent movements in overcoming adverse structural considerations. Three well-known experts on nonviolence argued structural concerns have little impact on the success or failure of nonviolent campaigns (Zunes, Merriman, & Stephan, 2010). In this paradigm, the success of nonviolent campaigns hinges on the organization of the campaign, and its ability to encourage elite defections and garner external support, as opposed to initial structural conditions.

What could be described as the “agency” paradigm of strategic nonviolence is characterized by a scholarship examining individual case studies, experiential lessons from activists and trainers worldwide, and relevant opportunities for financial and other resources. Writers such as Nepstad (2011, 2013, 2015), Stephan and Chenoweth (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008), and Zunes (1997, 1999, 2011) focused on increasing the ability of nonviolent groups to overcome “structural” obstacles via improved strategies and tactics. These actions are designed to improve the organizing capabilities of civil resistance movements, to increase the number of participants in nonviolent actions, and to reach out to other sectors of society, i.e. to “fractionate” the regime and separate its leaders from their pillars of support. Recent works by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) and Nepstad (2015) argued that one of the key elements for successful civil resistance movements is their ability to persuade members of the security forces—either the police, the military, or both—to either defect from the regime or to, at the very least, step aside and refuse to implement regime orders that crack down on civilian protesters.

While the work of these scholars was detailed and thorough, we find the notion that any nonviolent movement can achieve success simply through better organizing, irrespective of circumstances, to be somewhat unconvincing. In contrasting the Sharpian and Gandhian visions of nonviolence, Chabot and Sharifi argued that simply focusing on short-term resistance, at the expense of long-term structural and cultural transformation, is likely to result in regime change rather than revolution (Chabot & Sharifi, 2013, p. 22). We do believe there is value in focusing on human agency, but we fear that if our research indicates that agency is all that matters, it *may* lead activists to engage in provocative resistance activities before addressing and attempting to change structural constraints, which may make success much harder.

### **The Other “Way”: Structural Factors**

In sharp contrast to the literature on nonviolence, scholarships on social movements, nationalism, and ethnic conflict tend to focus on structural factors in understanding the success of revolutionary movements—whether violent or nonviolent. In a marked shift from nonviolent agency, Way (2008) argued the success or failure of revolutions in former Soviet regimes stemmed from the strength of the autocratic regime and the perceived distance from the Western influence (p. 60). In Way’s view, the diffusion of tactics and strategies from earlier, more successful movements had a limited impact on the ability of later movements in overthrowing their respective dictatorships.

It is important to note that there were several skeptics of Way’s focus on a narrow range of structural causes for the color revolutions. Foremost were Bunce and Wolchik (2009), who countered that while structural causes are important, they must take their places alongside equally-important issues of agency and process (p. 70). In contrast to Way, they argued that political organization mattered, and that “what lay between structural factors and electoral change...was a specific set of strategies...that was fashioned, applied, and transferred by a transnational network of...democratic activists” (Bunce & Wolchik, 2009, p. 72). Likewise, Beissinger (2009) castigated Way for downplaying the effects of diffusion; without the transnational agency inspired by earlier revolutions—and the techniques spread by its activists—it would be impossible to predict, as Way did, whether these revolutions would have taken place at all. Apart from Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution, each of these movements was highly organized, focused on nonviolent action, and inspired mass participation. Their leading organizations played a key role in removing authoritarian incumbents from power (Beissinger,

2009, p. 75). A third critic, Stilitski charted a middle path, noting that while diffusion and agency played a large part at the beginning of the color revolutions, mass participation dwindled with time. This led him to argue some contests were “determined more by structural factors than were others” (Silitski, 2009, pp. 87-88).

Although Way conceded there was evidence diffusion had taken place and agency played some role, he argued the impact of diffusion in the failure of post-communist authoritarian governments was weaker than others had argued (Way, 2009, pp. 90-91). While focusing on the structural weaknesses of these incumbents as critically important, Way admitted that such weaknesses did not make their falls inevitable. Instead he pointed to proximate factors, such as incumbent popularity, which he saw as a structural factor linked to the strength or weakness of the regime itself (Way, 2009, pp. 93-94). Way further expanded on this notion in a 2010 chapter examining the differences between Ukraine’s successful Orange Revolution and similar yet unsuccessful attempts to overthrow autocratic rulers in neighboring Belarus. Here, Way discussed the role of national identity as being either securely controlled by the authoritarian regime or as being divided and available “as a mobilizational weapon” against the incumbent regime (Way, 2010, p. 130).

Way viewed national identity as a background or a contextual factor “arguing that potentially successful movements require the existence of a national identity that is shared by a majority of both elites and the general population” (Hancock, 2014b, p. 503). In such circumstances, popular attitudes can create an “anti-incumbent majority identity” even in the absence of a civil society, *only if* the incumbent is weak enough (p. 503). On the other hand, a pro-incumbent central identity will favor the regime, providing it with both state resources and popular mobilization (Way, 2010, p. 130).

