



# Protestors, terrorists or something else? How to think about dissident groups

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## Abstract

Many scholars of contentious politics claim there is no such thing as a group that uses only one tactic, yet scholars, pundits, and the public routinely use single-minded terms like protestors, dissidents, and terrorists. Other scholars and research programs suggest that some groups are specialists who tend to stick to a single tactic to achieve their goals, such as non-violence, violence, or specific kinds of violence, like terror. We make the claim that both sides of the debate are empirically valid and that both types of group exist. That is, some groups tend to specialize in a single tactic while others use a variety of tactics. This paper examines the empirical distribution of group types by examining the mix of tactics that groups employ. The analysis helps resolve part of the debate and pushes scholarly thinking in new directions about how often, why, and when groups operate across this spectrum.

## Keywords

Dissidents, political violence, protest, terrorism

## Introduction

An inherent tension between studying forms of political violence, like terrorism and civil war, and focusing on reasons for more or less conflict permeates the historical study of political violence (see Eckstein, 1965; Gurr, 1970). More often than not, researchers assume the need for a separate theory of each form of violence. For example, there are separate literatures on social movements, revolution, civil war, genocide, ethnic and religious conflict, and terrorism. There are even separate literatures within those literatures, such as a concentrated

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focus on suicide terror, suggesting that it too needs a separate theory to explain its etiology. In contrast, Will Moore and some of his colleagues and students contended that these various forms of violence could be explained holistically within more general theories of contentious politics. For example, Moore preferred the term “dissident” to refer to individuals and groups competing with the state or other groups for control over resources, territory, autonomy, etc.<sup>1</sup> Moore contended that “dissidents” choose from a menu of tactics that range from agreements, meetings, and endorsements to threats, protests, guerrilla warfare, and killing civilians. One of his seminal works (Moore, 1998) focused on dissidents substituting tactics when confronted by different state behaviors and how states subsequently substituted tactics in response to various dissident challenges (Moore, 2000). While Moore and others like Lichbach (e.g. 1987, 1998) and Davenport (e.g. 1995) influenced a handful of scholars to think more dynamically about conflict processes and less about structural factors, a large body of work still focuses on structural explanations of conflict. Moreover, as pointed out above, separate literatures exist to address these different forms of conflict that Moore often saw as alternative tactics and strategies. Furthermore, different datasets exist (selected on the dependent variable) to test hypotheses focused on specific forms of political violence. For example, there are datasets focusing on non-violence, genocide, civil war, and more recently isolated terrorist attacks. Moore (2006) referred to this tension as a difference between particularistic conceptualization and holistic conceptualization, arguing more for the latter.

Today, many academic and policy communities focus on one specific form of violence—terrorism. Moore scoffed at this idea—first that we should study terrorism by itself and second that many associate terror with an “ism.” He contended that “Terror is not an ideology, it’s a tactic! So study it like a tactic!” Others have written about the strategies of terror (e.g. Kydd and Walter, 2006). Our paper specifically calls into question whether or not terrorism should be isolated as its own phenomena or whether it indeed is a tactic employed within an array of other tactics.<sup>2</sup> We ask: do actors typically specialize in one kind of violence or do they engage in multiple types? We cannot state definitively that a holistic approach is correct as compared with more isolated approaches to studying political violence (or vice versa). Instead, the purpose of this paper is to empirically evaluate the distributions of actions by violent actors to examine this narrower question. In short, we discuss conceptually whether dissident actors only engage in single approaches, like terror tactics, or whether they employ other forms of hostility. Relatedly, assuming that there are some specialists and some actors that use diverse tactics, we examine the empirical distributions of these types. We later consider how the implications of our study reveal new ways to move the study of political violence and terrorism forward.

In the paper that follows, we first lay out the theoretical background for thinking about groups that specialize vs groups that use a mixed strategy. We then offer some basic, testable claims. In the design section, we discuss a unique dataset built to test these claims. Next, we conduct a preliminary evaluation of these claims by analyzing descriptive statistics of various groups’ behaviors. Finally, we discuss the implications for the wider study of political violence as well as policy in this area.

## **Theoretical background**

Given the rise in studies attempting to explain the causes and consequences of terrorism (Sandler, 2014; Young and Findley, 2011), it would seem that terrorism is the domain of a

group of specialists in violence. Scholars like Moore and Charles Tilly would likely argue that terrorism is a tactic (or strategy)<sup>3</sup> that any group or individual may select from a menu that also includes many other tactics. Terrorism is not unique here. We could substitute civil war, genocide, torture, or many other distinct research areas of political violence. Terrorism is used here as an extended example because many pundits, members of the public, and scholars implicitly see it as a unique form of violence.

