



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This Special Report examines the influence of gender dynamics on women's contributions to nonviolent movements, and how women capitalize on these dynamics to create special opportunities for participation and tactical innovation. Funded by the United States Institute of Peace, the report is based on research and interviews, complemented by the author's expertise in the intersection of gender and political instability.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Marie A. Principe*

## Women in Nonviolent Movements

### Summary

- Nonviolent movements are nearly twice as successful as violent ones in achieving their objectives.
- Mass participation is part of what makes nonviolent movements so successful, particularly—and importantly—when women are included.
- Women have historically been denied full access to political spaces usually reserved for, or dominated by, men.
- All over the world, women have persisted in the face of inequalities to assume roles as strategists, organizers, and active participants in various nonviolent campaigns and movements.
- Argentina, Chile, Egypt, Liberia, the Palestinian territories, Poland, Syria, and the United States offer pertinent examples of women capitalizing on these inequalities to change the trajectory of nonviolent movements.
- Research shows that sustainable peace is more likely if women are meaningfully involved, but more quantitative data on the roles women play in nonviolent campaigns is needed.
- Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners all have a role to play in advancing the understanding of and support for women's meaningful participation in nonviolent movements.

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### Introduction

In the ancient Greek play *Lysistrata*, the protagonist of the same name persuades the women of Athens and Sparta to withhold sexual acts from their lovers until peace is negotiated, bringing an end to the Peloponnesian War. Although a political satirist, the author Aristophanes may have been one of the first to emphasize the powerful and unique roles women played in leading civil resistance in the context of violent conflict. *Lysistrata* highlights both women's particular leverage in movements and the power of organized noncooperation in challenging the status quo.

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The play raises an interesting question: How have women and women's participation in nonviolent movements influenced their trajectories and outcomes? This report examines the question through the dual lens of nonviolent action and gender.

First, though, the distinction between sex and gender warrants mention. The terms are not used interchangeably in this report. Sex is a biological distinction whereas gender is a personal identity based on characteristics and behaviors determined by sociocultural influences (masculine, feminine). This paper refers to gender largely as a set of sociopolitical or cultural expectations as to how a man or woman should act in a given context based on their biological distinction as either male or female.

Despite parsimonious current quantitative data on the roles women have played in nonviolent campaigns, qualitative data and a scan of the literature reveal that women have assumed significant roles as strategists, organizers, and active participants in various nonviolent campaigns and movements.

Women can and often do perform gender-normative roles in nonviolent movements, though their doing so does not always translate into movement success. Their active and sustained participation may in fact increase tactical innovation and resilience in movements, contributing to the movement's success. At the same time, women have been sidelined following major nonviolent campaigns, setting back their claims to equal rights.

## Nonviolent Resistance

Civil resistance, nonviolent direct action, and people power all refer to a series of techniques ordinary people use to challenge various injustices and oppression with direct action tactics—tactics that operate outside existing institutions and do not involve the threat of or actual violence. In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes reveals the often unmentioned potential that those without armies actually hold; thousands of years later, sustained civil resistance campaigns around the world have tapped into that potential, challenging entrenched power and achieving political and social change. These terms—civil resistance, nonviolent action, and people power—are used interchangeably in this report, but the growing body of literature on nonviolent action identifies nuances for each.

Aristophanes understood that organized noncooperation with the status quo can wield great power. In his theory of power, leading theorist of nonviolent action Gene Sharp argues that power is never monolithic in society, nor is it inherently held by a ruler, flowing from top to bottom. Instead, power originates in the “pillars of support” propping up a powerholder, such as the business community, news media, labor unions, organized religion, police, and the military.<sup>1</sup> In this model, power flows upward to the ruler, given by those it rules through consent, cooperation, and obedience. And just as consent to rule can be given, it can be taken away.

