

The sword or the plowshare: Conflict and third-party groups' reaction to violent versus nonviolent resistance

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Abstract

Around the world, movements for justice or social change struggle with the question of whether to use nonviolent or violent protest strategies. While research suggests that nonviolent strategies may be more successful than violent ones, people's preferences and support for different strategies may depend on their specific role in the conflict. We tested this in Study 1 in the context of the Kurdish question in Turkey ($N = 320$), and we found that Turks and Americans supported nonviolent movements more than violent movements, while Kurds were equally supportive of both. Study 2 ($N = 192$) replicated Study 1 and investigated whether the preference for nonviolent strategies among the third-party group was dependent on the perceivers' specific preferred outcomes in the conflict. We found that, in the context of the Kurdish question in Syria, third-party Americans still supported nonviolent movements more than violent movements regardless of their preferred outcomes, although the more that they preferred that Kurds would win the conflict, the more supportive they were of both nonviolent and violent protest movements. These studies suggest that the preference for nonviolent strategies may depend on people's role in the conflict, with important implications for addressing conflict needs and conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

In a world that glorifies role models like Mahatma Gandhi and values the nonviolence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. over the approaches of social activists like Malcolm X who do not rule out violent strategies when combatting violent injustice, there is a growing need to better understand the choice of and support for violent vs. nonviolent social movements. Social protest movements can be powerful tools to challenge political systems. In recent years there has been much social upheaval as people have been energized to challenge perceived oppression and unfairness. This upheaval can take many forms; from Arab Spring protestors in Egypt and Tunisia; to Black Lives Matter protestors in the streets of New York, Minneapolis, and Amsterdam; to Extinction Rebellion protestors across Europe. Within many of these movements, there are ongoing debates about whether the protests should be nonviolent, or whether more extreme or even violent methods are necessary to achieve the movement's aims. For example, amidst widespread protests which started in 2010 in the Arab world, some protest movements remained nonviolent even in the face of violent reprisals, while others embraced more violent strategies.

While protestors use various strategies, research has generally found that nonviolent strategies increase support and mobilization among people compared to violent strategies (Feinberg et al., 2020; Orazani & Leidner, 2018a, 2018b) and that they are often more successful than violent strategies (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). However, research has also shown that people may nonetheless still support violent strategies (Fischer et al., 2008; Saab et al., 2016; Wohl et al., 2014), perhaps even finding the use of violence necessary (see Fanon, 1961). Thus, both scholars and members of protest movements have been debating the potential for success as well as the ethicality of strategic violence and nonviolence for a long time. However, the support that members of these social protest movements have for violent or nonviolent strategies may be influenced by the situational context that these groups find themselves in (Asal et al., 2013; Huddy, 2013), such as the role or power of the parties in a conflict.

Therefore, we investigated how parties to a conflict might differ in their support of nonviolent vs. violent movements, depending on their role in the conflict. Moreover, we explored how people's role in the conflict may affect their judgments of the morality and efficacy of groups using violent or nonviolent strategies. We predicted that people's support for violent as compared to nonviolent movements will increase to the extent that they take the side of that group in the conflict they view as the oppressed and as less powerful. We tested this prediction in the context of the Kurdish question in Turkey and Syria to investigate the effect of a social movement's strategy on people's willingness to support the movement.

Nonviolent versus violent resistance

Undoubtedly, Mahatma Gandhi is one of the inspiring symbols of nonviolent resistance around the globe (Schock, 2013). He is well-known for using nonviolent resistance to confront societal injustice in India and his philosophy has been adopted widely by nonviolent activists and scholars (Nepstad, 2013; Schock, 2013). However, while Gandhi's philosophy has been used and expanded upon as a theory of political power, a moral ideology, or a strategy by scholars and activists (Nepstad, 2013), many social movements continue to debate internally whether or not they should use nonviolent or violent strategies. In contrast to the debates within social movements, the collective action literature tends to find that nonviolent strategies are more effective and garner more

support than violent ones (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020). Moreover, research shows that violent action (e.g., bombings, kidnapping, harming of people, and property, etc.) generally garners less support compared to nonviolent action (e.g., strikes, protests, sit-ins, and restricting adversaries' sources of power; Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020).