For some social movement scholars, such as the late Charles Tilly, the answer is simple:

Social scientists who attempt to explain sudden attacks on civilian targets should doubt the existence of a distinct, coherent class of actors (terrorists) who specialize in a unitary form of political action (terror) and thus should establish a separate variety of politics (terrorism). (Tilly, 2004: 5).

Tilly clearly thought about terror as a *menu item* rather than a *specialty*. Much of the recent work completed by scholars of terror suggests the opposite or at least implicitly assumes that it is a distinct form of violence pursued by *specialists*.<sup>4</sup> At its core, this is an important debate, as each model would suggest different ways to analyze data, different units of analysis, and contrasting reasons why these different forms of violence occur or do not.

*Time* magazine selected The Protestor as its Person of the Year in 2011. As any casual reader of *Time* can tell you, this person of the year is not always a hero (Stalin was selected in 1942 and Ayatollah Khomeini won the honor in 1979) or a person (in 1988, it was the Endangered Earth). Recently, groups of individuals have been selected with regularity: Whistleblowers, Good Samaritans, and in 2011, the Protestor. The Protestor is apropos given the events of the so-called “Arab Spring,” the Occupy encampments, and the Tea Party movement in the US. These actors are often referred to as *protestors*. Implicitly, this succumbs to the similar fallacy outlined by Tilly about terrorists. The use of *protestor* suggests that there is a coherent class of actors (protesters) who specialize in a unitary form of political action (protest) and thus establish a separate variety of politics (protestism).

Again, the *menu item* approach would suggest that this is one choice among many other forms of contention. Scholars like Charles Tilly, Ted Robert Gurr, Will Moore, and others—while not explicitly referencing this divide—clearly conceptualized contentious politics using this general *menu* framework.<sup>5</sup> For adherents to a menu item approach, all forms of violent contention were different in degree but rarely in kind. Gurr, in *Why Men Rebel*, for example, discusses how political violence can vary in scope, intensity and duration, all different ways to think about degree. He discusses three types of violence that he refers to as coups, riots and civil wars while arguing that they can co-occur or happen in combination. Each of these types of violence in *Why Men Rebel* can be explained by a version of relative deprivation theory combined with “societal conditions.” As Gurr (1970: 11) notes, “Within [the political violence] universe ... some kinds of violence tend to occur together, and the occurrence of some types tends to preclude the occurrence of other types.” While his focus is not on groups but more on psychological processes and the environment that can lead to collective violence, it is probable that he would be uncomfortable labeling groups in much the same way that Tilly was. Gurr’s later work on Minorities at Risk also examined both violent and non-violent choices by dissidents (Gurr, 2000a, b). Implicit in his early work and this later work was that groups used different tactics within a larger strategy and may even vary or substitute strategies (e.g. violence vs non-violence) depending on conditions. Asal et al. (2013) is a recent example of such an approach.

Gurr and Tilly were intellectual heavy-weights who dramatically influenced Will Moore's thinking on political violence. While we could certainly identify topical areas where Moore made outstanding contributions, including the study of torture (Conrad and Moore, 2010; Conrad et al., 2014), forced migration (Moore and Shellman, 2004, 2006, 2007; Rubin and Moore, 2007), and ethnic conflict (Gurr and Moore, 1997), his most enduring legacy will be related to how we should think about dynamic interactions between states and dissidents, how these interactions lead to violence, and then how these interactions create different forms of contention and quiescence (Moore, 1998, 2000). He was one of the earliest adopters of events data that allow for lower levels of aggregation/units of analysis to rigorously test hypotheses that could sort competing theories based on how much empirical support each received (Moore, 1995). Moore was part of the newer generation of political violence scholars who implicitly and sometimes explicitly believe there is no shortage of theory, but there is a dearth of good data connected to the right units of analysis across space and time to validate and support one theory over another. Moore also was extremely careful when defining concepts and building theories, which led him to reflect on the sorry state of affairs related to the use of the concept of terrorism in his Peace Science Presidential Address (Moore, 2015).

Based on his seminal works on repression and dissent, it was clear that Moore was more on the side of what we call *menu-ists* or scholars that think groups choose actions from a menu of options. His early work was group-focused and looked at how dissidents switched tactics based on interactions with the state. He lamented privately that most people that reference his works on repression and dissent do not really read it but just cite it when writing on vaguely related topics. Regardless, his focus on the choices of states and dissidents in their interactions and his search for the best data and the best unit of observation (see Shellman, 2004 as one inspired paper) have had an enduring legacy. In his commentary in an online discussion of terrorism,<sup>6</sup> he cites the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Students for a Democratic Society in the US, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, to highlight the kinds of groups he thought were the most prevalent. All of these examples had violent factions and a non-violent middle, and all changed tactics based on state repression. Citing Tilly (1978) and DeNardo (1985), Moore felt that terrorism was a tactic used by groups that learned from watching other groups and had little public support for their cause. Otherwise, they would use a different tactic. In a study of cross-national terror, he and coauthors (Bakker et al., 2013) used alternative forms of violence to explain the escalation and de-escalation of terror tactics across space and time.