When a large swath of a citizenry revokes its consent through nonviolent direct action, the resulting movement shifts loyalties within the pillars of support and shakes the powerholder's ability to maintain the status quo. Sharp outlines 198 methods of nonviolent action, including marches, consumer boycotts, sit-ins, labor strikes, and silent vigils, that have since been built upon and expanded. The most successful movements use a combination of tactics, allowing engagement at various commitment levels so individuals can maintain as much of their routine as they choose. Broad participation in nonviolent direct action through strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, and sharing footage of abuse on social media can draw attention to and create sympathy for a movement. By encouraging shifts within the pillars

of support, a nonviolent movement has a better chance at bringing about defections that undermine the power-holder's ability to rule.

A major component of what makes nonviolent campaigns more successful than violent ones is what captures global attention: people power, or mass participation and representation. Images from the 1963 March on Washington in the United States, the protests in 2000 that led to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, and the 2011 uprising in Tunisia show male and female citizens of diverse ages and professions calling for a change to the status quo. From men and women, children to older adults, doctors, university students, and the unemployed, nonviolent movements create opportunities to engage large numbers of people in a way violent campaigns do not.

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## Primacy of Participation

Numbers matter. In the landmark book *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan use statistical analysis to show that nonviolent movements with political aims are twice as successful in achieving their stated objectives as those that use violence. Examining 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns from 1900 to 2006, the authors find that nonviolent campaigns attract about eleven times more participants than most armed movements.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, movements choosing nonviolent tactics met their stated objectives 54 percent of the time against 26 percent for armed campaigns.<sup>3</sup> The authors conclude that greater participation in nonviolent campaigns paves the way for more durable and internally peaceful societies.

Mass participation of a large cross-section of society is considered a primary component in explaining the success of a movement by several notable political scientists and sociologists. High numbers of involvement build legitimacy and enhance a movement's leverage.<sup>4</sup> Fewer barriers to participation exist in nonviolent campaigns than violent ones, increasing not only the size of the campaign but also the diversity. Broader representation in gender, age, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and ideology makes it more difficult for the power holder to isolate certain groups for repression, leading them more likely to adopt indiscriminate tactics that will garner backlash.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, diversity in participation gives a campaign access to new knowledge and resources, aiding in the development of new tactics while building resilience.<sup>6</sup> The combination of legitimacy, tactical innovation, and resilience sustains a movement, eventually chipping away at the loyalty within the pillars of support that are propping up an oppressive political institution.

People-power movements bring together citizens with a diverse range of experiences, skills, and know-how, as well as overlapping social identities that may influence their participation. Systems of oppression such as dictatorship and patriarchy often intersect and reinforce one another. Intersectionality, or the interconnectedness of social identities, can create layers of discrimination or opportunity in a given context.<sup>7</sup> A woman's age, economic status, ethnicity, gender identity, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation also have the potential to influence her interaction with systems of oppression and the power she holds to challenge them. In but one example, older, married women may be perceived in a way that allows them to employ certain tactics in a movement that younger women cannot. For example, the military junta in Argentina that ruled from 1976 to 1983 kidnapped and tortured as many as thirty thousand dissidents, male and female, most between the ages of sixteen and thirty.<sup>8</sup> The regime did not immediately crack down on the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, which comprised mostly older women who collected in public spaces to protest the disappearance of their children. In overlooking that these matronly women ultimately posed

a greater existential threat than the kidnapped young dissidents, the junta contributed to its own demise.

Participation is one of the primary factors, though not the sole one, that make a movement successful. Strongly linked to the importance of mass participation are specific capabilities, broadly categorized as unity, planning, and nonviolent discipline. Peter Ackerman and Hardy Merriman identify six key attributes in determining the outcome of a nonviolent movement. Three capabilities of successful movements are the ability to unify people, operational planning, and nonviolent discipline. In the presence of these capabilities, Ackerman and Merriman assert that three critical trends are likely to emerge: increasing civilian participation in civil resistance, diminishing impact of repression and increasing backfire, and increasing defections from a movement's adversaries. But what happens when 50 percent of a population is unable to fully engage in a civil resistance movement? Women's roles in planning and organizing, tempering violent responses by security forces, and gaining access to spaces contextually closed to men indicate that women have directly contributed to the formulation of these capabilities and trends, and thus the success of nonviolent movements. In short, women's meaningful involvement in civil resistance movements has shown to be a game changer.

