Dissent and Dialogue: The Role of Mediation in Nonviolent Uprisings

By Isak Svensson and Daan van de Rijzen

On November 17, 2021, in Khartoum, Sudan, protesters demonstrate against the military coup that ousted the government in October. (Photo by Marwan Ali/AP)

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Summary

- This report explores trends in mediation in the context of nonviolent action campaigns and explores challenges that mediators face when attempting to mediate between a nonviolent action movement and its opponent.

- The report introduces the Mediation in Nonviolent Campaigns data set and presents a descriptive analysis of the first completed segment of the data, encompassing nonviolent campaigns in Africa from 1945 to 2013.

- As nonviolent uprisings have increased in number, so too have cases of mediation in these uprisings, although the proportion of uprisings that are mediated has been relatively constant over time.

- The dynamics of nonviolent action lead to four distinct challenges for mediators: how to determine when the situation is ripe for resolution even in the absence of hurting stalemates, how to identify valid spokespersons when movements consist of diverse coalitions, how to identify well-positioned insider mediators, and how to avoid the risk of mediation leading to pacification without transformative social change.

- Research and policy should pay more attention to the potential of mediation in nonviolent campaigns and explore ways of increasing its effectiveness, such as strengthening domestic capacities for dialogue and conflict resolution in societies experiencing social conflicts and tensions.

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SPECIAL REPORT

ABOUT THE REPORT

Drawing on the new Mediation in Nonviolent Campaigns data set, this report documents trends in mediation in the context of nonviolent uprisings in Africa and explores some of the challenges of mediation in mass-mobilization movements. The underlying research was supported by the People Power, Peace Processes, and Democratization project of the United States Institute of Peace and by the Swedish Research Council.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Alaa Salah, a Sudanese protester who became an icon when photos and videos of her addressing a crowd of protesters went viral, stands in front of a mural depicting her in front of the Defence Ministry in Khartoum, Sudan, on April 20, 2019. (Photo by Umit Bektas/Reuters)

Introduction

One of the most remarkable cases of nonviolent action in recent years is the Sudanese revolution of 2019. A people power revolution ousted Omar al-Bashir, a ruthless autocrat, who had led Sudan for thirty years. The Sudanese mobilization—including the iconic image of activist Alaa Salah standing on a truck, delivering an inspirational speech to a crowd of people filming with their mobile phones—has rightfully received significant international attention for its systematic application of protests and non-cooperation, including massive strikes.[1] However, less attention has been paid to the role of mediation in the dynamics of the uprising. Mediators played important roles in brokering an accord between the protesters and the military after the latter had ousted Bashir, which paved the way for the establishment of a civil-military transitional government.[2] After the military staged a coup on October 25, 2021, and protesters demanded a return to the pre-coup situation, mediators, both local and international, once again sought to de-escalate the situation and reach agreement on the way forward.[3] Through their efforts, an agreement was reached that saw the civilian prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, restored to his position and political detainees released.[4] The case of Sudan and its mediated nonviolent revolution illustrates the important role that mediation can play in the dynamics of nonviolent uprisings.

While both mediation and nonviolent resistance have been the subject of significant scholarly work, the connection of the two fields has received less attention. In particular, there has been surprisingly little systematic research into mediation between nonviolent campaigns and their opponents. Research on mediation or negotiation has overwhelmingly focused on armed

Opposition supporters at a rally in Lomé, Togo, on July 6, 2013, react to announcements that parliamentary elections will be delayed. (Photo by Erick Kaglan/AP)

conflict.[5] Investigations of nonviolent action, meanwhile, are often approached with reference to the question of their effectiveness, and ways in which external actors may assist campaigners in reaching their goals.[6] Both in theory and in practice, these two themes and fields are usually treated separately. For example, Gene Sharp's classic list of 198 methods of civil resistance, as recently pointed out by Erica Chenoweth, does not include techniques of conflict resolution: "Sharp's analyses leave out some kinds of political activity that aren't generally considered techniques of civil resistance: negotiations [and] dispute resolution."[7] While specific cases of mediation in the context of nonviolent resistance campaigns have recently received some attention in both policy reports and academic publications, comparative research into this phenomenon has so far been rare.[8] This is surprising, if only because mediation between nonviolent campaigns and their opponents *does* occur in a nontrivial number of cases.[9] This oversight is all the more consequential because mediation could play a crucial role in resolving conflicts between governments and civil resistance movements before they escalate into violence, creating space for negotiated agreements or transitions, and turning the leverage of mobilization into political reforms.

This report explores several questions related to mediation in nonviolent campaigns: When does mediation occur in the context of nonviolent campaigns? Who tends to mediate in

nonviolent campaigns? What are the outcomes of mediation processes in the context of nonviolent campaigns? And what are the challenges that mediators face when engaging with nonviolent uprisings? In line with convention in research on mediation, mediation is defined here as "a voluntary process in which a third-party actor assists the disputing parties without utilizing force, and without employing the legal processes of arbitration and international law"; it is broadly conceptualized "to include the supply of good offices, direct negotiation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation, bargaining, and face-to-face dialogue."[10] The report uses newly collected data from the Mediation in Nonviolent Campaigns (MENOC) data set. MENOC is a unique data set that catalogues the occurrence of mediation in nonviolent campaigns from 1945 to 2013. The first phase of data collection for MENOC has focused on all instances of mediation in nonviolent campaigns within this period in Africa. Africa is a region that has experienced a lot of nonviolent campaigns, making it suitable for studying the occurrence and dynamics of mediation in this context. This report uses this first completed segment of the MENOC data to map the empirical landscape of mediation in the context of nonviolent action campaigns and to formulate some tentative but more broadly applicable recommendations for mediators engaging with nonviolent campaigns.