Way viewed national identity as a structural condition that can benefit the regime or opposition, while ignoring the possible agency of the actors. National identity, therefore, is restricted to a dichotomous categorization, sliding away from the socially constructed nature of identity. In response to events and framing by relevant stakeholders, collective identity can shift in meaning and interpretation. Identities are recursive in nonviolent campaigns, crystallized through interaction with opponents, allies, and even the public (Smithey, 2013, p. 31). In sum, “identity can be both a structural impediment and a resource that can be redefined and put into the service of the non-violent movement” (Hancock, 2014b, p. 504).

Considering Way's limited view of identity, combined with critiques of his purely structural approach in examining the success of nonviolent movements, we propose a third way, integrating some of the structural characteristics and the need for agency to exploit the structural situation. With an eye toward examining national identity as both a structural characteristic and a tool of agency, we turn our attention to our main argument.

### **A Third Way: Structure and Agency in Identity Capture**

The struggle between incumbent regimes and nonviolent movement can be characterized as a David and Goliath battle. The regime is Goliath. In addition to the state's wealth, it has the control of security forces and the obedience of the general population (Sharp, 1980, p. 23, cited in Hancock, 2014b, p. 504). On the other hand, every nonviolent attempt starts out as David. Its task ahead is herculean: to fight the regime successfully, it must neutralize the regime's source of power that often includes common belief systems or ideologies (Sharp, 1973, p. 10, cited in Hancock 2014b, p. 504), and, in our view, national identity. History has shown that regimes have used national identity to criticize nonviolent movements, a move that has often backfired, as evidenced in the cases of Serbia and Georgia (Nikolayenko, 2012). To persuade most of the population of its legitimate grievances and that they are true representatives of the *people*, "a unifying national identity ... or some form of bridge between communal identities needs to be constructed" (Hancock, 2014b, p. 504). When the national identity is contested, nonviolent movements have the opportunity to sever the regime's power and make a credible case for their movement's own success.

A crucial finding of recent works on nonviolence is that in order to be successful, nonviolent movements need to secure sufficient defections from security forces (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 193; Nepstad, 2011, pp. 14-15). What is meant by sufficient is difficult to say, but it is worthwhile to point out sheer numbers might be enough in some cases, while small numbers of high-level representatives might be sufficient in others. Chenoweth, Stephan, and Nepstad pointed out that in the Philippines, the people power movement was able to capitalize on the defection of two high ranking members of President Marcos' cabinet. Alternatively, Serbia's Otpor movement appeared to successfully gain respect from enough members of the police and national army, and the latter simply refused to obey the regime's orders to stop demonstrators, strikers, and the like during the October 2000 uprising (Erlangera, 2000).

A basic question that has been asked, but not yet sufficiently answered, is how the split between an incumbent ruler and his (or her) security forces is achieved. The argument of this paper is that security force defections can only be achieved if civil resistance organizations can convince security force members (and at times, leaders) they—and not the incumbent—are the legitimate representatives of the country’s sovereignty. To do so, we argue there needs to be a cohesive enough national identity in existence to be contested over by popular resistance movements and the incumbent. Furthermore, this structural factor needs to be *acted upon*, i.e., the organized civil resistance movements need to make the case they are the legitimate representatives of the national identity to those who make up the pillars of support for the incumbent regime.

Like Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), we recognize the encompassing power that mass mobilization has on many sectors of society. It allows nonviolent movements to persuasively argue they, and not the incumbent, are the legitimate representatives of the national identity, and thus deserve the support of state security forces. In this sense, we disagree with Way’s contention that an existing anti-incumbent national identity is enough to engender the collapse of an authoritarian regime.

Moving ahead, we will divide our analysis into the structural portion of the argument and the agency portion of the argument. We shall first review several nonviolent revolutions to examine to what extent a cohesive national identity existed that *could* be contested by a civil resistance movement. We will then examine applicable cases to determine if the civil resistance organizations contested the national identity, and if their actions had any effect upon security force defections.

### **A Sense of National Identity**

We will begin by examining the cases covered by Chenoweth and Stephan, as well as by Nepstad, but will expand beyond those to look at the more recent events associated with the Arab Spring uprisings. We will restrict our analysis to nonviolent resistance movements focused on changing their own governments rather than on ousting an external occupier. We shall focus on this distinction because identity as a concept is based upon an internal/external dialectic wherein any identity—from personal to national—is always built on the opposition of self and other (Hancock, 2010). What this means for our analysis is that there would be a clear differentiation between movements seeking to oust “outsiders” as with Lebanon’s Cedar Revolution and



Gandhi's campaign to drive the British from India, and movements seeking to change internal leadership or systems, like Serbia's removal of Slobodan Milošević or Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. For the former the use or creation of a national identity would be much easier, even if temporary, due to the ability of different groups to come together against outsiders. We will examine some initial cases from three different time periods: an early period from 1967 through the end of the Cold War; the period of the color revolutions from 1999 through 2009; and the more recent cases from the Arab Spring movement.