Additionally, some scholars argue that nonviolent movements are less costly (Anwar et al., 2018) and that it has greater potential to mobilize people (Orazani & Leidner, 2018a, 2018b) than violent movements. In line with this scholarship, Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) point out that nonviolent campaigns are more successful than violent campaigns because nonviolent campaigns bring more people together. Similarly, research has shown that individuals under an oppressive and corrupt system in Iran were more willing to support and join a nonviolent movement than a violent one, and that they perceived nonviolence as equally effective even after having experienced unsuccessful nonviolent action in the past (Orazani & Leidner, 2018b). However, people's support for violent versus nonviolent strategies might depend on the context. In a Western context, among Australians, for instance, greater support for an environmental movement using nonviolent rather than violent strategies depended on government corruption being perceived as low; as perceptions of government corruption increased, support for violent actions also increased (Thomas & Louis, 2014; see also van Zomeren et al., 2004).

Contextual factors influencing preference for nonviolence versus violence

While scholars believe that nonviolent movements are more successful than violent movements, there are nonetheless situations where people call for and support violent movements. Indeed, movements often use both strategies (e.g., anti-Kaddafi movement in Libya, 15-M movement in Spain, and the yellow vests "gilets jaunes" protest movement in France). Some scholars also suggest that violence likely becomes a tool, with some liberation psychologists arguing that violent responses are an effective way for the disadvantaged facing long-term oppression (e.g., Fanon, 1961). For example, when people are not able to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and work, they may support violent actions in pursuing these needs. Among some struggling peasant farmer communities, it is frequently said that "It is better to die fast from a bullet than slowly from hunger" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 160). Thus, people may use violence as a tactic to achieve their political goals depending on the specific situations they face and the strategies they believe they need to address them. In support of these strategic choices, a study found that diaspora groups in Canada tend to support violent strategies, specifically when they see a threat to their group or are concerned about their future in their homeland (Wohl et al., 2014).

Additionally, a study found that activists believe that extreme protests may gain more support and are, therefore, willing to engage in such actions (Feinberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, there are also situations where people support violent resistance—for instance, in contexts of severe threats and when nonviolent resistance has not been successful in alleviating the group's oppression (Vollhardt et al., 2020). Finally, movements' strategies may change for several reasons, including movement leadership, exposure to new tactics, pragmatic reasons, search for allies, and demands for tactical changes from a movement's support base (Nepstad, 2013), which may influence the willingness to engage in mixed and even in violent strategies.

Recent research shows that the more effective people perceive aggression to be, the more appealing it becomes (Saab et al., 2016). However, despite this notable work, there is limited research investigating the circumstances under which people may support violent versus

nonviolent movements. According to Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), members of different groups can experience different psychological processes as a function of differences in group status and context, and their concerns might vary (see also Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As such, perceived threats may differ according to the power dynamics between the groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), which may lead to different psychological processes (Çakal et al., 2016). Therefore, groups' differential understanding of collective action and the strategies they believe that they need to use may lead the groups to support different strategies. In a violent conflict situation, for instance, oppressed and oppressor groups may experience the events in a different way (Li & Leidner, 2019), and their resistance strategies may similarly differ. Thus, members of a victim group in a conflict who feel oppressed and view the group as fighting for its existence (Wohl et al., 2014) may not show the same preference for nonviolence as members of oppressor groups or others less directly connected to the conflict.

The role of third-party preferences

Beyond the effects of movement strategies on the oppressed or oppressor groups in a conflict, the use of violent or nonviolent strategies may also influence third-party support for the movement which may, in turn, influence the conflict (Bruneau et al., 2017). However, in the literature, the third-party role is often overlooked and reduces intergroup conflict to the groups directly involved in the conflict. Depending on the context, gaining third-party support may be important for the conflicting parties, because third parties can support and legitimize conflict groups, which is especially important for disempowered groups (Nadler & Saguy, 2004). Therefore, concerns of losing third-party support can be important for groups embroiled in conflict (e.g., Adelman et al., 2016). While third-party groups can play an important role in inhibiting or ending conflict (e.g., the role of the USA in the conflict in Northern Ireland), it is not clear how support from third-party members will be affected by violent and nonviolent strategies of the conflict parties. On the one hand, studies show that under some circumstances, third-party groups show solidarity with protestors. For instance, non-participants of a conflict may feel solidarity with protestors when their right to protest has been restricted (Saavedra & Drury, 2019). Furthermore, when third-party people feel connected to a group (e.g., Arab people during the protests for the Arab uprising), they are willing to support the movement (Stewart et al., 2015). Similarly, research has found that people generally tend to support those perceived as weaker or underdogs (e.g., Kim et al., 2008). On the other hand, this may be specific to groups using nonviolent strategies. For example, third parties have more positive views towards a group engaging in protests when they are exposed to nonviolent protest action compared to violent action or no action (Thomas & Louis, 2014). Additionally, Americans tend to show support for Palestinians' nonviolent resistance but not violent resistance (Bruneau et al., 2017). Thus, we expected that while third-party groups might be favorable to protest movements, this may not be the case when those movements engage in violence.