There are several challenges in applying mediation in the context of nonviolent action campaigns, which arise from the systematic differences between the context of an armed conflict and a nonviolent action campaign.[11] In particular, the report identifies several key issues mediators should account for when thinking about mediating in a nonviolent action campaign: identifying a "mutually hurting stalemate" when the parties will be ready for mediation; knowing who can represent or speak for a nonviolent action campaign when it lacks a central leadership structure; identifying suitable insider mediators when external mediation may not be possible; and avoiding a "pacification" effect from mediation. By providing examples of successful and unsuccessful mediation interventions in nonviolent action, the report aims to (1) better inform mediators who may find themselves mediating between a nonviolent action campaign and its opponent, and (2) identify areas in which further research could help address the challenges posed by such mediation.

Mediation in Nonviolent Uprisings: Current Knowledge

While mediation in the context of nonviolent uprisings is a largely neglected field of study, scholars have increasingly started to integrate the fields of nonviolent resistance and conflict resolution.[12] Consequently, some previous research has been done on mediation in nonviolent uprisings, which has generated a few key insights regarding the subject.

First, *negotiation and mediation can complement nonviolent action tactics.* Negotiation is essential for nonviolent action campaigns.[13] From a strategic perspective, nonviolent action techniques seek to create leverage through which a nonviolent resistance campaign puts pressure on its opponent—pressure that can then be used in negotiations to obtain concessions. This process can be seen as the "fundamental bargain in civil resistance": "direct action creates the leverage that negotiation translates into tangible gains."[14] Thus, negotiation is important at

several stages of a nonviolent uprising: at an early stage it may serve to build a cohesive movement and mobilize support; at a later stage it may help to build relationships with internal and external allies, weaken key sources of regime support, and translate leverage into concessions at the negotiation table; and after a transition has been made it remains important as a means of creating durable transformation. Likewise, peacebuilding methods like negotiation and mediation complement nonviolent action as approaches to conflict transformation.[15] In particular, such methods can be useful to "translate civil resistance gains into mutually acceptable negotiated outcomes" but also to "reconcile polarized relationships in the wake of nonviolent struggles."[16]

Second, *mediators working with nonviolent uprisings can be insiders.* Insider mediators may be particularly important peacemakers because they bring indigenous resources, including local knowledge, networks, and special access to the conflict parties. Their position within the affected society may also give them a reputational incentive to stay honest, which can make them especially well equipped to serve as trustworthy channels of information.[17]

Third, *uprisings at risk of escalating are more likely to be mediated.* Mediation in nonviolent uprisings is more likely when such uprisings create challenges for and impose costs on the outside world—meaning actors beyond those engaged in the uprising and their opponents. In particular, cases with a higher risk of violent escalation, such as exists with uprisings that have radical flanks, are more likely to be mediated than those where the risk of escalation is lower. In addition, campaigns that are met with more rather than less state repression are more likely to be mediated.[18]

Patterns of Mediation in Nonviolent Uprisings

Collection and coding of data on mediation for this report focused on mediation between the main contending parties in a nonviolent conflict, generally representatives of a government on one side and representatives of a nonviolent campaign—or of actors associated with the campaign—on the other. This report does not examine mediation between different factions within a nonviolent campaign or a government. Nor does it cover mediation between elites that occurs in the wake of mass protests if the protesters are excluded from such mediation. It does, however, interpret broadly who the representatives of a nonviolent campaign can be. It thus includes cases of mediation in which a campaign is represented by individuals or organizations directly associated with it, as well as cases in which mediated discussions with the government—on the campaign's behalf— are conducted by actors sympathetic to but not directly involved with the campaign.

To catalogue mediation in nonviolent campaigns, the MENOC data set combines data on nonviolent action campaigns from the Nonviolent and Violence Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) data set, version 2.1, with updated and expanded data on mediation presented in earlier studies.[19] The NAVCO 2.1 data set defines a campaign as "a series of observable, continuous, purposive mass tactics or events in pursuit of a political objective."[20] For campaigns to be included in the NAVCO data set, they need to have "maximalist" aims, specifically "regime change, secession, or the removal of a foreign occupier."[21] While the NAVCO data set includes both violent

and nonviolent campaigns, MENOC includes only those campaigns whose primary method of resistance was nonviolent in every year in which the campaign was active. It covers the period from 1945 to 2013, with annual data collected for every nonviolent campaign.[22]

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Mediation occurs at different levels in a nonviolent uprising. The ambition here is to be broad in scope, given the exploratory nature of this project. Thus, in addition to instances in which a national-level mediation process took place, this report includes more limited instances of mediation, in which, for example, an individual mediated between security forces and protesters in a particular place in order to negotiate safe passage for protesters. Two examples from the pro-democracy campaign in Côte d'Ivoire in 1989–90 serve to illustrate these more limited, tactical mediation processes. The first example involves the aftermath of a standoff between police and protesters occupying a cathedral in Abidjan, when Catholic priest Jean-Pierre Kutwa began negotiating safe passage for the protesters. Although a deal was struck in which the police would move protesters from the site in vans, the vans actually ferried protesters to the police station, where they, along with Kutwa, were detained and beaten.[23] The second example is from a few months later, when protesters sought refuge in the French embassy in Abidjan. French ambassador Michel Dupuch was reported to have successfully negotiated safe passage for them with security forces, after which the protesters were able to leave.[24] In this campaign, mediation occurred only on the tactical level—that is, in response to specific situations, limited in time and place—but was absent on the national level. In many other cases, mediation takes place predominantly or solely at the national level.

The broad definition of mediation used for MENOC and adopted here means that this report records a variety of forms through which mediators engage with nonviolent action campaigns, though it does not systematically distinguish between them. In some cases, mediation is largely informal and may, for example, involve mediators shuttling between parties in order to pave the way for more direct talks or to broker an agreement. At other times, mediation involves bringing the parties together at the table in a more formal setting—although even in these cases a certain ad hoc element often remains. This more formal type of mediation can take the form of a conference to which representatives of the government and the nonviolent campaign are invited, but it may also entail a more iterative formal dialogue process involving representatives of the government and the nonviolent campaign—and sometimes other relevant political and societal actors as well.