### **Early Cases**

In this early time period, we shall focus on national identity in a number of countries that experienced nonviolent revolutions between 1966 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In selecting our cases we have relied upon prior work done by Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) as well as by Nepstad (2011, 2013, 2015), as the most recent and comprehensive texts on the subject.

The Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) began their work in the mid-1960s as an attempt to address the concerns of impoverished communities within the province (Hancock, 2014b; NICRA, 1978; Purdie, 1990). However, rather than being seen as a class-based challenge to the wealth and privilege then currently held by upper class unionists, the peaceful demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins (occupying rental properties) were viewed as a sectarian attempt to create a united Ireland, attracting condemnation from both middle-class unionists and working-class loyalists. Marches by NICRA were attacked by the latter, elements of the police forces, and later, extreme loyalist followers of the Rev. Ian Paisley. Although NICRA attempted to attract Protestants to its ranks, the lack of a central Northern Irish identity, coupled with the division of that society across all sectors, meant that if Protestants were to join the civil rights movement, they would be viewed as betraying their own community (Hancock, 2014b). This division in identity was further exposed by the Northern Irish government's action of granting reforms, only to implement them at a slow pace (Maney, 2012).

Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution is cited by Chenoweth and Stephan as "an example of a successful nonviolent campaign" that pulled participants from a wide variety of social sectors, and managed to reduce their perceived threat to Iranian security forces by maintaining a fairly strict code of nonviolence (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 116). The Iranian campaign, however, was sandwiched between violent periods. Armed insurrections prior to the revolution

were largely quashed by the Shah's regime; also, violence against leftist groups and ethnic and religious minorities picked up after the ouster of the Shah (Sazegara & Stephan, 2010, pp. 199-200). The multi-sector discipline and strategic disobedience displayed during the revolution, therefore, is somewhat marred by the violence that followed the revolution—to include the Iranian hostage crisis, as well as the war with Iraq. In terms of identity, it is worth noting that Iranian society draws upon two equally rich traditions in Shia Islam and its ancient Persian past. As Ahmadi (2005) contended, Iranian national identity and unity stem from a unique historical confluence of characteristics that have allowed diverse elements of society to view themselves as part of the Iranian project. These include an Iranian political heritage made up of the institution of the state, a rich cultural and linguistic heritage, and the “omnipresent” influence of religion (p. 134). This confluence was certainly present in Iran in the period leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Philippines' 1983 People Power Revolution is cited by many as a prime example of the power of nonviolence to triumph over an authoritarian regime. However, given the large number of languages spoken on the islands, it is evident that national identity was consciously constructed by the state in an attempt to unify the disparate elements of the Philippine society. Following its independence from the U.S. in 1946, the government created the term “Filipino” and declared the Tagalog-derived Filipino language to be the national language (Dawe, 2014, p. 70). State efforts to assemble a unified national identity have been contentious and controversial, often marginalizing ethnolinguistic and religious groups, such as the non-Christians and the Indigenous community (San Juan, Jr., 1999). Regardless of this apparent disunity among religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, there is some rationale for arguing that there was enough of a central, coherent identity available for contestation at the time of the People Power revolution. Dolan (1993) noted that in the 1990s Philippine society was relatively homogenous, with approximately 90 percent of the population sharing a common cultural and religious background. This cultural and religious background helped the Roman Catholic Church play a prominent role in the People Power movement, contributing to the unity of the movement and inspiring massive local participation (Nepstad, 2011, pp. 120-121).

### **The Color Revolutions**

The first of the color revolutions covered here is the Otpor—or bulldozer—Revolution in Serbia, beginning in 1999 and culminating in October 2000. We have included Otpor in our

analysis as it was one of the first major nonviolent revolutions following the fall of the Soviet Union and many Eastern European communist regimes. A second reason is the ubiquitous use of the color black in Otpor's "clenched fist" logo. Nepstad (2015) categorized color revolutions as electoral revolutions, due to the movements' strategic emphasis on national elections to remove the respective autocrats (p. 80).

Serbs are the dominant ethnic group in Serbia (*The World Factbook*, 2017), and it is quite clear from history that Serbia boasts a unified and recognizable national identity. This is true of Serbia dating back to Prince Lazar and the Battle of Kosovo Polje, as well as during the resurgence of ethnic chauvinism and nationalism following the death of Tito in 1980. In the context of the post-Tito environment, Milošević was the first political leader to exploit Serbian nationalism (Božić-Roberson, 2004, p. 396), but the fact that many of Milošević's opponents were themselves highly nationalist indicate there was a strong ethnic national identity available over which different parties could contest.

Georgia's Rose Revolution took place largely in December of 2003, when nonviolent activists flooded the streets of Tbilisi, forcing then-President Eduard Shevardnadze to step down in favor of Mikheil Saakashvili. Georgia certainly had its share of ethnic tensions, whether from Ossetians, Abkhaz, or Ajaria, but one of the issues with the Rose Revolution is that it took place when neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia were under the control of the central government. While Ossetians and Abkhaz speak a different language, Ajarians share the main language to the extent of speaking a dialect and using the same written form.

