



POLICY BRIEF | OCTOBER 2019

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND THE FATE OF NONVIOLENT CAMPAIGNS

A REPORT ON THE WOMEN IN RESISTANCE (WIRE) DATA SET

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Women, Peace and Security agenda is a transformative policy mandate with a global constituency. It provides policymakers with the tools to end cycles of violent conflict, create more equitable peace processes, and promote gender equality on a global, national, and local scale. Passed in October 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) underscores women's agency, voice, and capacities as intrinsic to creating more effective international peace and security-related policies. Since 2000, more than 80 countries have adopted national action plans and policies to robustly implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In 2017, the US Congress adopted the Women, Peace, and Security Act to incorporate the principle of gender equality into US foreign policy.

As the global agenda on Women, Peace and Security is increasingly implemented, the transformational role of women as direct actors in issues of peace and security is becoming more obvious. This is certainly true in the case of formal institutions, where women are increasingly represented in higher positions internationally. It is also true in less formal, official domains: women have been at the forefront of civil resistance movements throughout history, and they have been visible leaders in contemporary nonviolent resistance movements from Sudan to Algeria and beyond.

*Gender-inclusive movements may be better at building and wielding genuine political and social power to create change.*

## II. ANALYSIS OF THE WIRE DATA SET

Research has shown that women's engagement in formal state institutions can improve the effectiveness of these institutions. Similarly, research has shown that peace settlements endure longer when women actively participate in peace processes and peace negotiations. Moreover, some research has focused

on the ways in which women's involvement in armed rebellions affects their prospects for empowerment in the postwar milieu. However, there has been less systematic research on the way that women's engagement in nonviolent resistance movements affects the outcomes of such movements. Does women's participation in nonviolent resistance campaigns correlate with their success?

A recent research project led by Erica Chenoweth in partnership with One Earth Future has explored this question through the development of the Women in Resistance (WiRe) data set, which catalogues women's participation in both civil resistance movements and armed rebellions. The WiRe data set features global coverage of 338 maximalist resistance campaigns (seeking to overthrow national governments or achieve

territorial independence) from 1945 to 2014. The data include information about gender dynamics within these campaigns, including whether women were involved in frontline actions and in the group leadership, whether the group's ideology was explicitly gender-inclusive, whether women's groups were formally partners in the group's campaign, and whether these groups explicitly called for peace. The initial analyses of these variables identified correlations between gender inclusivity and the strategy and impact of resistance movements.

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The report finds that the more women are observed in the frontline participation of such movements, the more these movements are likely to remain nonviolent even under the threat of brutal repression by the state. Nonviolent strategies of mobilization are often relatively successful among maximalist campaigns; consequently, campaigns with higher degrees of visible frontline women's participation are more likely to succeed in overthrowing their governments or achieving territorial independence. The analyses similarly found that

movements with more explicitly gender-inclusive ideologies are also more likely to be successful.

These findings should not be interpreted as an indicator that women are inherently more peaceful than men. Instead, the findings demonstrate that gender-inclusive movements may be better at building and wielding genuine political and social power to create change.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Frontline women's participation is quite common among the campaigns in the data set, but it is more common among campaigns that rely on nonviolent resistance. Ninety-nine percent of nonviolent campaigns featured frontline women's participation compared with 76 percent of violent campaigns. Only one nonviolent campaign, the anti-Chaudry campaign in Fiji in 2000, did not feature any reported women's frontline participation.
- The greater the role of women in the campaign (in terms of observed numerical participation), the larger the correlation with nonviolent discipline, even in highly repressive contexts. Campaigns that feature greater women's participation—in terms of both the extent of women's frontline participation and the formal involvement of women's organizations—are more likely to maintain nonviolent discipline rather than develop armed flanks or engage in active street fighting against opponents.
- Importantly, nonviolent campaigns with high degrees of frontline women's participation are also more likely to elicit loyalty shifts from security forces. The same is true for campaigns in which women participants actively call for peaceful mobilization. This is crucial, because moments of disobedience and noncooperation among security forces are often a key inflection point in the trajectory of mass movements—and one of the most powerful predictors of their success.
- Frontline women's participation is highly correlated with successful resistance campaigns, even when accounting for other factors such as campaign size. A similar effect holds for campaigns that feature gender-inclusive ideologies, which are more likely to succeed than campaigns without such ideologies.
- There are some signs that women's participation is associated with a common measure of gender equality—lower fertility rates—after a nonviolent campaign has succeeded. The same is not true for violent campaigns. This result must be treated with some caution because of missing data. However, further research can better untangle the association between the level and scope of women's participation in nonviolent campaigns on longer-term and multidimensional indicators of gender equality.