MEDIATION IN NONVIOLENT UPRISINGS

Figure 1 presents an overview of the first completed subset of the MENOC data, which includes all nonviolent campaigns in Africa included in NAVCO 2.1.[25] The unit of analysis for these data is the campaign-year, meaning that data entries are made for every year in which each individual nonviolent campaign was active. The total number of campaign-years included in this subset is 117, representing 42 unique campaigns. Of these, mediation was recorded in 28 campaign-years, representing 19 different campaigns (for some examples, see table 1). Both the incidence of nonviolent campaigns and the occurrence of mediation in nonviolent campaigns vary substantially over time. The period surveyed is characterized by two periods of relatively constant frequency

Occurrence of mediation in nonviolent campaigns in Africa from 1945 to 2013
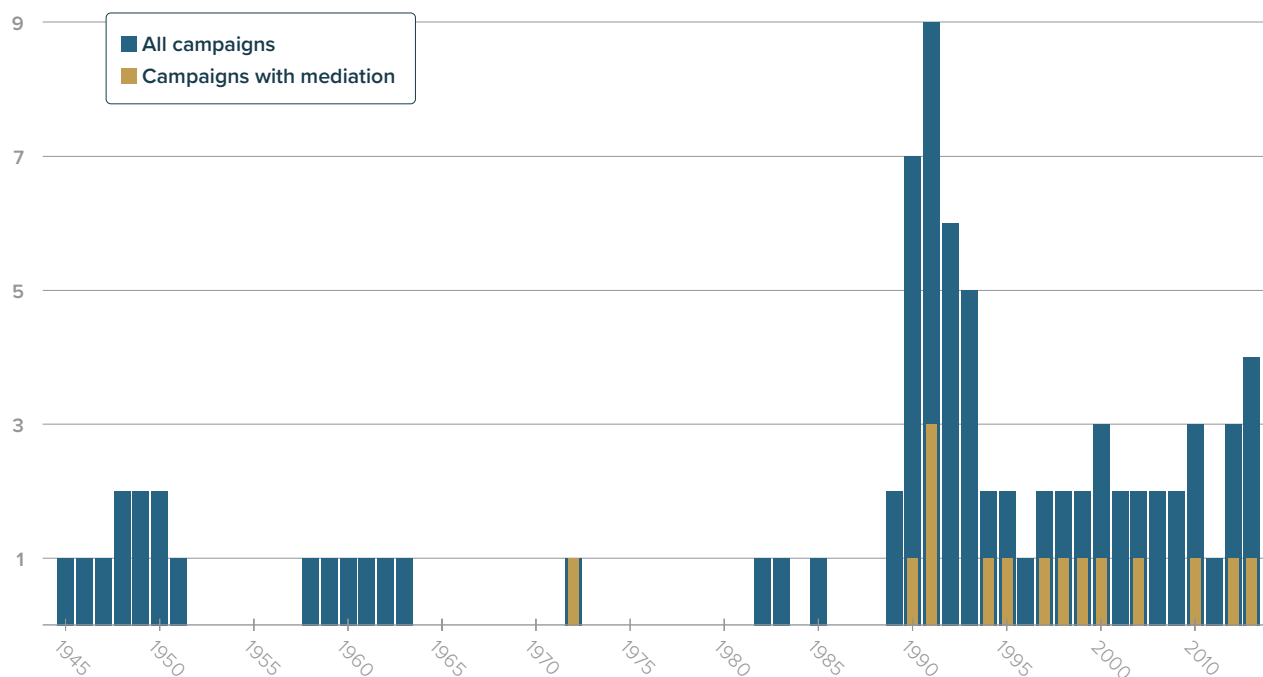
Note: The data for this figure come from the MENOC data set. A mediated campaign-year may represent one or multiple mediation processes.

and two periods in which there were clear spikes in both the number of campaigns per year and the number of mediated campaigns per year. Until the start of the 1990s, nonviolent campaigns were uncommon, and there was only one case of mediation. Then there was a spike in 1990–93. From 1994 onward the number of campaigns and mediated campaigns dropped but remained at a higher level than previously. This trend continued until the start of a second spike around 2009, which continued until 2013, the last year included in the data.

The trend in the incidence of nonviolent uprisings and the trend in the number of mediated uprisings mirror each other quite closely, seemingly indicating that the rate of mediation may have stayed relatively constant over time. However, when the data are split into the Cold War period (1945–89) and the post–Cold War period (1989–2013), the rate of mediation differs sharply for these two time frames: 5 percent in the Cold War period (mediation in one case out of 20), and 28 percent after the Cold War (mediation in 27 cases out of 97). This allows for the conclusion that the rate of mediation in nonviolent uprisings in Africa rose significantly starting in 1989; since this initial rise, however, the mediation rate has stayed relatively constant.

When comparing these data with data on mediation in armed conflicts, two main observations can be made. The first is that the rate of mediation in nonviolent campaigns has been either

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF MEDIATORS IN NONVIOLENT CAMPAIGNS IN AFRICA, 1945–2013

Campaign	Campaign-year with mediation	Country	Examples of mediators
Ivorian pro-democracy movement	1990	Côte d'Ivoire	Jean-Pierre Kutwa (Catholic Church); Michel Dupuch (France)
Anjouan separatist movement	1997–2000	Comoros	Pierre Yere, Said Djinnit, Jakaya Kikwete, Francisco Madeira (OAU); Mohammed Ahmad Al Khazandar (Arab League); Michel Rocard (France/European Parliament)
Anti-Gnassingbe/coup crisis	2005	Togo	Boukar Mai Manga (ECOWAS); Olusegun Obasanjo (AU)
Guinean pro-democracy movement	2007–10	Guinea	Henriette Conté (president's wife); Aboubacar Sompare (Speaker of the National Assembly); Ibrahim Babangida, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Blaise Compaoré (ECOWAS); Said Djinnit (UN)
Anti-Ravalomanana movement	2009	Madagascar	Haile Menkerios, Tiébilé Dramé (UN); Alain Joyandet (France/IOC), Sultan Chouzou (Comoros/IOC); Amara Essy, Ramtan Lamamra, Pascal Yao (AU); Archbishop Odon Razanakolona (Christian Council of Churches); Tomaz Augusto Salomão, Lutfo Dlamini (SADC); Edem Kodjo (OIF)
Anti-Mutharika protests	2011–12	Malawi	João Honwana, Sahle-Work Zewde (UN)

Note: Neither this list of examples nor the list of mediators is meant to be exhaustive. AU = African Union; ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States; IOC = Indian Ocean Commission; OIF = Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; OAU = Organisation of African Unity; SADC = Southern African Development Community.