At the same time, this report does not adhere to essentialism, the view that women hold certain inherent traits that make them better or more peaceful leaders. Choosing violent or nonviolent action has more to do with context and circumstances that create motivational sets than whether someone is a man or woman. The shocking number of women who have traveled from Europe to join the Islamic State and the 2002 hostage crisis led by Chechen women in Moscow indicate as much. Reducing explanations to what women inherently are and are not leaves us vulnerable to envisioning oversimplified solutions that fail to address the circumstances and contexts that make violence a more likely choice over nonviolent action.

### ***Women's Involvement in Nonviolent Movements***

Women have historically been denied full access to political spaces usually reserved for, or dominated by, men. Given existing inequalities, women are presented with specific opportunities, as well as challenges, in engaging in nonviolent struggles. Linkages between nonviolent movements and the role of women are typically rooted in examples of movements for women's rights specifically: suffrage movements, civil rights, anti-femicide campaigns, or even *slut walks*. (The term *slut walk* refers to the global trend of antisexual assault protests, especially against rape culture that promotes victim-blaming. The protestors frequently dress provocatively to satirize the notion that rape can be excused or explained by any aspect of a woman's appearance.) Beyond gender-specific movements, and frequently without recognition, women activists have organized and led countless movements for rights and freedom around the world.

### ***Opportunities for Participation and Tactical Innovation***

Pam McAllister argues that women's understanding of power and control has developed the technique of civil resistance as a whole, as "most of what we commonly call 'women's history' is actually the history of women's role in the development of nonviolent action."<sup>9</sup> These roles have been varied, from using gendered language to call on certain segments of a population to participate, to taking on traditional roles usually reserved for women to keep a movement afloat. Many women in many instances have exploited notions that they are apolitical and more focused in the domestic sphere than the political one as a shield for subversion. Women also rely on prevailing ideas of women as victims to pose a moral dilemma to security

forces when faced with the prospect of using violence toward female opponents. Women have also used their own body, and the idealization surrounding the use of it, as a tool for dissidence. In the examples that follow and in many others unmentioned, women have designed methods of nonviolent direct action that are both innovative and highly gendered.

### To Encourage Participation

Context-specific notions of who men and women are and what they should be can be exploited for the benefit of a movement. Although such use can potentially reinforce harmful stereotypes or victimization of women, women have used these dynamics numerous times to encourage participation and create space for other women to participate in resistance.

Toward increasing civilian participation, Asmaa Mahfouz—in her now-famous video said to have sparked the Egyptian revolution—appeals to Egyptians to join her in Tahrir Square. Her speech deliberately uses gendered language toward male viewers to encourage them to participate in protests. Calling on traditional concepts of manhood and honor, Asmaa implores them, “If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever says women shouldn’t go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th.” Speaking specifically to gender dichotomies of women as weak and needing protection, and men as strong and doing the protecting, she says, “Come and protect me and other girls in the protest.”<sup>10</sup> Asmaa was thus able to catalyze male participation in the protests that eventually led to the overthrow of Mubarak.

Women also actively encouraged broad participation in the 2011 demonstrations in Egypt. When it became clear that government officials were sending people to the square with weapons to use on protestors, women volunteered to do body searches—a role that would not be suitable for Egyptian men.<sup>11</sup> Activists in Egypt provided tips to women for what to wear and bring to a demonstration, encouraging them to not be dissuaded by risks of sexual assault. In addition to promoting engagement and ensuring a protective space for protestors, Egyptian women of all ages took care of day-to-day operations in the tent city that sprang up in Tahrir Square during the eighteen days of protest—distributing blankets, erecting portable toilets, and cooking in makeshift kitchens.<sup>12</sup>