## RESISTANCE CAMPAIGNS

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## III. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

These findings point to the importance of incorporating women's participation and gender-inclusive ideologies into analyses of movement successes, as some feminist scholars have begun to do in case-based analyses of social movements. Although more research is needed to establish causal relationships, the findings suggest that supporting such ideologies and participation may increase the likelihood of nonviolent and successful movement strategies.

*Some practical implications to consider:*

### For Governments

- Women's participation may be a leading indicator of resistance movement development and success. Visible, frontline participation by women can be observed as a sign of healthy nonviolent movements and as a sign of the likely success of the movement.

- Correspondingly, a lack of visible women's engagement—even in groups that are purportedly committed to nonviolent resistance—may be a sign that repression may escalate against the movement as security forces remain loyal rather than disobey orders to repress nonviolent movements. Moreover, a lack of visible women's engagement may be an indicator that the movement may develop violent fringes or violent strategies unpredictably.

## For Civil Society

- Movements engaged in mobilization may find it useful to keep track of who is participating in related events, trainings, and organizing sessions, with a particular eye to whether participation is gender equal.

## For Scholars

- For scholars of civil resistance and nonviolent struggle, these findings add to previous calls to incorporate women's participation and gender-inclusive ideologies into analyses of movement successes. Indeed, analyses that disregard the gender dimensions of movement victory may be omitting a crucial variable.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **GENDER PARITY IN PARTICIPATION COULD BE INTERPRETED AS AN INDICATOR OF MOVEMENT STRENGTH AND POTENTIAL** Women's exclusion from movement leadership or frontline participation could be interpreted as an indicator of movement weakness.
- **STRATEGISTS AND ORGANIZERS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS SHOULD EXAMINE THE GENDER REPRESENTATION OF THEIR MEMBERSHIPS, ALLIES, AND IDEOLOGY.** Gaps in women's representation in any of these elements suggest structural weaknesses that should be addressed.
  - For movements that lack gender parity in frontline participation or in leadership, review the research on outreach and engagement strategies to ensure a diverse membership and leadership. Consider questions of why women are not currently represented equally, and identify and address structural issues that have created the current situation.
  - For groups without explicitly gendered elements to their political goals, consider reviewing the literature on gender mainstreaming and how to explicitly add gender equality to the political goals and claims.

- For movements that lack active engagement of women's organizations as allies or aligned groups, identify local women's groups and initiate outreach to identify why they aren't already aligned with the movement. Consider how to address the issues or concerns identified by these organizations to ensure a representative set of aligned groups.

- **PRIORITIZE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ORGANIZERS, ACTIVISTS, AND LEADERS IN MOVEMENT-BUILDING, AS WELL AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT PRIORITIZE GENDER PARITY.** Support training initiatives for women activists, like the Inclusive Global Leadership Initiative, which seeks to elevate and amplify networks of women-identified activists working to build peace. But also support mixed-gender training initiatives that recognize, appreciate, and prioritize expanding the role of women's participation in movements.
- **RESEARCH CAN BE FURTHER STRENGTHENED BY A SYSTEMATIC FOCUS ON WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN NONVIOLENT MASS MOBILIZATIONS, AS WELL AS A SYSTEMATIC FOCUS ON GENDER DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT THAT MOVE BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY.** This will require further data collection on gender variables within movements that are seeking not maximalist aims but various forms of civil, political, economic, and environmental justice.
- **MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED TO ESTABLISH CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS,** particularly regarding the ways that frontline participation in mass mobilization affects women's empowerment in the longer term; such research efforts are under way. In the meantime, the WiRe data set provides some important, baseline, descriptive information that allows researchers to compare women's involvement in maximalist nonviolent and violent uprisings throughout the postwar period.

## ONE EARTH FUTURE

[oneearthfuture.org](http://oneearthfuture.org)     

One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies, and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial, and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.

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## OUR SECURE FUTURE

[oursecurefuture.org](http://oursecurefuture.org) 

Our Secure Future (OSF) is a program of One Earth Future. Our Secure Future believes that women make the crucial difference to achieving more effective governance and lasting peace. We work to strengthen the Women, Peace and Security movement to enable effective policy decision-making for a more peaceful world.

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## OEF RESEARCH

[oefresearch.org](http://oefresearch.org)  

OEF Research is a program of One Earth Future. OEF Research believes that policy and practice reflect the quality of available information. We promote empirically-informed research developed using methodologically rigorous approaches as a tool for policy making in peace, security, and good governance. We believe in analyzing evidence using both quantitative and qualitative best practices. We also believe the most innovative solutions to problems of conflict and peace necessarily involve a diverse set of disciplinary and sectoral viewpoints. Much of our work aims to break down the barriers between these different perspectives.

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OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

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