Types of mediators in nonviolent campaigns in Africa from 1945 to 2013
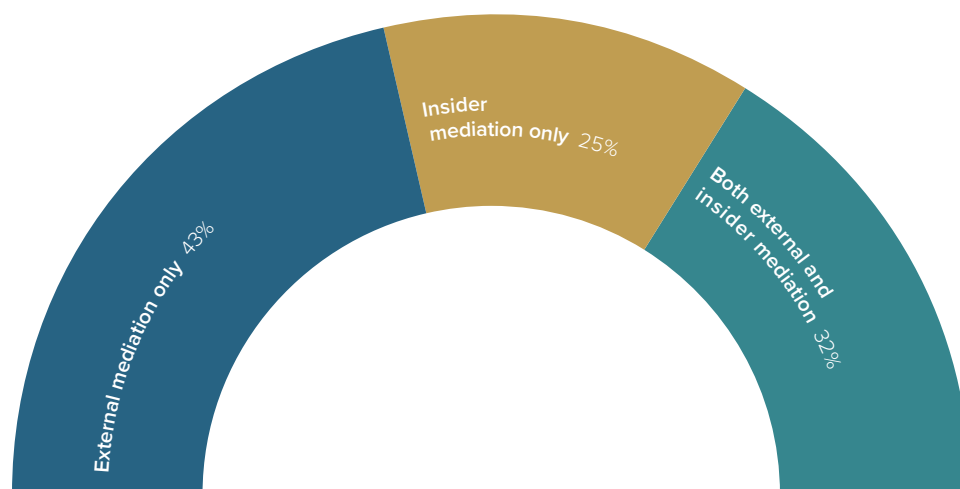
Note: The data for this figure come from the MENOC data set.

higher than or at least roughly equal to the mediation rate in armed conflicts, depending on the data source examined.[26] The second observation is that while the rate of mediation in nonviolent conflicts has stayed relatively constant since the 1990s, the share of armed conflicts with mediation peaked in the first half of the 1990s and has been on the decline since.[27]

MEDIATORS IN NONVIOLENT UPRISINGS

Mediation may be initiated by a variety of actors. In some cases mediation is requested, either by a representative of the nonviolent movement itself or by a representative of the government. An example of the latter is the United Nations–led mediation in Malawi in 2011, which came about on the initiative of the country's permanent representative to the UN.[28] In other cases, mediation is offered by would-be mediators themselves, before being requested by the conflict parties; if such an offer is accepted by the nonviolent campaign and the government, mediation can begin in this way as well. As discussed in more detail below, mediation can be initiated after offers by insider mediators, such as in Tunisia. It may also result from an offer by external actors to mediate. UN mediation in Madagascar—between the government of President Marc Ravalomanana and the opposition campaign led by Antananarivo mayor Andry Rajoelina—started with a public offer of mediation made by the UN Secretary-General.[29] This offer was accepted by the government and (following the arrival of a UN envoy who consulted with both sides) by Rajoelina as well.[30] Table 1 provides examples of mediators in some of the nonviolent uprisings in Africa during the studied time period (1945–2013) and illustrates the different types of mediators involved. The table identifies both individual mediators and the organization they represented or function they fulfilled, insofar as this is applicable and could be determined.

Mediation in nonviolent uprisings is not only initiated by different actors but also carried out by different types of mediators once it has commenced. Figure 2 categorizes all mediated campaign-years included in the MENOC Africa subset—28 in total—according to the type of mediators active in that campaign-year. A distinction is made here between insider and external mediations. External mediation is the more common of the two, occurring in a total of 75 percent of cases of mediation: it is the only form of mediation in 43 percent of cases, and takes place alongside insider mediation in a further 32 percent. Insider mediation is slightly rarer, taking place in only 57 percent of the campaign-years with mediation; it is the sole form of mediation in 25 percent of cases and occurs alongside external mediation in 32 percent of cases.

OUTCOMES OF MEDIATION IN NONVIOLENT UPRISINGS

Some mediation processes are ineffective and fail to stop escalation into violence or repression. Others result in limited agreements, as in Madagascar in 1991, when the Active Forces campaign called off an ongoing strike and a decision was made to hold a national conference involving representatives of the campaign and the government, among others.[31] Agreements are considered limited when they do not end the conflict or address the main issues that the parties disagree over. Some mediation processes end with more comprehensive agreements between the nonviolent campaign and its opponent. In the sample studied here this outcome is rare, occurring in only five cases: Guinea in 2007, Mauritania in 2009, Togo in 2005 and again in 2013, and Tunisia in 2013. Comparing these five cases of mediation leading to negotiated agreements offers no clear conclusion as to whether insider or external mediation, or a combination of both, is more likely to succeed: two of these cases (Guinea and Togo in 2013) involved both insider and external mediators, two of them (Mauritania and Togo in 2005) involved only external mediators, and one (Tunisia) involved only insider mediators. In any case, an agreement is not necessarily a guarantee of deeper and more durable changes: as discussed further below, a potential problem with mediated interventions is that they lead to conflict pacification rather than transformation.