### As a Shield for Subversion

The tendency to underestimate women’s political potency can function as a shield for non-violent direct action, allowing women to evade government officials and security forces, which typically target men, in order to document abuses, raise awareness, and engage in acts of defiance without receiving as much scrutiny. Maha, a Syrian activist, confirmed that the gendered miscalculation allowed her to move from one location to another documenting and reporting human rights violations: “In the beginning of the uprising, I used to drive through the police checkpoints with my Western outfit and short skirt and they never suspected me. They were under the impression that the only supporters for this movement were the Islamists. The police would have never suspected a secular woman like me.”<sup>13</sup>

Augusto Pinochet’s military junta in Chile backed the arbitrary detention, torture, disappearance, execution, and assassination of thousands of people between 1973 and 1990. Meanwhile, the economy suffered.<sup>14</sup> Women wove stories of poverty, unemployment, and grief into tapestries, known as *arpilleras*, becoming celebrated as *arpilleristas*. In the repressive environment that kept dissent inaudible, women were encouraged to embrace traditional gender roles rather than be politically active.<sup>15</sup> Under the guise of doing work more appropriate for women, the *arpilleristas* created tapestries as a way to depict the

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harsh conditions they lived under while also preserving the memory of their loved ones who had disappeared. Female political prisoners wore arpilleras to send pleas for help or messages of hope to loved ones. The arpilleras were smuggled out of Chile in the late 1970s and early 1980s and displayed in public spaces, cementing the role of these women as radical instigators of a political movement. These awareness-raising campaigns, including Amnesty International's subsequent printing of the arpilleras on greeting cards, helped "indict the regime in the court of international public opinion" until Pinochet conceded power to the democratically elected president, Patricio Aylwin, in 1990.<sup>16</sup>

Female Polish activists played critical roles in the success of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s. The mostly male-led trade union opposition party, with membership in the millions, organized strikes and other forms of nonviolent resistance against the Polish Communist Party.<sup>17</sup> When General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law and arrested Solidarity's leaders, he forced those who evaded arrest into hiding.<sup>18</sup> The Communist government presumed that without the figureheads organizing the charge, the movement would die out. Seven women, however, hid the remaining male leaders and established Solidarity's underground structures and its newspaper, ultimately maintaining the movement's momentum. The continued activity sustained pressure on the government until Solidarity's leadership was released from prison. Unrelenting strikes and protests continued, forcing the government to the negotiating table with Solidarity members, including Zofia Kuratowska, for constitutional adjustments that eventually led to the collapse of Communist control in Poland.<sup>19</sup>

Palestinian women were integral to nonviolent discipline during the First Intifada before being sidelined by increasing militarization and religiosity.<sup>20</sup> Award-winning director Julia Bacha's film, to be released in 2017, features the contributions of women in supporting and planning nonviolent direct actions during the uprising, defiant acts in a political space typically reserved for men. Palestinian women played a major role in organizing the parallel structures and institutions, such as the committees and victory gardens that allowed the popular uprising begun in December 1987 to remain resilient in the face of Israeli repression. Rabeha Diab, who led the Intifada for about eighteen months, spoke of the ostensible need to consult with male leadership before decisions were made: "People would come from Ramallah saying they needed this or that and asking for advice. We'd say to them, 'Give us a couple of hours while we ask the brothers in the organization.' But there were no brothers."<sup>21</sup>

Prevailing gendered notions of a woman's place in society provided a cover for women even as their actions eroded the loyalty of the pillars of support and drew global attention to abuses. These notions also subjugate and idealize women in that certain treatment of women may pose a moral dilemma. Security forces tend to be less willing to open fire on women, and thus the presence of women can both temper a violent response by security forces and encourage greater participation.<sup>22</sup> In civil resistance movements in Argentina, the Palestinian territories, and Liberia, women have capitalized on context-specific gender dynamics to take their disobedience out in the open.

### **As a Moral Shield**

A mass gathering of women poses a particular moral dilemma to security forces and militaries, who are trained to respond aggressively. Women, however, along with children and the elderly, are deemed innocent victims during conflict and political strife, and statistically women do suffer disproportionately from conflict overall. This widely accepted notion creates a shield under which women can maneuver to disrupt the status quo, such as in Argentina and the Palestinian territories.