Overall Georgia presents somewhat of a mixed case in the argument for the necessity of a unified national identity. While an overarching Georgian identity does exist, not everyone in Georgian society subscribes to it. However, aside from the Abkhaz and the Ossetians, most members of society could be said to have some measure of belonging to the central national identity, making it potentially valuable for contestation at the time of the Rose Revolution.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine took place against a background of struggle over the country's national identity. Ukrainian society was split between welcoming the influence of the EU and the West or leaning back to Russia and the East. As Way stated, "divisions over national identity...made it possible for the opposition to use national identity as a mobilizational weapon" (2010, p. 130). President Kuchma, and his chosen successor, Yanukovich, represented the "Russophile" national identity (Binnendijk & Marovic, 2006, p. 413). On the other hand,

Yushchenko and the *Pora* student movement, supporting a “Ukrainian-centered” identity, stood in opposition (p. 414).

A Ukraine-centered identity traces its roots to the Kyvian Rus period from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Following the Russification of Ukraine during the Soviet period, a Ukrainian-centered identity gained in strength and pushed the country toward more openness to the West and more democratic forms of governance (Shulman, 2005). Taras Kuzio (2010) argued that this push by the Western-oriented Ukrainophile identity—which he characterized as civic as opposed to ethnic—is an important element in the success of the Orange Revolution. Polling data shows the support for revolution and participation were dominated by western and central regions of Ukraine, where the Ukrainophile identity held more sway (Kuzio, 2010, p. 293).

### **Arab Spring**

For each of these countries that experienced an uprising viewed as a part of the Arab Spring movement, there is the added element of attempting to distinguish between national or ethnic identities, and religious and sectarian identities grounded in interpretations of Islam. These can be difficult to untangle given the birth of Islam in this region and its dominant social role in Muslim communities. Despite this difficulty, we shall briefly analyze the structural context of several of these uprisings in order to determine the extent to which a unified national identity existed and was available for mobilization by civil resistance organizations.

Egypt is a country that is characterized by a rich history of national identity, both Islamic and pre-Islamic, which, as Suleiman argues, “promotes itself as an alternative to Arab and Islamic nationalism” in the Egyptian cultural and political space (Suleiman, 2003, p. 169). The creation of an Egyptian identity stems from a dialectical process of struggle against and comparison with colonial occupiers, i.e., Britain, and the use of historical components of its pharaonic, Islamic and Arabic pasts to construct a uniquely Egyptian identity. While many Egyptians see themselves as Muslims and as part of the Arab world, they also view themselves as somewhat unique due to their link to the great civilizations of Egypt’s past.

Bahrain, by contrast presents a far less unified picture with a large Arab population split into Sunni Bahrainis and Shiites, South Asians, and other expatriates who make up 54 percent of the population (Al Khalifa, 2011, p. 58). Al Khalifa, who served as the Bahraini Minister of Culture, argued that as an island nation Bahrain has a multiplicity of identities from which to draw, and this cosmopolitanism creates a set of shared beliefs, values, practices, and familiar

circumstances which can, when applicable, express themselves in a Bahraini national identity. However, despite this, she acknowledged the 2011 uprising coalesced around the sectarian schism between Sunnis and Shiites. Hasan Shafaei of the *Bahrain Human Rights Monitor* appeared to agree, arguing that although Islam should unify Bahrainis, the country is “very much affected by sectarian tension” (Shafaei, n.d.). Therefore, there is a conspicuous absence of a unifying national identity in Bahrain. Though Bahrain possesses all the prerequisites for establishing a strong national identity, Bahrain’s national identity “is not sufficiently strong” in the current political situation (Shafaei, n.d.). During the 2011 movement, in addition to the demand for fair elections and a representative government, “civil resisters demanded an end to the ‘political naturalization’ of Sunnis from other nations” (Nepstad, 2013, p. 343). About half of Bahrain’s security forces are composed of Sunni immigrants from countries like Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, and Jordan (Al-Shehabi, 2011). The Sunnis in the security forces, Nepstad (2013) argued, had no incentive in defecting or changing the regime, which could lead to a Sunni purge from the security forces. Hence, the armed forces remained loyal to the incumbent.

Finally, Libya presents a complicated picture of a state that attempted, at times, to construct a national identity, but to most observers was not successful. For most of its history Libya has been dominated by tribal identities, with some competition from Islamic identities and, for a brief while, the incursion of Arab Nationalism based on the popularity of Egypt’s Nasser. Prior to the ascent of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya’s King Idris was described as a “struggling” monarch seeking to create a Libyan national identity from the various tribes that made up its population at independence (Golino, 1970, p. 348). Both Golino and Anderson (1986) noted that Idris continued the prior policies of promoting one ethnic group over the others, never quite succeeding in convincing the entire country that a unified Libyan identity existed.