Across these giants (Tilly, Moore, and Gurr) in the study of political violence, there is definitely a tension between this core issue of whether groups can do many things or specialize, or even switch tactics. Part of this is due to data limitations, but another part is related to how scholars conceptualize the political violence spectrum.

Without clear guidance on how each scholar conceptualized this spectrum, we discuss and develop a stylized version. In this simple stylized form, scholars of political violence could think about a spectrum of violence where causes of violence explain changes in its quantity, intensity, or magnitude. This spectrum would have behavior that begins at lower levels of violence like riots and moves progressively up in intensity to such actions as guerrilla attacks, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of mass violence. In short, these forms of political violence have similar causes and there are differences in degree and intensity, but not kind. Alternatively, scholars studying political violence might treat each kind of violence as a different form. In this approach, many argue we need a separate theory of terrorism, a

separate theory of genocide, a separate theory of civil war, etc. Recent works like Kalyvas (2006) seem to lean more in this direction as he is proposing a theory to explain the logic of violence *in civil war*, not the logic of violence that gets us to civil war and beyond. In contrast Young (2013), extending Moore's work on repression and dissent, argues that lower-level state-dissident interactions build to civil war and are part of the same process. Shellman's (e.g. Shellman, 2006a, b; Shellman et al., 2013) work analyzes dynamic interactions of states and dissidents before, during, and after civil war without qualifying periods as war or peace. This latter work is more relevant to what the US government is referring to as the Gray Zone—strategies and tactics between war (black) and peace (white).<sup>7</sup> In the twenty-first century, for most national governments, there exists a continuum between peace and war that threatens national security that comprises (but is not limited to) propaganda distribution, diplomatic aggression, economic warfare, cyber harassment, terrorism, the use of proxy forces, and unconventional warfare.

Importantly, for the menu-ists approach all actions can be ordered at the same meal (assuming one has the resources). There may be a connection then between the menu-ists and thinking about how all forms of violence can occur and differ in quantity not kind. Tilly, for example, often referred to violent groups having a *repertoire of contention* that could include a basket of choices that varied based on environmental conditions and relational factors with the state and other societal actors (e.g. Tilly, 2003: 45).

The *specialist* approach would argue that the same item is selected over and over again because of circumstance, ideology, success, or some other common set of causes. These causes may be unique to the type of violence and are not arrayed in an ordered spectrum. In this way of thinking, we would need separate theories to explain onsets of civil wars that are not merely more (or less) of what explains low-level civil conflict.

As we know from internal debates among activists in the Weather Underground, the German Red Army Factions and other violent organizations that eventually desisted, groups consciously select themselves into violence or non-violence and often specialize within these general categories. As Bernardine Dohrn, a co-founder of the Weather Underground, said in a documentary about the organization, “[t]here’s no way to be committed to non-violence in the most violent society that history has ever created. I’m not committed to non-violence in any way”.

On the non-violent side, the Indian Independence movement and the movement in the Philippines against Marcos were both primarily non-violent and rarely deviated from this path. With that said, groups such as the ANC in South Africa and the current Syrian resistance have different factions in their movements that use vastly different strategies mixing violence and non-violence.

This brief case discussion leads to a third way to think about the *menu-ists* vs *specialists* debate: a  $2 \times 2$  group action space (see Figure 1). This space is a combination of two spectra. The first (top) dimension can range from violence to non-violence. At one end of this continuum, we could imagine a group that is completely committed to violent struggle (far left), and even more specialized in creating a violent struggle against some other people's civilians (upper left).<sup>8</sup> In the Weather Underground's case, it could be specializing in violence against the state and its institutions but not people. As we move towards the center of the continuum, we get closer to a group or movement that might adopt a mixture of violent and non-violent tactics and use each at roughly the same proportion. If we were to draw a circle representing a group's actions in this space, a group that switched between specializing in protests to specializing in terrorism might occupy the top middle space. While these

	Violence	Nonviolence
Specialty	Terrorism, Guerrilla attacks, Genocide	Protest, Boycotts, Disruption
Menu	Mixture of violence above	Mixture of nonviolence above

**Figure 1.** Stylized contentious group actions.

groups may empirically be rare, this is the conceptual space that is possible. In contrast, a group that is firmly committed to violence but would shift kinds of violence depending on a host of factors would appear in the far lower-left quadrant. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) for many years of its long history may be situated here.