Sometimes the mediation effort may contribute to other types of outcomes, even if it is unable to get the parties to an agreement. For example, mediation may be a way to create space for further and wider dialogue. This was the case in the campaign against the Mutharika regime in Malawi in 2011. The initial impetus for mediation came from Malawi's permanent representative to the UN, who convinced the UN Secretary-General that the organization could play a mediating role between the country's civil society and the government.[32] Subsequently, the secretary-general sent an envoy to the country to help reduce tensions and explore whether mediation was possible. The envoy met with representatives from both sides and persuaded them to participate in a UN-facilitated national dialogue process, which helped to de-escalate tensions.[33] In this case, as in Madagascar in 2009, a successful—if limited—outcome of mediation was simply to get the parties talking to one another.[34]

Of course, even this limited type of success may be out of reach. In Côte d'Ivoire in 2010–11, for example, mediators served as messengers between different actors but were finally unable to get them to talk to one another directly. The nonviolent campaign in this case took place after a disputed election; incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo was sworn in as president, in spite of UN-certified results showing that Alassane Ouattara had won the election and despite support

for Ouattara's claim of victory by the African Union, European Union, United Nations, and United States.[35] A nonviolent campaign in support of Ouattara took place, and Ouattara also attempted to use legalistic means and garner international support to persuade Gbagbo to step down.[36] In this context, mediators engaged with Gbagbo and Ouattara but never got them to talk to one another directly, instead shuttling between them in attempts to broker agreement. These mediation efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and the situation escalated into violence.[37] A similar failure to get the two parties to talk to one another occurred in Egypt in 2013. After the ouster of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, his supporters campaigned for his return to power and for the interim military-backed government to step down. A crowded field of both domestic and international mediators interested themselves in this situation: the European Union, Germany, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States were all involved, as were many domestic Islamist figures.[38] While all of these actors talked to both sides, they were not able to make any progress in bringing the two sides together to pursue direct talks with one another.[39]

Challenges for Mediation in the Context of Nonviolent Campaigns

Much of what is known about mediation relates to mediation in armed conflicts and uprisings. This section outlines some of the key issues in mediation research and identifies some of the specific challenges for mediation in the context of nonviolent campaigns, in particular issues relating to ripeness, spokespersons, insider mediators, and the risk of pacification. While these challenges are also faced by mediation of armed conflicts, they tend to become more accentuated for mediation in the context of nonviolent uprisings.

IDENTIFYING RIPENESS

Ripeness refers to the idea that a stalemate between the parties needs to occur for a conflict to be resolved. The timing of a mediation bid is therefore crucial. Conventional wisdom suggests that when a conflict reaches a stalemate (and importantly, a hurting one), the situation is ripe for mediation to make a meaningful contribution to conflict settlement.[40] However, in nonviolent uprisings, the role of stalemates is less evident. Mass mobilization and shifts in loyalties often create rapidly evolving, fluid situations, making stalemates hard to come by and difficult to identify. In empirical analysis of nonviolent uprisings (in contrast to analysis of armed conflicts), stalemates are rarely found.

Yet there may be other dynamics driving the turn to mediation. Previous research suggests that, in the context of nonviolent uprisings, a certain degree of escalation has to occur before negotiation or mediation can yield results.[41] In this view, the escalation of a conflict through the actions of nonviolent campaigners can serve to address existing power imbalances between the regime and its challengers. Conflicts may first become ripe for resolution when nonviolent campaigners have managed to escalate a conflict to such a degree that any negotiated agreement will not simply result in the reproduction of previous constellations of power. At the same time, movements may wish to avoid complete state failure and disintegration. Similar considerations may figure in

Leaders of the organizations that form the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet speak at a press conference in Tunis, Tunisia, in September 2013. (AP file photo)

the regime's calculations about mediation as well; the state is unlikely to agree to mediation unless it sees that the situation is getting out of its control.[42] Potential mediators, on their part, will want to intervene before the situation escalates into violence while also considering that a sense of urgency among the actors may be needed to make mediation acceptable to them.

The case of Tunisia in 2013 illustrates the significance of ripeness for mediation in nonviolent uprisings. After the overthrow of long-time leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia in 2011, an interim transitional government was established, led by the Islamist party Ennahda. By 2013, tensions were rising between the Islamists and the secularist opposition, which were further fueled by the murder of two opposition politicians. Large-scale protests erupted, and the National Constituent Assembly, the interim parliament, was on the verge of breaking down. At this point, various civil society actors and politicians began to meet informally to discuss the situation, driven by the urgent wish to avoid a breakdown of the transition process and any violent escalation.[43] From this proliferation of meetings and discussions a coalition gradually emerged of four prominent civil society organizations: the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT); the Tunisian Order of Lawyers; the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA); and the Tunisian Human Rights League. These four organizations, which came to be called the

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Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, together launched an initiative to mediate an end to the political deadlock.[44]

The UGTT was closely linked to the protest movement and opposed the Ennahda-led government.[45] After the second high-profile assassination of 2013, it was the UGTT that called a general strike. It also had a history of working with the Order of Lawyers and the Human Rights League, both civil society organizations with a secular bent that also distrusted Ennahda.[46] UTICA represented the traditional economic elite and had been a historical antagonist of the UGTT, but its leader was considered to be close to Ennahda.[47] The Quartet therefore represented a balance of different currents within society and politics. Although Ennahda was reluctant to accept the authority of the unelected Quartet, it was forced by the continuing popular mobilization—and related fears of violent escalation and of a breakdown of the transitional process—to come to the table.[48] The Quartet launched round-table talks, eventually joined by twenty-one political parties, which resulted in agreement on a road map specifying that the interim government would step down, a national dialogue would take place, and a constitution would be adopted and elections held.[49] This road map was implemented, and the government stepped down. A constitution was agreed upon and new elections were held in 2014.[50]