CURRENT RESEARCH

We argue that the general preference for nonviolent over violent strategies found in previous research may depend on the roles of different parties in the conflict. To test this hypothesis, we conduct two experimental studies examining the effect of movements' strategies on people's

willingness to support a social protest movement. Study 1 tested the hypothesis in the context of the Kurdish question in Turkey, with Kurds and Turks as the minority historically oppressed and majority historically oppressor groups to the conflict, respectively, and Americans as the third-party group. Kurds have been struggling in different forms against social, political, and economic discrimination in Turkey (Ayata & Yükseser, 2005; Çakal et al., 2016). Examples include the lack of freedom of speech and political organization (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), limited recognition of Kurdish identity, and cultural rights (Gunes, 2012), and the denial of Kurdish history (Yeğen, 1996). Furthermore, Kurds have faced multiple attempted genocides, mass killing, physical torture, assimilation, jailing, and exile. Due to the conflict, more than 40,000 people have lost their lives, and the state forced between 2 and 3 million Kurds to move out of their homes (Gunes, 2013). We predicted that while Turks (who are the oppressor majority group) would support nonviolent over violent Kurdish social movements, Kurds (who are disproportionately more oppressed) would be equally supportive of both violent and nonviolent Kurdish social movements, or possibly even more supportive of violent Kurdish social movements. We also predicted that Americans, as a third-party to the conflict, would support nonviolent Kurdish social movements more than violent ones. Study 2 focused on the third-party group to better understand whether there are circumstances under which third-parties are more willing to support a violent protest movement. To this end, we conducted Study 2 in the context of the struggle of Kurds in Syria for their rights against the Syrian government. Kurds faced oppressive state policies in Syria, such as the denial of citizenship. This exclusion from nationality prevented them from accessing education, political participation, and economic opportunities (Tejel, 2009). We predicted that while third-party Americans would generally prefer nonviolence over violence when the conflict is not related to them, they would be more supportive of a violent protest movement to the extent they were personally interested in the ultimate success of the Kurdish goals in this conflict.

Hypothesis for Study 1 and Study 2

Study 1. We hypothesized (H1) that while Turks would support nonviolent over violent Kurdish social movements, Kurds would be equally supportive of both violent and nonviolent Kurdish social movements, or possibly even more supportive of violent Kurdish social movements. We also hypothesized (H2) that Americans, as a third-party to the conflict, would support nonviolent Kurdish social movements more than violent ones.

Study 2. We hypothesized that third-party Americans would be more supportive of a violent protest movement to the extent they were personally interested in the success of the Kurdish goals in this conflict.

STUDY 1

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate the effect of protest movements' strategies on support for Kurdish protest movements that either used violent or nonviolent strategies, and whether that differed depending on people's role in the conflict as oppressed (Kurds), oppressor (Turks) or third-party (Americans).

Method

Participants

Kurdish and Turkish participants were recruited through social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) and American participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in 2017. Due to the sensitivity of the environment in Turkey, we planned on using a social media convenience sample to access Kurdish and Turkish participants. This study was planned before the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016, but the authors decided to wait to collect data because of the sensitive security situation in Turkey, and therefore the data collection started 7 months after the coup attempt. However, despite the delay following the coup attempt, the situation in Turkey remained unstable as many people were fired from their jobs, arrested, or imprisoned, amidst heightened suspicion towards anything that could be seen as questioning the government (see e.g., Redlawsk, 2021). Therefore, we had to cut data collection in Turkey short, only collecting data from 60 Kurdish and 40 Turkish participants. Of the 412 participants collected from across all three ethnic groups, 75 American participants were excluded from the analyses for failing the attention check on the movement's strategy question, and 25 were excluded for indicating that they had not completed the survey seriously in all three groups (see below for details).

In total, 320 participants were retained for analysis, 40 Turkish (gender: 62.5% female; age: $M = 29.62$, $SD = 7.21$, range = 18–50; political orientation: $M = 2.03$, $SD = .58$), 60 Kurdish (gender: 63.3% male; age: $M = 31.17$, $SD = 6.19$, range = 19–53; political orientation: $M = 1.85$, $SD = .73$ [1 = strongly liberal/leftist, 6 = strongly conservative/rightist]), and 220 American (gender: 58.6% female; age: $M = 39.24$, $SD = 12.76$, range = 20–98; political orientation: $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.58$). Overall, there were 164 participants in the nonviolent condition and 156 in the violent condition¹.