Moving towards non-violence, we might find a group that specializes again, but this time in non-violence (see Otpor in Serbia, for an example). Our framework provides the possibility for both kinds of actors to exist, specialists and menu-ists, as well as both kinds of actions to exist, specialties and menu strategies. In some cases then, terms such as terrorist or protester may be relevant (at the upper-left and -right quadrants), in other cases (lower-left and -right quadrants) they lose meaning. The lines between the quadrants in Figure 1 suggest a demarcation. Water, for example, with enough change in temperature can change state into ice or steam. In our conceptualization of this space, we suggest that groups can make these state changes from violence to non-violence and specialty to menu. Empirically this may be quite rare; we may see more IRAs than ANCs. Regardless, from a theoretical perspective, this framework should allow for the possibility of these changes just as a polity space should allow for transitions from democracy to autocracy, even if it is rare (see, for example, Dahl, 1971).

If we are serious about adopting such a conceptualization about contention that allows for many types of actors, it has implications for how we then relate these contentious actors, episodes, and actions to other phenomena. As Goodwin notes in his introduction to a *Mobilization* special issue on this topic, this would require thinking about a different unit of observation. Importantly, where specialists reign, an actor-focused unit of analysis (individuals, groups) may be plausible. Recent work that focuses on terrorist groups is an example (see Phillips, 2014, 2015). Where we see menu strategies, especially in response to the decision of the state and its leaders, the “conflict situation” as the unit of analysis may be the best choice.

Prior to the events of 11 September, relatively few social movement scholars wrote about terrorism.<sup>9</sup> Now terrorism enjoys unprecedented interest across scholarly disciplines.<sup>10</sup> During the Arab Spring groups from Egypt to Saudi Arabia remained committed to non-violent contention, while groups in Syria and Libya used menu strategies to challenge their respective regimes with varying levels of success. Interest in non-violence (and specialists in

non-violence) is beginning to rise with recent work garnering significant attention.<sup>11</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many scholars focused on explaining civil war and genocide as unique forms of violence, more akin to thinking of these as different in kind.<sup>12</sup> In sum, as we progress in our study of these issues and move across substantive domains, the tensions persist between these approaches.

In the next section, we lay out some hypotheses that serve as a first cut in exploring whether specialists or menu-ists are more accurate, or whether they can exist at the same time and thus support a *Third Way* to categorize actors.

## Hypotheses

Based on the discussion above we can derive testable implications from the three arguments: specialists, menu-ists, and the third way. In sum, the specialists believe that political violence and non-violent contention are the purview of actors who do one thing and thus terms like terrorist and protestor are appropriate. Menu-ists assert that actors use a range of tactics and should thus have mixed strategies of contention. The third way we propose is that both can exist at the same time.

*Specialists hypothesis:* groups will use one primary strategy of contention.

*Menu-ists hypothesis:* groups will use multiple forms of contention.

*Third way hypothesis:* there is an empirical distribution of groups that includes both specialists and menu-ists.

## Research design

Above we posited some general testable claims. For our empirical analysis we focus on the targets of violence such as government/military, other dissident groups, and/or social actors. We could include non-violent acts but our focus in this particular study is on whether or not groups that use violent tactics attack civilians (use terror) or other targets. While we hope the paper spawns studies that explore many other questions about menuists vs specialists, there exist many other studies on the choice of violence and non-violence. While these studies do not examine the use of tactics across groups like we do herein, they examine groups' use of violent vs non-violent tactics. For example, Moore's (1998, 2000) studies focused on dissidents and states substituting violent and non-violent tactics for one another. Shellman (2006a, b, and 2009) focuses on the direction in which actors shift, on a hostility continuum ranging from violence to non-violence, given current relative levels of hostility and cooperation. Shellman et al. (2013) focus on groups' violent vs non-violent phases of behavior. This paper specifically focuses on whether or not groups mix terror and non-terror violent tactics, which we argue is understudied. As such we focus on analyzing the distribution of violent tactics directed toward civilians, governments, and other dissident groups.

## Data

To do an initial test of the terror specialists vs menuists hypotheses, we need data that is group-focused. In a perfect world, we would have data that is both global and spans from the end of World War II (or perhaps the beginning of organized contention between

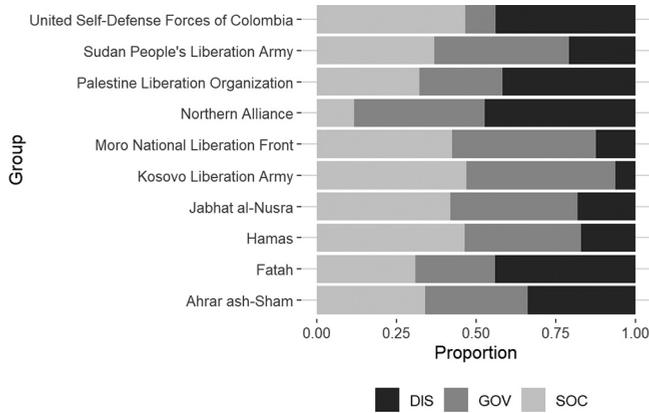
humans) to the present. Even with data collection tools and data quality that have improved over the past few decades, our data do not cover this whole period. Instead, our data covers the period from 1 January 2000 to 1 March 2018. We do not believe that contentious politics during this period differs dramatically from pre-2000 strategies of contention. Violence in the forms of both terror and non-terror existed long before 2000.