Under Argentina's military dictatorship, the government sponsored the kidnapping, torture, and murder of anywhere from eleven thousand to thirty thousand dissidents between

1976 to 1983. Grief-stricken without any knowledge of their children or the ability to recoup and bury the bodies, the mothers of *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared) began marching every Thursday to the government buildings at the Plaza del Mayo, becoming known as Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo.<sup>23</sup> At a time when opposition to the military junta meant sure death, the group of older women were mostly overlooked as an existential threat, referred to by government officials as *las locas* (the madwomen).<sup>24</sup> In a society that “glorified motherhood and exalted women as domestic beings,” the Madres were implicitly excluded from the other groups, who were considered subversives.<sup>25</sup> As their numbers grew, however, Argentine officials were baffled as to how to handle them: swaths of middle-aged women, wearing white headscarves with their children’s names sewn into them, demanding answers as to their whereabouts. Still, the junta avoided open confrontation.

Firing on a group of mothers seeking to know what happened to their children could easily backfire, sparking a public reaction that would increase the level of mobilization.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the junta kidnapped some of the key organizers, hoping the disappearance of a few would dissuade them from continuing.<sup>27</sup> The Madres regrouped, however, and raised global awareness when they demonstrated in the Plaza during Argentina’s hosting of the 1978 World Cup, gaining coverage by the international press corps.<sup>28</sup> Having effectively exerted their power over Argentina’s military junta, they paved the way for future open resistance that undermined the junta’s authority until elections were held in 1983.

The 2009 documentary film *Budrus*, by Julia Bacha, features the village’s use of nonviolent direct action to protest the planned route of the Israeli West Bank barrier. Over ten months in 2003 and 2004, the community of Budrus staged fifty-five nonviolent demonstrations, some of which had women on the front lines.<sup>29</sup> The film highlights the women greeting the Israeli troops first in protests, creating a shield between them and the land. The Palestinian women knew that they would not be perceived as being as threatening to the approaching Israeli troops, and the women were “implicitly excluded” from the groups of men and youth, who tend to provoke a more violent response. Because the Israeli troops were reluctant to use violence against women, the women on the front lines created space for the Budrus community to maintain pressure on the Israeli forces until the planned route was reconsidered. In the end, Israel revised the route in 2006 to be closer to the internationally recognized Green Line between Israel and the Palestinian territories.<sup>30</sup>

### **As a Tool**

Viewing the naked female form in certain cultures is taboo, which allows for the tradition to be exploited.<sup>31</sup> Women in Liberia and Nigeria in particular have used their bodies to nonviolently demand change, invoking—much like the sex strikers did in *Lysistrata*—a centuries-old practice. It was, in part, the threat of deliberate female nudity that forced Liberian government representatives and rebel warlords to reach a peace deal in 2003, calling an end to the Second Liberian Civil War. A year earlier, Liberian women had organized into the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which guided nonviolent efforts during the conflict. The primary organizer, Leymah Gbowee, led a delegation of women to Ghana in June 2003 when it was announced that peace talks would be held in Accra. After six weeks of failed talks and continued violence, Gbowee called for more women to come to the hotel where the men were meeting, to participate in a sit-in outside the negotiating room, and to block the doors and windows until a peace agreement was signed. When security forces came to arrest the women, they threatened to strip naked, summoning a “traditional power.” The war did not end that day, but Gbowee refers to it as “the beginning of the end,” bringing a more serious tone to the peace talks. President Charles Taylor resigned two months later, and the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement officially ended the war a week after that, on August 18, 2003.<sup>32</sup>

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Similarly, in Nigeria, women living in the Niger Delta used the same threats to persuade the oil industry into negotiations toward job-creation and infrastructure development in the region. Nigeria collected more than \$700 billion of oil exports between 1982 and 2010, yet 70 percent of its population live below the national poverty line, those in the Niger Delta suffering the most from the economic and environmental decline.<sup>33</sup> Widespread oil spills and waste dumping has made the Delta one of the most polluted places on the planet, damaging crops and contributing to malnutrition, cancer, and infertility for the thirty million people who live there.<sup>34</sup> In response, women performed a series of sit-ins and capitalized on their body as a tool to effect change.