Procedure and materials

The survey was designed in English for the American participants and then translated into Turkish for Kurdish and Turkish participants in Turkey. All continuous measures were administered on scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). We focus on five measures (i.e., support for the movement, morality, efficacy, the third party's help, and support, and perception of victimhood) that are central to our research questions in the manuscript and report the results for the other measures (i.e., illegitimacy, support for the policies, willing to compromise, work for peace, moral and general patience, clear distinction, achieving peace, hope for peace, attitudes toward joining the movement) in the appendix. We focused in the manuscript on what we consider the more central measures of this research: support for the movement as the main outcome of presenting a movement as violent vs. nonviolent; perceived relative morality and efficacy of the movement as two key components of supporting violent versus nonviolent movements; third party help and support given that we use a third-party in our research design as an important role player in conflict; and perceptions of victimhood, given the copious research into victimhood perceptions and conflict (e.g., Adelman et al., 2016; Noor et al., 2012). Some of the other variables which we excluded from the main manuscript were excluded due to the unexpected sharp changes in the political sphere in Turkey during our data collection, as many people were arrested

¹ All materials are publicly available on OSF (see https://osf.io/2rkda/?view_only=259b10cf804a4ef89ebe0b2bb6a755e4)

immediately after the failed coup, which we believe affected motivational measures related to peace in Turkey.

Manipulation. In the violent condition, we asked participants to read an article about a Kurdish movement which uses violent strategies to fight for equal rights in Turkey. In the non-violent condition, participants read an identical article about a Kurdish movement, except that the movement was described as using nonviolent strategies (see appendix for the full texts of the manipulations).

Attention Check. Six multiple-choice questions were asked to assess participants' attention to the article they read about the movement's strategy (e.g., "Who is involved in the struggle in Turkey?"; see appendix for all the item list).

Support for the movement. Five items, partially adapted from Orazani and Leidner (2018a), measured to what extent participants supported the movement (e.g., "I would like to sign a petition to support the movement in Turkey"; $\alpha = .92$, $M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.45$).

Perceived Morality. Six items, partially adapted from Orazani and Leidner (2018b), measured participants' perception of the morality of the movement relative to the morality of the Turkish state (e.g., "Morally speaking, the movement is in the right and the state is in the wrong"; $\alpha = .83$, $M = 4.83$, $SD = .98$).

Perceived Efficacy. Four items, partially adapted from Orazani and Leidner (2018b), measured to what extent participants believed that the movement would be efficacious in terms of achieving its goal (e.g., "The movement will be able to accomplish what it set out to do"; $\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.21$).

The Third Party's Help and Support. Ten items, partially adapted from Adelman et al. (2016), measured participants' attitudes toward third-party (U.S.) help and support (e.g., "The U.S. should impose international sanctions on the Turkish government in order to support the movement in Turkey"; $\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.28$).

Perception of Victimhood. Five items, adapted from Noor et al. (2008) and Adelman et al. (2016), measured participants' beliefs in terms of who was victim or perpetrator (e.g., "Throughout the struggle between the movement and the state in Turkey, there were probably more injured people within the Kurdish movement than within the state"; $\alpha = .83$, $M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.02$).

Results

To test our hypotheses, we analyzed the data using a 2 (nonviolent vs. violent strategy) \times 3 (Kurdish, Turkish, Americans) between-subjects ANOVA to examine the differences between the groups in terms of nonviolent versus violent resistance. As mentioned above, we focused the results below on five dependent variables, and we reported the rest of the results in the appendix. The effects for three of the other variables (support for the policies, general and moral patience, and willingness to join the movement) are consistent with the effects reported below (significant), while the other six (i.e., illegitimacy, willingness to compromise, work for peace, clear distinction, achieving peace, and hope for peace) were non-significant.

Support for the movement

A significant effect of condition, $F(2, 313) = 12.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .039$, indicated that people supported a nonviolent movement ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.31$) more than a violent one ($M = 3.60$, $SD =$



1.53). This effect was moderated by a significant group by condition interaction, $F(2, 313) = 7.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .046$, such that Turkish, $F(1, 313) = 15.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .047$, and American, $F(1, 313) = 17.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .053$, participants were more likely to support a nonviolent movement ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 4.66$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.20$; $M_{\text{American}} = 3.90$, $SD_{\text{American}} = 1.28$) than a violent one ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 3.05$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.61$; $M_{\text{American}} = 3.19$, $SD_{\text{American}} = 1.34$; see Table 1 for overall means and standard deviations for the three groups in Study 1). In contrast, Kurdish participants did not differ in their support for either a nonviolent ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.15$) or violent ($M = 5.30$, $SD = .74$) movement, $F(1, 313) = 1.21$, $p = .272$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$.