The dataset we use consists of dyad-event-months. An event is a coded interaction between socio-political actors (i.e. cooperative or hostile actions between individuals, groups, sectors—such as military or police within a government or average citizens within a state—and nation-states). Events are extracted from news articles by the BBN ACCENT event coder consisting of a source actor, an event type (according to the CAMEO taxonomy of events), and a target actor. Geographical-temporal metadata are also extracted and associated with the relevant events within a news article. The data can be temporally disaggregated down to the day if desired. Our dataset has 721 named groups, targeting seven total sectors (or actor types) with 152 event types. These data were initially produced for the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and Office of Naval Research.<sup>13</sup> A portion of the ICEWS data was publicly released for academic research and can be found on the Harvard Dataverse website.<sup>14</sup>

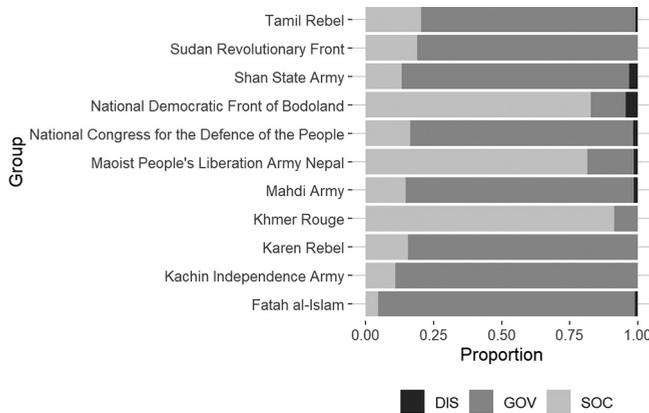
For this initial exploratory test, we examined named groups and their behavior over the period of 2000–2018.<sup>15</sup> For simplicity, we look at violence against other dissidents/rebels (DIS), violence against the state/government (GOV), and violence against the society/population (SOC). For our violence aggregation we only looked at CAMEO scaled events equal to  $-7$  through  $-10$ . This includes violent actions ranging from violent protests and riots to suicide terror attacks and armed clashes (including the use of light weapons, artillery, tanks, and aerial weapons). Most other negatively scaled values refer to CAMEO codes that are hostile but not violent. For example, peaceful protests are negatively scaled ( $-6.5$ ) but not violent.<sup>16</sup> There are many other ways to arrange the data, for example by including non-violent acts and/or exploring other targets. In this version, we examine only these three targets of violence. Our goal in this initial endeavor is to separate violent groups that attack civilians vs other targets (e.g. social and government actors).

If a group only attacked the state (GOV), we would expect this proportion to be 100%. If they attacked both the state (GOV) and society (SOC) we might expect a 50/50 split. Figure 2 displays proportions of various groups' targets. Given the number of groups in the sample (721), we display 10 here just to show groups that use a fairly mixed strategy. Groups like the United Self-Defense Forces in Colombia (AUC) both attacked other rebels (DIS/red line), like the FARC and ELN, and also terrorized society (SOC/blue line). They were less violent with the state as they often worked in concert, but occasionally they used violence against the Government of Colombia (GOV/green line). In the AUC's case 44% of attacks were directed at the rebels, 47% at society, and 9% at the state. Other groups in Figure 2 had different percentages but a similar pattern emerges: these groups use terrorism, insurgency, intra-rebel conflict, or a menu of tactics rather than just one tactic.

This initial evidence seems to support the *Menu-ists* hypothesis. Figure 3 illustrates a different story. Using the same graph style, Figure 3 shows the breakdown for groups like Khmer Rouge and the Karen Rebels in Myanmar. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia from 2000–2018 almost exclusively targeted the population/society (SOC). Similarly, the Maoist People's Liberation Army in Nepal has predominantly targeted society (SOC). This seems like evidence in support of labeling each a terrorist group. The Karens, in contrast, mostly target the Government (GOV) of Myanmar. The Maoists direct over 89% of their acts at



**Figure 2.** Groups that used mixed strategies, 2000–2018.



**Figure 3.** Groups that used specialized strategies, 2000–2018.

society (SOC) while the Karens direct over 84% of their violent acts at the state (GOV) and the Khmer Rouge directed over 91% of their acts at society (SOC). This would seem to support the specialist contention that groups tend to employ one kind of strategy.

If both kinds of groups can exist, and many other kinds of groups in between, then this would suggest a third way of thinking about these groups. This is a first cut and more needs to be done to confirm this distribution, but these results suggest that both specialists and menu-ists exist in our data.