In the case of Tunisia, then, space for mediation was created by ongoing mobilization in the streets, combined with a perception that without a mediated solution to the crisis, there was a real risk of the transitional process breaking down, possibly leading to violent escalation. Although members of Ennahda, the predominant party in the transitional government, were reluctant to engage in mediation, this situation led them to participate in the Quartet-led mediation process anyway. The involvement of well-established and influential domestic civil society actors in the mediation process, in combination with the links between at least one of the mediators (the UGTT) and the protest movement in the streets, lent both legitimacy and leverage to the mediation initiative, making it difficult for the transitional government to refuse to participate. A possibly relevant additional factor may have been that both the UGTT and the UTICA—historical antagonists—were involved in the mediation initiative, thereby emphasizing the serious nature of the situation and adding to the sense of urgency in avoiding further escalation and reaching a mediated solution. Although some influential parties still refused to participate in the mediation process, their refusal did not cause the process to break down; instead, it led to those parties being sidelined, causing them to lose political relevance as the mediation process progressed.[51]

FINDING VALID SPOKESPERSONS

Mediation research has pointed to the importance of identifying *valid spokespersons* as a precondition for opening meaningful dialogue in conflicts.[52] In settings involving nonviolent campaigns, many of which are decentralized, mediators may find it especially challenging to identify valid spokespersons. In order for meaningful dialogue to be achieved, however, individuals are needed who can speak on behalf of a movement and its larger aspirations during negotiations and at the same time credibly communicate back to the movement. Mediators face a couple of other challenges in selecting valid spokespersons for nonviolent campaigns: first, singling out particular individuals could create or worsen divisions within movements;

and second, individuals mediators engage with could become vulnerable to government repression or co-optation.[53]

The situation in Guinea in 2007 provides some insight into how the selection of valid spokespersons can be beneficial in securing a campaign's demands. In 2007, Guinean trade unions, opposition parties, and civil society organizations led strikes and protests against the government of longtime president Lansana Conté. Initially, a variety of local actors took the lead in mediating between the two sides.[54] These same actors were also involved in brokering an agreement by which, among other things, a new prime minister was appointed.[55] From February 2007 onward, external actors became predominant in mediating the conflict. The Economic Community of West African States in particular played a key role in the process leading up to implementation of the brokered agreement.[56] Throughout this period, the nonviolent campaign was represented in mediated talks by representatives from the labor unions, which played a central role in the campaign.[57] The unions' important role in the campaign likely led others—both those involved in the campaign and members of the government—to see union leaders as legitimate spokespersons in the negotiations. These leaders were heavily involved in organizing anti-government mobilization and, as a result, could also make credible commitments to scale down the mobilization after agreement was reached.

DEPLOYING INSIDER MEDIATORS

When exploring mediation involving nonviolent uprisings, it is clear that a country's civil society itself often has resources, capabilities, and willingness to act as an intermediary between the opposition movement and the regime in power. These insider mediators have unique avenues of access and entry points to the different actors in often complex contentious societies. *Insider mediators* (or, as they are sometimes called, insider-partial mediators) have local networks, connections, and legitimacy that external mediators do not.[58] They are often trusted actors who can draw on their long-standing relationships to open channels of information, clarify misunderstandings, defuse tensions, and seek out ways for accommodation, areas of mutual agreement, and settlement. The case of Tunisia described previously illustrates some of these points.

Previous research has also found that leverage can be an important asset for mediators seeking to bring parties to negotiated settlements.[59] Mediators who have ties with, and leverage over, the conflict parties tend to be the ones who can get them to sit down at the table, commit to often painful concessions, and conclude peace deals. This is why the involvement of insider mediators can be so valuable for nonviolent uprisings. Outsiders may have ties to a movement, but these are rarely ties that can be turned into leverage over a party; outsiders can offer support, but research suggests that this is seldom the most important factor in shaping the developments of nonviolent uprisings.[60] With ties to and leverage over the conflict parties, insiders are better positioned to help them reach a settlement.

One other interesting example that illustrates some of the unique advantages that insider mediators may have is the case of Madagascar in 1991, when the Active Forces opposition coalition—comprising opposition political parties, labor unions, and clergy members—orchestrated a campaign of strikes and demonstrations aimed at bringing down the government of President Didier Ratsiraka.[61] Amid spreading unrest, the Christian Council of Churches (FFKM), which brought

Rabiatou Diallo, center, leader of the National Congress of Workers of Guinea, talks with journalists as she arrives at a meeting with Guinean authorities in Conakry, Guinea, on February 15, 2007. (Photo by Luc Gnago/Reuters)

together representatives from different Christian denominations, mediated between representatives of the Active Forces and the government. The FFKM had close ties to the Active Forces—in fact, the latter was established at the urging of some of the FFKM's leaders—as well as to the government; several army generals were affiliated with it.[62] These connections may have contributed to its being considered an acceptable mediator for both the government and the opposition. Through the FFKM-mediated talks, agreement was reached that the Active Forces would call off an ongoing strike, and that a national conference would be held to decide on a new constitution.[63] Although the process came close to breaking down at several points, the mediators managed to bring the parties back to the table on multiple occasions.[64] The FFKM abandoned its role as mediator and sided with the opposition, however, after members of the presidential guard opened fire on peaceful protesters and killed over a hundred people.[65] In the end, a power-sharing agreement was reached between the government and the Active Forces, and the FFKM played an active role in the transition process leading up to the adoption of a new constitution.[66]

In addition to having unique assets, insider mediators may also face challenges that external mediators do not, or not to the same degree. First, while their position within the conflict context can have advantages, it can also raise issues of partiality, which may affect their credibility

and ability to mediate. A lack of distance from the conflict can certainly play out in a mediator's favor, as in Tunisia, where the labor union's connections with the protest movement increased the pressure on the transitional government to take part in the mediation process. But it can also frustrate mediation efforts. Mediators may feel that after violent government repression they are not able to play an impartial mediating role anymore but must side with the opposition on moral grounds. The case of Madagascar, where the FFKM abandoned its mediation efforts after a violent government crackdown on the opposition movement and sided with the latter, illustrates this possibility. Local actors may also be more vulnerable to government repression than external actors when they become involved in mediation. This is likely to be an especially pertinent problem when mediators act on their own initiative. The case of Jean-Pierre Kutwa, the priest who tried to mediate a standoff between protesters and security forces in Côte d'Ivoire but was then himself detained and beaten, illustrates this risk.