By contrast, Gaddafi’s 42-year rule focused first on an Islamic identity and his personal role as the principal spokesman of political Islam. Anderson intimated that, as Gaddafi grew more secure in power, he shifted his concerns from an Islamic identity toward a more revolutionary identity, espoused in his *Green Book* (Anderson, 1986, p. 70). In this sense Gaddafi sought to promote an “international identity” of revolutionary Islam and focused on a cult of personality surrounding himself. He was fairly successful in doing so due to the weak positions of Libyan national identity and Arab nationalism in the country (Anderson, 1986, p. 71).

Overall, we see a mixed bag in terms of societies that either promulgated or harbored a strong unified national identity. In some cases, like Northern Ireland, Bahrain and Libya, we see societies whose primary division rested upon some form of ethnic, racial, or sectarian identity (cf. Hancock, 2016; Jenkins, 1996). These societies could be said to conform to Horowitz's (2000) definition of stratified societies, where the primary division of identity is coterminous with wealth and access to power. The other cases explored all possess some level of unified national identity; we view this to mean ethnicity, race, or religion was not the basis for division between those with the access to the levers of power and those without. As we move into our next section, we will examine the extent to which national identity was a factor in the success or failure of each of these nonviolent movements.

### **Attempts to Capture the Central Space**

Now that we have established the existence of a coherent national identity in some of the cases, we move on to examine the two questions we proposed earlier. First, does the existence of a central national identity relate to the success of the movement? Second, in cases where the national identity exists, did an attempt to “capture” that identity—by the civil resistance movement or the incumbent—take place? Also, what were the effects of these attempts?

Our preliminary statement on central or core national identity does not plumb each case in depth. However, it illuminates the relevance of collective identity in civil nonviolent attempts at regime change; these initial inferences may support the contention that the existence of a core or central national identity shared by elites and masses is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for success in nonviolent revolutions.

Table 1 below shows a general correlation between the existence of a shared national identity and the success of the nonviolent civil resistance movement for each of the three time periods. In addition to mass participation and subsequent security force defections, we have observed that a strong common national identity plays a key role in nonviolent campaigns. In cases exhibiting common national identity, there was a higher level of mass participation, and the security forces were more likely to be swayed to support the movement or, withdraw their support from the incumbent regime.

Table 1

*National Identity in Nonviolent Movements*

	<b>National Identity</b>	<b>Main Division</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Early Cases</b>			
Northern Ireland (1968)	Not Shared	Prot/Cath	Failure
Iran (1979)	Shared	None	Success
Philippines (1983)	Shared Core	None	Success
<b>Color Revolutions</b>			
Serbia (2000)	Shared	None	Success
Georgia (2003)	Shared Core	Ethnic	Success
Ukraine (2004)	Weak Split	East/West	Success
Iran (Green) (2009)	Split?	Persian/Islamic	Failure
<b>Arab Spring</b>			
Egypt (2011)	Shared	None	Success
Bahrian (2011)	Split	Sunni/Shiite	Failure
Libya (2011)	None	Tribal	Failure

In the Philippines, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Iran, and Egypt, either a common national identity existed, or as in the Philippines and Georgia, most of those involved in the demonstrations shared an identity with the elites and were not contending over the centrality of that identity. Furthermore, in each of these cases the population and the security forces shared that central identity, making it possible for a bridge to be built between the movement and the security forces.

On the other side of the ledger, it seems clear from this initial snapshot that Northern Ireland, Bahrain, and Libya all lacked a central national identity shared by a majority of the population and their elites, much less the security forces. In the case of Northern Ireland, while an overarching British identity is quite strong, it is still not shared by the entire population of the province. Instead, Northern Ireland has been characterized by its split into sectarian divisions of Catholic and Protestant, affecting most aspects of communal relationships. From its creation in

1922 to the outbreak of the Troubles, Northern Ireland was ruled by the Ulster Unionist Party and controlled by upper class Protestants. The security forces—the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its auxiliaries—were almost completely made up of Protestants, who also managed the majority of the wealth and, thanks to a heavily gerrymandered electoral system, controlled most of the local district councils (cf. Hancock, 1998, 2014a).

Likewise, both Bahrain and Libya failed to establish a central national identity. Furthermore, the security forces of both states were (or are) controlled by members of the ruling family, and often staffed by expatriates. In Bahrain’s case, this refers to the National Guard, whose 2,000 member strong force was rapidly expanded by recruiting foreign nationals from Pakistan, Syria, and other countries (Al-Shehabi, 2011; Imtiaz, 2011; Mashal, 2011; Riedel, 2011). In Libya, no cohesive national identity was developed, leaving tribal affiliation as the strongest form of identity for many Libyans. Likewise, the security forces were divided along the tribal lines. While a Libyan national army did exist, it was largely made of up conscripts who were poorly armed and trained. In reality, Gaddafi relied upon a number of paramilitary forces to support his rule, including the Revolutionary Guard Corps, made up of members of his own tribe and a Pan-African Legion made up of mercenaries. As with Bahrain’s forces and Northern Ireland’s Protestant police force, we expect that tribal forces and expatriate mercenaries would have little sympathy with popular nonviolent movements. Since they would feel little, or no sense of shared identity with the dissidents, their defections would be highly unlikely.