One important limitation, of course, is that Figures 2 and 3 look at cross-group variation not group behavior over time. Figures 4 and 5 display a sample of groups' behaviors over time to show how tactics may be mixed as the menuists argue. As both the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Sudan's People's Liberation Army demonstrate, these groups target all three kinds of actors. Sometimes a group specializes, like Sudan People's

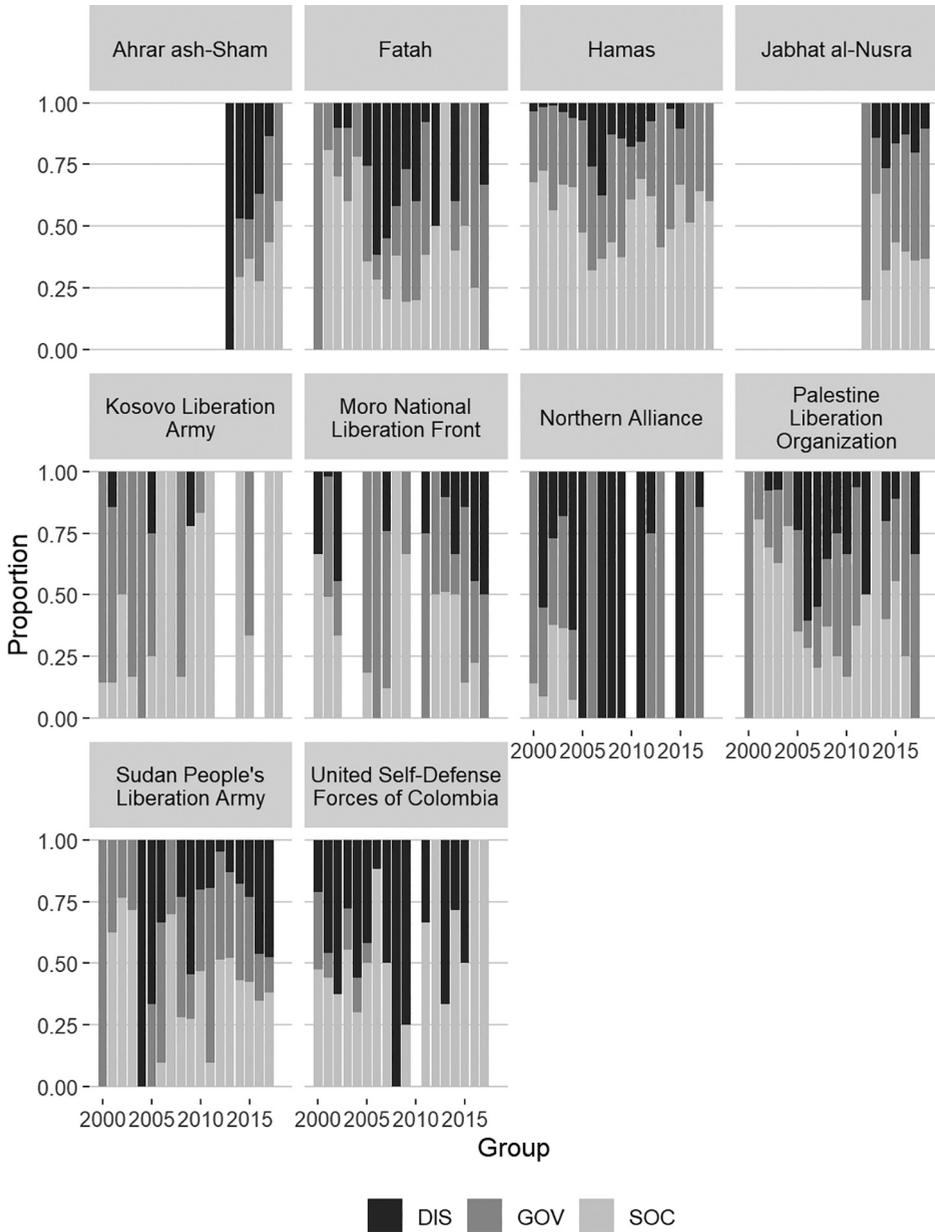
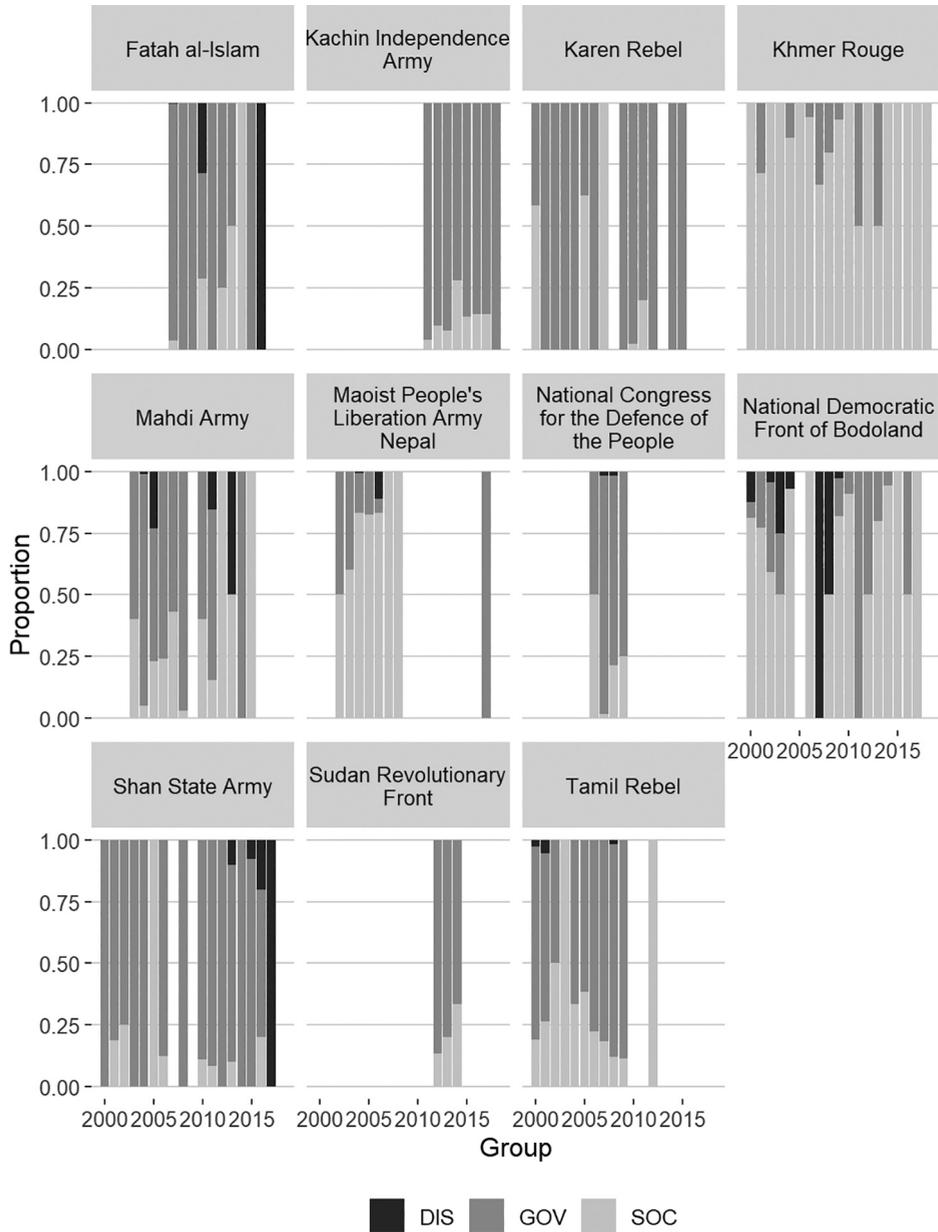