AVOIDING PACIFICATION

Previous research has pointed to the risk that mediation—and conflict resolution more broadly—in social conflicts can lead to *pacification*.[67] A key task for mediators involved in nonviolent uprisings has been to forge agreements between the government and the opposition movement that result in real political, social, and institutional change. The risk with mediation is that it can represent a face-saving option for an illegitimate regime, which can then engage in superficial changes without more deeply transforming society and the state. In other words, mediation can carry the risk of merely pacifying a situation rather than addressing underlying causes of discontent. Movements may therefore fear losing momentum by accepting mediation, or lack trust in a government's ability and wish to earnestly address the movement's grievances.

A challenge for mediators is thus how to engage with movements so that they prevent further escalation of the conflict, but also allow movements to retain momentum and keep up the pressure on the government to engage in transformative change.[68] The relationship between movement leadership and mobilization is central for mediators to consider in this context. Striking the balance between the risks of pacification on the one hand and violent escalation on the other, mediators need to ensure that mediation does not decrease the momentum of movement mobilization too much and at the same time make sure that movements are ready to back down, accept compromises and concessions, or at least temporarily avoid further escalation to provide space for dialogue once a mediation process has started. The key role of national trade unions in nonviolent uprisings is interesting in this regard, as they have an organizational structure that enables them to engage in confrontational struggle but also in bargaining, negotiations, and settlement.[69]

The nonviolent campaign in the Comoros starting in 1997 illustrates how difficult it can be for nonviolent campaigns with maximalist aims to engage in concession making, and how mediation can carry the risk of pacification. After separatist movements on two islands in the Comoros unilaterally declared independence, different actors were involved in mediation over the course of several years (1997–2000). Initially, the main mediating actor was the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). At different points in time, and to various degrees, South Africa, France, the Arab League, and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) played roles supporting the OAU process. Throughout the mediation process, the OAU insisted that the solution

to the conflict should preserve the territorial integrity of the Comoros—a demand that was diametrically opposed to the demands of the campaign.[70] Eventually, in 1999, a compromise agreement was reached that preserved the territorial integrity of the country, in accordance with the wishes of the central government and the OAU, but that left the future relationship between the different islands to be determined through a referendum. In a referendum held on the main separatist island of Anjouan, however, reunification was rejected, leading the islands' leaders to reject the agreement and signaling a renewed impasse, one strengthened by a military coup on the main island of Grand Comore.[71]

In the aftermath of these events, the OAU became discredited and sidelined, and a new process was set up in which the OIF, with heavy French involvement, became the main mediator. The mediators in this process took a less stringent stance on the matter of territorial integrity. In addition, France did not implement the OAU sanctions that had been leveled against the central government after the coup.[72] The combination of these factors may have made it easier for both government and separatists to come to the table. In the end, the OAU rejoined this OIF-led process, which led to a negotiated agreement being reached in 2001. This agreement retained the territorial integrity of the Comoros but provided for substantial autonomy and a presidency rotating between its three islands.[73] The Comoros example illustrates how a failure by mediators to adequately address causes of discontent can pose severe problems to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, as well as how inflexible and pro–status quo positions taken up by the mediator in an effort to pacify the situation can decrease the chances of a mediated solution.

Conclusion

Mediation has largely been a neglected approach in the study of nonviolent campaigns. Yet mediation in the context of nonviolent uprisings occurs often and has become more common in recent decades. Just as in armed conflicts, mediation can play an important role in the dynamics of nonviolent uprisings. This report is part of a larger scholarly trend where conflict resolution and nonviolent action, which for a long time have mainly been studied separately, are increasingly being integrated. Exploring mediation in nonviolent uprisings is a way to contribute to this increasing synergy. This study therefore ends by offering some overall takeaways, policy conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

The most important takeaway is that more attention needs to be given to the role that mediation plays and can play in nonviolent uprisings, and the conditions under which it can be successful. A particular focus should be on how to boost domestic capacities for conflict resolution and empower local actors to serve as mediators. Locally anchored mediators, sometimes from segments of the civil society other than those engaged in the nonviolent uprising, can in some cases act as crucial go-betweens and create the space necessary for dialogue in a contentious situation. They possess some key characteristics and strengths that external mediators may lack. Scholars as well as policymakers would do well to more fully recognize the potential of local civil society actors (insider mediators) in acting as peace brokers.

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As this report has sought to demonstrate, the challenges of mediation involving nonviolent uprisings are different from those of mediating armed conflicts. Important differences concern the role of hurting stalemates in providing space for mediation, as well as the challenges of identifying valid spokespersons. Another difference is the special potential for insiders to successfully mediate nonviolent conflicts. Insiders may, however, also face particular challenges related to their proximity to the conflict that external mediators do not face, or do not face to the same degree. More attention therefore should be paid to these challenges—and more support should be provided to mediators in overcoming them.

Mediation in nonviolent uprisings also carries the risk of pacification, where the momentum of a movement is decreased without bringing about fundamental societal change. Mediated interventions need to be carefully crafted so that they do not provide legitimacy to otherwise illegitimate regimes and do not favor stability over democratic development. In some contexts, international or regional organizations such as the African Union may be hindered from intervening due to the norm of noninterference in domestic affairs. Nonviolent uprisings may be considered primarily as a domestic matter, in which external actors should not be involved. In such cases, in which external third parties are not seen as viable mediators, insider mediators can play a role to fill the vacuum. Overall, mediators can help establish more democratic practices and ensure a transformation in which incompatible claims are addressed within a democratic framework where they can be managed peacefully. The long-term aims of mediators as well as nonviolent protesters should align with such a transformation.