Like Chenoweth and Stephan, we noted the 1979 Islamic Revolution managed to persuade members of the security forces to defect and end their support for the Shah. The Shah’s legitimacy and hold on power was already weakening: he was perceived as “a puppet of the West...whose values were regarded as corruptive of Iranian culture and traditions” (Sazegera & Stephan, 2010, p. 186). The Shah also alienated the security forces when he blamed his subordinates, especially his Prime Minister. Moreover, the nonviolent movement seems to have appealed to the security forces through a narrative anchored in Iranian identity:

Proud soldiers who are ready to sacrifice yourself for your country and homeland, arise!  
Suffer slavery and humiliation no longer! Renew yours bonds with the beloved people  
and refuse to go on slaughtering your children and brothers for the sake of the whims of  
this family of bandits! (Sazegera & Stephan, 2010, p. 197)



Following our hypothesis, this reflects both the presence of a coherent national identity as a structural element and active attempts to capture that identity in order to persuade the security forces to defect. As we turn to the penultimate section, we will grapple with the question of agency, and whether struggles took place to capture the national identity in each of these successful revolutions.

### **Identity Contestation and Capture in Nonviolent Revolutions**

The main difference for most of the aforementioned cases is the presence or absence of a coherent national identity that helped create a bridge between the nonviolent movement and members of the security forces. If we were merely following Way's (2010) thesis, we would not need any further evidence. However, identities at various levels, from personal to national, are constructive in nature. Activation of national identity, and subsequent participation in nonviolent movements, is responsive to the stimulus of structural conditions and the actions of agents. Iran experienced its Islamic Revolution in 1979 as well as a failed attempt at nonviolent change in 2009. In the former case, the resistance benefited from existing Islamic networks and their successful use of national identity (Bayat, 2013; Sazegara & Stephan, 2010). During the Green Movement, nonviolent organizers were unable to successfully contest an Iranian national identity that was divided between a hardline interpretation of Iranians as dutiful subjects and the youth movement's interpretation of Iranians as active citizens (Hancock & Raisi, 2014, p. 22). Therefore, national identity as a structural condition alone is far from sufficient in predicting and analyzing success of nonviolent movements.

Our basic premise is that there needs to be a marriage between the structural element of a national identity and the agency of the nonviolent movement to persuade members of the security forces to cross over and defect from the incumbent regime. In some sense, finding evidence for this agency is a challenging task. That being admitted, we believe there is some evidence that in the more successful campaigns, civil resistance groups attempted to create connections with members of the security forces and to base those connections on shared senses of identity, often revolving around national identity.

### **The Philippines**

In the Philippines, one can see the power of the Catholic church in mobilizing different sectors of society and in providing an organizing backbone to the nonviolent movement (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p 160; Nepstad, 2011, pp. 151-152). Chenoweth and Stephan

argued that the diversity of the movement is what gave it the ability to bridge the gap between the people and the security forces. The inclusion of people from all walks of life meant the usual argument, that protestors were communists, became irrelevant (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 165). One could also assert the larger Catholic identity enabled the people and the security forces to cross the bridge. Chenoweth and Stephan further note that instead of attacking loyalist troops: ...supporters of Corazon Aquino offered them food and appealed to their sense of nationalism as an encouragement to join the prodemocracy movement... (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p. 166). Here, the defections of Juan Ponce Enrile, the Defense Minister, and Fidel Ramos, the deputy chief of staff of the armed forces, were instrumental to the civil resistance (even though they had been planning a coup that Marcos discovered). Civil resistance leaders like Cardinal Jaime Sin chose to protect these men and their troops as patriots. This decision opened a bridge between the security forces and civil resisters and made it far more difficult for loyalist troops to use violence (Nepstad, 2011, pp. 118-19). When coupled with the outreach practiced toward loyalist troops we can see some preliminary evidence the civil resistance movement deliberately acted to secure a common identity with security forces, making it easier for them to defect and harder to use violence against the protesters.