In 2002, hundreds of Nigerian women between the ages of twenty and ninety began participating in acts of nonviolent disobedience that involved taking control of the largest oil-producing facility in the country. Protests came to a head when the women barricaded parts of the plant and threatened to go naked unless Chevron created more jobs for villagers and invested more in the community they had casually been damaging.<sup>35</sup> The threat and subsequent backlash put a halt to the production of about a half million barrels of oil a day, significantly improving the women's bargaining position.<sup>36</sup> Going naked is a powerful example of a context-specific civil resistance tactic, immediately giving a normally marginalized group formidable power to negotiate a change to the status quo.

### ***Overcoming Challenges***

Intersecting gender and power dynamics may generate unexpected opportunities but can also discourage women's full participation. Although nonviolent movements pose lower moral, physical, commitment, and information barriers than violent ones do, such obstacles affect men and women differently. Primary caretaking and child-rearing responsibilities land disproportionately on women in nearly all societies, placing an undue burden on women to find child care while they participate in sit-ins, meetings, or marches. Lower literacy rates for women also inhibit information-sharing by anything other than word of mouth.<sup>37</sup> In societies where social or cultural codes of behavior limit or restrict mixed groups of men and women, their participation in protests or picketing is limited if not forbidden. Even in societies that impose no legal restrictions on the movement of women, large groups gathering in public spaces pose greater risks to women than men for physical and sexual assault or harassment.

The threat of sexual violence during demonstrations inherently establishes a gendered intimidation tactic that discourages female participation in public spaces. Although it exists in some contexts and not others, violence toward women demonstrates and reinforces male power, communicating to women that they are unwelcome in a politically charged public space. In Egypt, the regime was known for "dispatching thugs" to sexually assault women so that they would "reconsider participating in future protests."<sup>38</sup> Because protests and other forms of nonviolent direct action rely on mass participation, actual or threatened male violence toward women deters their involvement and thus weakens a movement's potency.

Aside from covering movements that push explicitly for women's rights, media attention does not always give due credit to the women involved in shaping them. The civil rights movement in the United States is rife with stories of women playing integral roles in the organization and execution of sit-ins, protests, and marches, but their stories have long been hidden from public praise.<sup>39</sup> Dr. Mary Elizabeth King echoed this in her personal reflections on her time working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the movement's leading organizations: "It is evident that men were usually the spokespersons and often the public orators. Women, however, were the central driving force. They were effective planners, organizers, enablers, and mobilizers."<sup>40</sup>



Before Rosa Parks was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white man, the black women’s political caucus in Alabama had been preparing for a bus boycott for three years. Parks’s arrest mobilized the caucus to start the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted for 381 days and became one of the most transformative events of the civil rights movement—though that it was spearheaded by a woman’s movement is rarely mentioned. It was Ella Baker who brought together the many leaders of various sit-in campaigns that were budding around the South, forming the SNCC.<sup>41</sup> It was Mahalia Jackson who, when Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech on the March on Washington was in peril of falling short, shouted to him, “Tell them about the dream!” After her encouragement, and going against the counsel of his adviser Wyatt Walker, King abandoned his prepared notes and ended his speech on the moving words still quoted today.<sup>42</sup>

Scholars have identified nonviolent methods of concentration, where large numbers of people gather in public spaces such as in rallies and protests, to usually be higher risk than methods of dispersion spread over a wider area, such as boycotts.<sup>43</sup> Nonviolent methods can also pose greater risks for women in that protests and marches can quickly devolve into a confusing and lawless atmosphere where assaults, if they occur, are more difficult to report and persecute. In some cases, the power-holder may purposefully neglect to enforce security and punish perpetrators, cultivating an environment of impunity that encourages more violence or sexual violence against women.<sup>44</sup> Gendered intimidation tactics and cultural codes of behavior may attempt to discourage female participation in public or political spaces, relegating them to traditionally apolitical and domestic spheres. In these cases, methods of dispersion allow women some anonymity, such as the Polish women who kept the Solidarity movement alive while the male leaders were imprisoned or in hiding. Overall, women have displayed tenacity and creativity in innovating tactics and strategies that use and exploit expectations and assumptions.