Notes

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3. Jonas Horner, "After the Coup, Restoring Sudan's Transition," International Crisis Group, November 5, 2021.
4. Horner, "After the Coup"; "Sudan PM Hamdok to Return to Lead Government after Deal," Agence France-Presse, November 21, 2021 (accessed through the Factiva database).
5. See, for example, J. Michael Greig and Paul F. Diehl, *International Mediation* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012); Peter Wallensteen and Isak Svensson, "Talking Peace: International Mediation in Armed Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014): 315–27.
6. See, for example, Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
7. Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 38. For the original list, see Gene Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, vol. 2 of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).
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9. Isak Svensson and Magnus Lundgren, "From Revolution to Resolution: Exploring Third-Party Mediation in Nonviolent Uprisings," *Peace and Change* 43, no. 3 (2018): 271–91.
10. Svensson and Magnus Lundgren, "From Revolution to Resolution," 278.
11. This report uses the terms "civil resistance," "nonviolent action," "nonviolent campaign," and "nonviolent uprising" interchangeably.
12. For a discussion of the interfaces between these two fields, see Amy C. Finnegan and Susan G. Hackley, "Negotiation and Nonviolent Action: Interacting in the World of Conflict," *Negotiation Journal* 24, no. 1 (2008): 7–24. Some examples of recent attempts to integrate the two are Anthony Wanis-St. John and Noah Rosen, "Negotiating Civil Resistance," Peaceworks no. 129, United States Institute of Peace, July 2017, www.usip.org/publications/2017/07/negotiating-civil-resistance; Véronique Dudouet, "Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies," International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, Washington, DC, April 2017.
13. Wanis-St. John and Rosen, "Negotiating Civil Resistance."
14. Wanis-St. John and Rosen, "Negotiating Civil Resistance," 19.
15. Dudouet, "Powering to Peace."
16. Dudouet, "Powering to Peace," 2.
17. Isak Svensson and Mathilda Lindgren, "Peace from the Inside: Exploring the Role of the Insider-Partial Mediator," *International Interactions* 39, no. 5 (2013): 699.
18. Svensson and Lundgren, "From Revolution to Resolution."
19. The NAVCO 2 data set was originally presented in Erica Chenoweth and Orion A. Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns: Introducing the NAVCO 2.0 Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 415–23. For the 2.1 version, see Erica Chenoweth and Christopher Wiley Shay, "NAVCO 2.1 Dataset," Harvard Dataverse, 2019, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MHOXDV. Previous iterations of the data on mediation used in MENOC were presented in Svensson and Lindgren, "Peace from the Inside"; Svensson and Lundgren, "From Revolution to Resolution."
20. Chenoweth and Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns," 416; Chenoweth and Shay, "NAVCO 2.1 Dataset."
21. Chenoweth and Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns," 417.
22. The main data source used in coding mediation is Factiva, a searchable database that contains news articles from a wide range of international and local publications. The research team's search within this database utilized the terms "talks," "mediat*," "negotiat*," "dialogue," "fact-finding," "peace agreement," and "proposal," for each nonviolent uprising, sometimes with tailor-made case-specific exclusion criteria. The team manually read the articles generated, and they coded the occurrence of mediation based on the definition outlined above. They also consulted complementary secondary sources—including the Swarthmore Global Nonviolent Action Database (https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu), encyclopedias, policy reports, journal articles, and books—dealing either with specific cases or with nonviolent action in general. The Factiva database contains comparatively little information dating from before the mid-1980s, meaning that data collection for cases before that time is based exclusively on the other sources listed. The research team consulted multiple sources for each case for the purpose of triangulation. For more recent cases, they leaned predominantly on Factiva for data collection but also consulted secondary sources.

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24. "Police Quell Protest against Forthcoming Visit by Pope," *Independent*, September 1, 1990 (accessed through the Factiva database).

25. Chenoweth and Lewis, "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns"; Chenoweth and Shay, "NAVCO 2.1 Dataset."

26. This conclusion is based on the authors' analysis of an updated version of the Civil War Mediation (CWM) data set, as presented in Marius Mehrl and Tobias Böhmelt, "How Mediator Leadership Transitions Influence Mediation Effectiveness," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38, no. 1 (2021): 45–62. For original data see Karl DeRouen, Jacob Bercovitch, and Paulina Pospieszna, "Introducing the Civil Wars Mediation (CWM) Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 5 (2011): 663–72. The conclusion also draws on Magnus Lundgren and Isak Svensson, "The Surprising Decline of International Mediation in Armed Conflicts," *Research & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2020). Data are available on the Harvard Dataverse website; see "Replication Data for: 'The Surprising Decline of International Mediation in Armed Conflicts,'" 2020, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QTBTB1.

27. Authors' own analysis of the updated CWM data set in Mehrl and Böhmelt, "How Mediator Leadership Transitions Influence Mediation Effectiveness."

28. Laurie Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011–12)," United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2018, 4.

29. United Nations Secretary-General, "Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the Situation in Madagascar," news release, January 29, 2009, www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2009-01-29/statement-attributable-spokesperson-secretary-general-situation.

30. "At Least They Are Talking," All Africa, February 23, 2009; "Political Rivals Agree to Talk," All Africa, February 10, 2009 (both accessed through the Factiva database).

31. "Huge Crowd Protests in Madagascar against Deal to End Strike," Reuters, July 16, 1991 (accessed through the Factiva database).

32. Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue," 4.

33. Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue," 3.

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51. Maryam Ben Salem, "The National Dialogue, Collusive Transactions and Government Legitimacy in Tunisia," *International Spectator* 51, no. 1 (2016): 99–112.

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72. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *AU and the Search for Peace and Reconciliation*.

73. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *AU and the Search for Peace and Reconciliation*, 37–44. Perceptive readers may wonder why the Comoros case was not listed above as one of the cases in which a comprehensive mediated agreement was reached. Although agreements were indeed reached, this case has not been coded in MENOC as resulting in a comprehensive agreement. For the 1999 agreement, this is because the Anjouan separatists did not sign it. For the 2001 agreement, this is because the year 2001 is not included in the NAVCO 2.1 data set that MENCO is based on, as popular mobilization had ceased in 2000.

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