## **Serbia**

The case of Otpor provides further compelling evidence of contestation of national identity. In contrast to the divisive ethnonational mobilization of Serbian leaders, Otpor employed national identity as a vehicle for change. "Resistance because I love Serbia," for instance, was one of the slogans employed during Otpor's campaign (Nikolayenko, 2012, p. 39). Otpor's civil dissidents practiced outreach designed to sway the sympathies of the police and army, explicitly telling them there was no conflict between the protesters and security forces. In fact, Otpor "tried to establish a dialogue with the police by persuading law enforcement agents that they were all victims of the political regime" (Nikolayenko, 2007, p. 178). This was done through several mechanisms. The first was their strict adherence to nonviolence and polite treatment of the police. Tina Rosenberg noted that "From the beginning, Otpor had treated the police as allies-in-waiting. Otpor members delivered cookies and flowers to police stations (sometimes with a TV camera in tow). Instead of howling at police during confrontations, Otpor members would cheer them" (Rosenberg, 2011). Additionally, Otpor:

...instructed people to carry roses, chant positive slogans, gather in their own neighborhoods, and persuade policemen to change sides by reminding them their own families could be among the protesters. It also gave practical advice on what demonstrators should wear and carry to protect themselves from tear gas and police batons. It suggested that they carry signs reading “Police and People Together Against the Regime.” (Rosenberg, 2011)

Moreover, our colleague noted while conducting primary research into Otpor’s strategic use of humor, that alongside the famous dilemma actions that focused on making the regime look foolish, it conducted a number of positive actions. This included “pick a police” days, involving “fraternizing marches” and “invasions” of police stations throughout Serbia, wherein:

Hundreds of female activists, including mothers with children brought cakes, cookies and flowers to the police, who responded in a number of different ways. In Belgrade, police blocked the front door of police stations so activists could not enter. However, in Kragujevac and “many other cities,” police invited activists to enter and celebrate with them, “sharing cakes and drinks, even singing with them!” (Lucas, 2010, pp. 105-106)

Lucas’ observation parallels Nikolayenko’s (2012) assertion that the nonviolent movement in Serbia (and Georgia) balanced a negative campaign against the government with a positive campaign to boost electoral turnout. Here, we can clearly identify agency in both action and intent, designed to create a bridge with the security forces, in particular the police, and to persuade them to defect by convincing them both they and the people were one, and both were victims of the regime.

## **Georgia**

The evidence of the opposition movement reaching out to the security forces in Georgia, to get them to defect, is less clear. Trained by Otpor activists, *Kmara* employed similar techniques of nonviolent resistance (Beissinger, 2009, p. 262). *Kmara* insisted on the application of strict nonviolence strategies, such as the female activists passing out flowers to security forces. In their attempt to “win” over the police, the activists used slogans like “Police is with the people” to create a separation between the regime and the police (Nikolayenko, 2012, p. 46). However, one participant argued it was the combination of nonviolence and large-scale

participation in the demonstrations that convinced police to stand with the people and not with the regime (Kandelaki, 2006, p. 11).

Despite the question of intent or agency, it is clear a connection was created between security forces and the masses involved in nonviolent civil resistance. The police were reportedly easy on the resisters; for instance, dissidents were released within seven hours of arrest (Nikolayenko, 2012, p. 44). As Ó Beacháin (2009) noted, Shevardnadze himself did not want to use force, but by the time he declared a state of emergency “he could not command the loyalty of the security apparatus,” noting that police units “were defecting to the opposition in large numbers” (p. 202). The question of whether this was by the design of the opposition movement, or a result of their large numbers, is uncertain. However, there is a plethora of evidence that dissidents established some connection with the security forces that benefitted the opposition.

## **Ukraine**

There also seems to be evidence that the opposition movements in Ukraine attempted to connect with elements of the security forces to persuade them to defect. Binnendijk and Marovic (2006) indicated the nonviolent movement “worked extensively with families of current military officers in garrison towns to build contacts and assess opinions” and, like their counterparts in Serbia, the opposition movement capitalized on the sense that the military suffered from poor living conditions, “emphasizing the relative deprivation and proposing measures to address” the issue as a part of the presidential campaign (p. 417).

Following Otpor’s footsteps, Ukraine’s *Pora* movement sought to increase contacts with police forces by leveraging arrests—where they could communicate the message of nonviolence and their solidarity with police—and imitating the pick the police day actions by “visiting police stations throughout Ukraine, giving policemen flowers and distributing letters...asking officers to abide by the law” and not crack down on legal protests (Binnendijk & Marovic, 2006, p. 421). Additional efforts were taken by opposition elites to calm potential police fears about civil disturbances, informing police of planned demonstrations and offering to meet to discuss methods and tactics. As Binnendijk and Marovic indicated, “[b]y the time of the Orange Revolution...Kiev Mayor Oleksander Omelchenko offered the full cooperation of the Kiev police” (p. 422).

Ukrainian national identity “was a force for autocratic consolidation in the years 1996-2002 ... but was a force for authoritarian *breakdown* in 2002-4” (Way, 2010, p. 150). This, in

our view, is an illustration of the constructive nature of identity, and how it can be re-framed and mobilized by various contesting parties. In these nonviolent electoral movements, the dictatorships pursued various strategies to defeat them. One of them was to paint the movements as foreign agents, being funded by the West (Nikolayenko, 2012). The fact this strategy failed to yield expected outcomes, shows that national identity was playing out in the movements' favor.