Figure 4. Groups that used mixed strategies by year, 2000–2018.

Liberation Army in 2004, but mostly they target dissidents, the government, and society in a mixed fashion. Figure 3 suggests that scholars need theories that can explain *when* strategies change and *why* they shift from one actor to the next. Labeling any of these groups terrorists or protestors seems misplaced when they use many tactics that shift over time.



**Figure 5.** Groups that used specialized strategies by year, 2000–2018.

Figure 5 illustrates how, even over time, some groups tend to specialize. The Sudan Revolutionary Front mainly targets the state. The Khmer Rouge from Cambodia almost exclusively targeted society. Calling the former insurgents and the latter terrorists may be more analytically appropriate. Regardless, what is clear from this figure and from Figure 3

is that some groups specialize and some used mixed tactics and this varies both cross-sectionally and over time.

## Policy and implications for research

Whether 2019 is deemed by *Time* as the Year of the Protester, the Terrorist, or some other specialty, we do not agree with Tilly and others who suggest that there are no such actors.<sup>17</sup> However, many groups and movements choose from a range of tactics, providing some plausibility for a continuum of specialization. Of special importance for policy, different kinds of groups may require different kinds of state interactions to bring about changes in behavior. If we believe, like Moore (1998, 2000) did, that many of these behaviors are substitutable, we would need to also think about why groups shift dominant tactics, under what conditions, and when to expect this. This would require looking at a different unit of analysis like phase shifts in dominant strategies.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, analyses that explore single forms of violence select on the dependent variable in that they often only study “terrorist events” or “genocides/ethnic cleansings.” As we are reminded by Geddes (1990), how you select cases for analysis affects your answers. Geddes (1990: 132) argues that “The only thing that can be explained using a sample selected on the dependent variable are differences among the selected cases.” We often mistake shared characteristics as causes and assume that relationships between variables in the selected sample reflect an entire population of cases (Geddes, 1990: 133). We argue that even if we focus on specialists (e.g. terrorist groups as our cases) we would do well to explain the choice to use a single tactic within a more holistic theory of political violence. We contend that more work must examine characteristics and attributes across groups. Does organizational structure, leadership, ideology, resources, geographic location, or opposition type influence whether a group is a menu-ist or a specialist or when a group shifts from being a menu-ist to a specialist and vice versa? This would also require a different data collection approach as many databases collect only one kind of contention like terrorism (GTD, 2018) or torture (Conrad et al., 2013). Recent data by Chenoweth et al. (2017), for example, includes both violent and non-violent campaigns, the sequencing of tactics and the outcomes of these campaigns. Beyond better data, formal theory like game theory and computational modeling is uniquely equipped to theorize about actors that vary according to types with a distribution of preferences and how the interaction among actors and states can lead to a range of outcomes that are complements and substitutes. To be clear, we are arguing for better theory and better data matched to the appropriate units of observation, not just more theory and more data.

## Conclusions and future research

The path-breaking work of the scholars that came before us inspired this paper and our individual and collective work. Will Moore’s work is embedded in us and our paper by being directly influenced by Tilly and Gurr but also by directly influencing our thinking on these major contentions. Will Moore’s legacy contributes to both macro- and micro-level perspectives. From a macro angle, he moved the whole discipline of political violence and many of the specialists focusing on civil war, ethnic conflict, or genocide to think about repression/dissent dynamics that supersede specific kinds of violence. From a micro perspective, he trained a generation of scholars directly under his tutelage at various institutions but also

mentored others writ large from California to Europe. He asked each of his students to think carefully about state–dissident interactions, how to build rigorous theory that generates predictions, and how to properly test these predictions with rigorous concepts and measures using data at the appropriate unit of observation.

This paper both serves as a celebration of his work and also pays it forward. We hope to integrate and extend some of his core ideas into thinking about the kinds of groups we see in the world, what this means for the future of contention, and how this affects state policies toward these “dissidents.”

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## Notes

1. We think Moore probably considered himself to be an intellectual “dissident” challenging the status quo way to study conflict in international relations and comparative politics. He did not fit easily in either the international relations or comparative box—in fact he had appointments both in international relations and comparative during his career. More specifically, he was a conflict processes scholar who focused on “alternative” behavioral, dynamic approaches and theories to better understand the evolution of conflict. As an example of his dissent of the status quo, he openly critiqued the mainstream study of conflict in his “Dark Side of COW” paper, which received much criticism and was ultimately never published.
2. Findley and Young (2012) show, for example, that terrorism often occurs in the context of civil war.
3. A strategy pursued by dissidents might be something like disrupting public space. The goal of this strategy is to undermine confidence in the state and lead to a policy or regime change. A specific tactic might be killing civilians, sabotage, assassination, direct action, civil disobedience or any of a collection of other tactics. Kydd and Walter (2006) outline five strategies that utilize terrorism to signal resolve to the state.
4. See, for example from the terrorism literature, Asal and Rethemeyer (2008), Enders and Sandler (2006), Findley and Young (2011), Kydd and Walter (2006), Li (2005), and Walsh and Piazza (2010).
5. Gurr (1970). Tilly (1978) and Moore (1998, 2000).
6. <https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2012/04/02/movements-mobilization-and-the-terror-tactic/>
7. See US Army Special Operations Command (2015: 11) and Freier (2016).
8. We are borrowing from Goodwin’s (2006) thinking about the role of complicitous civilians in explaining terrorism, or what he terms *categorical* terrorism.
9. For a notable exception see DeNardo (1985).
10. For an overview see Young and Findley (2011).

11. Schock (2005) and Chenoweth and Stephan (2011).
12. See Fearon and Laitin (2003), Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Cunningham (2006) and Cederman and Gleditsch (2009).
13. Additional information about the ICEWS program can be found at <http://www.icews.com/>. Shellman was one of several researchers who contributed to creating these data.
14. <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/icews>
15. Co-referencing of pronouns and group names is completed by the coder but if the group name is not mentioned the event gets coded as “dissidents”, “rebels”, “insurgents”, etc. We throw these events out given that we cannot reliably estimate the specific group who committed the acts.
16. The CAMEO scale is available from: <http://eventdata.parusanalytics.com/cameo.dir/CAMEO.SCALE.txt>. Other hostile but non-violent tactics captured include event types such as withdrawing or reducing relations, and various types of threats.
17. *Time* declared 2018 as the Year of the “Guardian of Truth” or the year of journalists who are battling what they call the *war on truth*.
18. See Shellman et al. (2013) for an example.

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