As one Syrian activist who has organized protests since 2011 put it, “Women choose the safest and more effective ways to do things, and these qualities and skills are very useful in our civil resistance. Women are the best at organizing—the logistics of setting up and running field hospitals, arranging blood drives and donations.” Female activists in Syria continued to participate in demonstrations even as armed conflict took hold, with many shifting to the work of empowering civil society when protesting became too dangerous.<sup>45</sup> Out of this emerged the Syrian Women’s Initiative for Peace and Democracy (SWIPD), a network of women’s civil society organizations that has strongly advocated for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and for women’s involvement at the negotiating table for the last three years. As a result of SWIPD’s effective advocacy, the United Nations (UN) announced the first-ever formal women’s advisory board to a UN envoy, positioning women to have a greater role in the peaceful resolution of a conflict than ever before.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the Women for the Future Syria initiative led by the Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria has trained women to help facilitate local cease-fires and “peace circles” in various parts of Syria.

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## **Does Women’s Inclusion Matter?**

We are only beginning to unpack the important intersection between gender inclusion and nonviolent movements. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women’s inclusion matters, as advocated by the Women, Peace, and Security field. More quantitative studies, including on the various roles women have performed, combined with case studies, will shed light on the relationship between women’s participation and movement success (or failure).

Quantifiable data is lacking on exactly how women have been involved in civil resistance, and whether or how female leadership or participation influences a movement’s ability to

achieve its goals. Stories from around the world, such as those cited, suggest that women will carve out a space for themselves in the absence of their deliberate inclusion, often supporting a movement's overall objective and maintaining its momentum.

A recent study focusing on the Middle East and North Africa indicates that gender-inclusive ideologies may influence a movement's choice to be nonviolent or violent, thus perhaps influencing its chances of success. Victor Asal, professor and director of the Center for Policy Research at SUNY-Albany, led a team of researchers to examine the Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior dataset, representing 104 ethnopolitical organizations and their actions from 1980 through 2004. Comparing gender-related variables and the organization's choice to use violence or nonviolent action, Asal concludes that "having an ideology of gender inclusion as part of its political agenda has a strong impact on whether a contentious organization will choose violent or peaceful forms of contention." His team found that the organizations that promoted a gender-inclusive ideology were more likely to use peaceful tactics.<sup>47</sup> More research is needed to determine whether the findings could be replicated in other geographical locations, and how an organization comes to the formulation of such an ideology. However, in reviewing Asal's findings against the backdrop of the research by Chenoweth and Stephan, a hypothesis emerges that the inclusion of gender-sensitive ideologies makes an organization more likely to use forms of nonviolent direct action than violent, and thus has a better chance at achieving its stated objectives.

Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, was a landmark—the first to specifically address women and acknowledge the disproportionate ways conflict affects them. It also addresses the critical role women can play in peace processes, and has served as a framework for furthering gender equality and the meaningful participation of women in conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace.

Research has shown that in the sixteen years since the passage of SCR1325 women's involvement in peace processes leads to more agreements and to lasting peace. Specifically, the strength of women's influence is positively correlated with agreements being reached and implemented. When women's groups strongly influenced a negotiation process, the chances of a final agreement being reached were much higher than when women's influence was moderate, weak, or absent in practice.<sup>48</sup> Care must be taken to not conflate women's participation with the guarantee that gender equality will be advanced, but "influential women's groups have tended for both peace and gender-sensitive provisions."<sup>49</sup> The empirical evidence overall strongly suggests a direct correlation between the meaningful inclusion of women and the stability and peacefulness of a society.