## **Egypt**

With regard to the Egyptian revolution, it appears that there was a sense of purpose and agency in the movement's outreach toward elements of the security forces. However, that outreach was extended largely to the army as opposed to the much-maligned police force. In fact, the beginning of mass protests in January 2011 was scheduled to take place on National Police Day to rally against the abuses perpetrated by police and interior security forces. Despite this, it is clear the April 6<sup>th</sup> youth movement, which was organizing the protests, had learned from Otpor. When they were confronted by the police, they relied on their tactics of nonviolence, eschewing violent resistance, saluting them, and at times embracing individual police members (Jones, 2011, 7:20). During the marches one could see—as in Serbia, Ukraine, and elsewhere—many symbols of the nation, most particularly the Egyptian flag. Also present was the military, whose tanks were often covered with protesters, riding along with the soldiers and reaching out to them in solidarity (Jones, 2011, 13:45). Later when the police withdrew from the streets, protesters assisted the army to protect property from vandalism and looting. Direct quotes from the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement indicate that they understood that they needed to reach out to the army stating that “We need to be with the army, because we can't separate the army from the people. We have to be with the army” (Jones, 2011, 19:45). In fact, as noted in the Al Jazeera video, the leader of the April 6<sup>th</sup> movement indicated that they had been in contact with military representatives, but had decided to defer to higher level talks between official opposition groups and the leading generals (Jones, 2011, 22:00).

At the time of the revolution, the military were viewed positively, as protectors of the nation and as a professional body rather than a corrupt and abusive organization (Anderson, 2011). During the revolution, the army often appeared to act as a calming force, at times protecting protesters from police violence and guarding national treasures while turning a blind eye to the takeover of the interior ministry. The Egyptian military was conscript-driven, with soldiers belonging mostly to the middle and lower classes (Nepstad, 2015). This helps explain

why many soldiers joined the protests, and the cry of “The people and the army are one!” was successful (Nepstad, 2015, p. 139). And as with many of our other successful cases, it was the military defection from the regime that led to the removal of the incumbent. Only in the case of Egypt, this removal was instigated by the military and resulted in the creation of a military-led regime, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), to oversee a sham “transition to democracy.”

However, there is a question, much as in the case of the Philippines, about the extent to which the military’s shift in allegiance stemmed from an affinity with the people, and how much it stemmed from an instrumental desire by the professional officer corps to retain control over their massive economic empire. Military defection is more likely when the collapse of the regime is imminent as security forces are forced to consider their future in the post-incumbent future (Kou, 2000). The Egyptian army was reportedly worried if Gamal Mubarak succeeded his father, it would lead to privatization policies and loss of U.S. funding (Nepstad, 2015, p. 139). In sum, the military not only viewed the dissident movement as the more likely to emerge victorious, but also supported the movement because they “believed that defectors would not be punished” (Nepstad, 2013, p. 343).

### **A Partially Promising Beginning**

National identity is one of many factors that can affect the success or failure of a nonviolent movement. We have shown, as summarized in Table 1, presence of a coherent national identity correlates with the success of old and recent nonviolent campaigns. In addition to the organization and agency of nonviolent campaigns, contesting or building a common national identity is a structural necessity for nonviolent movements. Despite the relative lack of data in this preliminary paper, we believe we have shown enough to initiate a discussion on the role of national identity in nonviolent movements. The difference between success and failure of nonviolent movement is often determined by the defection or non-participation of the regime’s pillar of support, i.e., security forces (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Nepstad, 2013, 2015). In the successful nonviolent cases reviewed in this paper, civil resisters have employed identity-based narratives and slogans to establish the movement’s credibility and appeal to the commonalities existing between them and the security forces. In sum, to a nonviolent movement, a common national identity can serve as both a structural challenge and a vehicle for agency (Hancock, 2014b).

It is difficult to fully capture the extent of national identity as a structural condition in this paper. The Arab Spring movements captured the world's attention, thanks to the unexpected beginning and diffusion. However, many of the Arab Spring cases have fallen back under Islamic (or military) leadership even though their campaigns were non-Islamic in outlook and demands (Bayat, 2013, p. 592). This trend is attributed to the pre-existing structure and power base of the Islamic groups (Abdelrahman, 2013, p. 572), or the intimate military-society linkage (Lutterbeck, 2013, p. 29). Perhaps it is an indication of limitation of national identity—as a structural condition and agency—to deliver post-revolution or post-regime change. Chabot and Sharifi, for instance, propose a cultural, economic, and political transformation-based pathway to revolution (Chabot & Sharifi, 2013, p. 210). We acknowledge, therefore, both the benefits as well as limits of national identity in nonviolent movements.

On the other hand, the question of national identity, both as structural condition and especially agency, merits further examination. We hope future work can study how the organizers of nonviolent movements have attempted to use national identity as a bridge to secure the defection of regime security forces. Also, what made the difference between success and failure of their nonviolent attempts? In our view, future exploration of national identity in nonviolent movements can provide a meaningful context to agency-based nonviolence scholarship. It can also invite a critical examination of the structural facet associated with successful nonviolent movements.

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