***When women's groups strongly influenced a negotiation process, the chances of a final agreement being reached were much higher than when women's influence was moderate, weak, or absent in practice.***

## **The Way Forward**

Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners all have roles to play in advancing understanding of and support for women's meaningful participation in nonviolent movements. They can do so several ways.

One is to introduce further research in the areas of women, gender, and nonviolent action. More attention needs to be given to the intersections of gender and nonviolent action and to the unique ways both men and women engage in people-power movements as dictated by gender roles and norms. Greater qualitative and quantitative studies would further elucidate our understanding of that intersection. Certain related questions remain.

Generally, what impact do gender roles have on women's demands in nonviolent movements?

Are movements in which women serve in leadership roles more likely to achieve their stated objectives? Are movements in which women serve in leadership roles more likely to use nonviolent direct action than violence? Do women lead nonviolent movements dif-

ferently than men, and if so, how? If different leadership styles exist, are they inherent to gender or deliberately chosen? What is the impact of different leadership styles within a movement on men and on women? Does women's leadership increase the likelihood of gender-just outcomes from the movement's activity? Are nonviolent movements with more women in leadership less likely to be internally violent?

How does an organization choose violent or nonviolent tactics? How does women's participation shape those choices? In organizations that have used both forms of resistance at different times, what triggered the change in strategy? Is gender parity in the organization of a movement more likely to result in a nonviolent strategy?

How does women's participation in nonviolent movements influence the movement's ability to remain resilient in the face of repression? What does quantitative evidence suggest about women's roles in enhancing tactical innovation and the creation of decentralized organizational structures (two key factors that contribute to movement resilience and momentum)? What strategic advantages do women bring to civil resistance movements?

How can donors, nongovernmental organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, and other outside actors help support women's active participation in nonviolent campaigns and movements? Which types of funding mechanisms, training and capacity-building, and diplomatic intervention have effectively contributed to an enabling environment for, and direct support of, women's active participation in nonviolent movements?

Are women leaders sidelined during negotiations? Do gender roles impact negotiations, at what levels, and how?

Another course of action is to convene safe spaces to bring scholars, practitioners, and policymakers together to dialogue and discuss research on the intersection of gender and conflict.

Too often, fields and their respective research findings remain siloed from other related and intersecting disciplines. Discussions and research around the intersections of political violence and conflict, gender, security, law, climate change, economics, and humanitarian assistance are more likely to provide the policy community with actionable ideas that do not oversimplify the complex challenges facing the world. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers should regularly convene and dialogue openly on the nexus of their respective disciplines. By establishing open channels of communication, greater knowledge-sharing has the potential to spark the formulation of creative, sustainable solutions.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

In spite of—and often because of—gendered barriers, women have capitalized on being underestimated and have exerted their power and influence to change the status quo in Argentina, Chile, Egypt, Liberia, Nigeria, Poland, Somalia, Syria, the Palestinian territories, and the United States, among others. In fact, of the sixteen female winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, eleven were women activists leading peaceful movements: Bertha van Suttner, Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Betty Williams, Mairead Maguire, Jody Williams, Aung San Suu Kyi, Wangari Maathai, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkol Karman.<sup>51</sup> If more than half of the women who have received the Nobel Peace Prize were awarded it for leading movements, how many other unrecognized women out there are worthy of the award? And if more than half of a population is excluded from the planning and organization of a movement and broad participation is a primary characteristic of a successful movement, how can it be successful?

The passage of SCR 1325 and acceptance of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 exemplify the global commitment to promote gender equality by actively engaging women

in decision-making and peace processes. Women have often been dismissed as apolitical and primarily concerned with matters at home rather than those in the political sphere, but women’s exploitation of gender inequalities has propelled nonviolent movements even closer to their objectives. Bolstered by research showing that sustainable peace is more likely if women are meaningfully involved, the incorporation of women’s groups is becoming normalized as intrinsic to peace processes. For gender equality to be fully realized, the global community must anchor commitment to promoting women’s contributions—not only in the postconflict phase but also early on, when citizens organize to challenge repression and advance government accountability nonviolently.

## Notes

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