Perceived morality

An effect of condition, $F(1, 312) = 4.36$, $p = .038$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$, indicated that people believed that nonviolent movement ($M = 4.97$, $SD = .94$) was more moral relative to the state than a violent one ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.00$). A significant group by condition interaction, $F(2, 312) = 3.81$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$ indicated that Turkish, $F(1, 306) = 5.81$, $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$, and American, $F(1, 312) = 9.31$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$, participants believed the movement to be more moral when it used a nonviolent ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 5.19$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = .73$; $M_{\text{American}} = 4.82$, $SD_{\text{American}} = .99$) rather than violent ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 4.48$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.22$; $M_{\text{American}} = 4.45$, $SD_{\text{American}} = .91$) strategy. In contrast, Kurdish participants, $F(1, 312) = 1.11$, $p = .294$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, did not differ in their perception of the movement as moral regardless of whether it pursued a nonviolent ($M = 5.39$, $SD = .72$) rather than a violent ($M = 5.64$, $SD = .49$) strategy.

Perceived efficacy

An effect of condition, $F(1, 310) = 1.46$, $p = .228$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, indicated that there was no significant difference between a nonviolent movement ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.17$) and a violent one ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.24$). A significant group by condition interaction, $F(2, 310) = 5.60$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$, indicated that Turkish $F(1, 310) = 4.54$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$, and American, $F(1, 310) = 7.61$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$, participants perceived higher group efficacy when the movement pursued a nonviolent ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 4.59$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.13$; $M_{\text{American}} = 4.06$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.12$) rather than a violent ($M_{\text{Turkish}} = 3.82$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.39$; $M_{\text{American}} = 3.65$, $SD_{\text{Turkish}} = 1.08$) strategy. In contrast, Kurdish, $F(1, 310) = 3.94$, $p = .048$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$, participants perceived higher efficacy in a violent ($M = 5.28$, $SD = .83$) rather than nonviolent ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.30$) movement.

Third-party help and support

We found that there was no significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 314) = 1.38$, $p = .241$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$ ($M_{\text{Nonviolent}} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{\text{Violent}} = 3.50$, $SD = 1.32$). However, a significant group by condition interaction, $F(2, 314) = 3.22$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$ indicated that Turkish participants supported US involvement when the movement was nonviolent ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.26$) rather than violent ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .96$), $F(1, 314) = 4.45$, $p = .036$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$, whereas American, $F(1, 314) = 1.63$, $p = .20$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, and Kurdish, $F(1, 314) = 1.80$, $p = .180$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$, participants did not differ in their support for US involvement regardless of whether the movement was nonviolent ($M_{\text{American}} =$

TABLE 1 The effect of the three groups in Study 1

| Sample Condition: | Turkish | | Kurdish | | American | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Nonviolence | Violence | Nonviolence | Violence | Nonviolence | Violence |
| | M(SD) | M(SD) | M(SD) | M(SD) | M(SD) | M(SD) |
| Support | 4.66(1.20) _a | 3.05(1.61) _b | 4.93(1.15) _a | 5.30(.74) _a | 3.90(1.28) _a | 3.19(1.34) _b |
| Morality | 5.19(.73) _a | 4.48(1.22) _b | 5.39(.72) _a | 5.64(.49) _a | 4.82(.99) _a | 4.45(.92) _b |
| Efficacy | 4.59(1.13) _a | 3.81(1.39) _b | 4.69(1.30) _a | 5.28(.83) _b | 4.06(1.12) _a | 3.65(1.08) _b |
| US Help | 3.22(1.26) _a | 2.39(.96) _b | 4.09(1.41) _a | 4.51(1.24) _a | 3.57(1.58) _a | 3.36(1.21) _a |
| Victimhood | 4.76(1.06) _a | 3.45(1.32) _b | 5.15(.85) _a | 4.29(1.17) _b | 5.18(.80) _a | 4.88(.93) _b |

Note. Comparisons are conducted between the nonviolent and violent conditions within each group (Turkish, Kurdish, and American). Different subscripts across conditions within each group represent significant differences at $p < .05$. Example: support (a) shows that there is a sig. difference among Turks and Americans between two conditions, but not for Kurds.



3.57, $SD = 1.57$ and $M_{Kurdish} = 4.09$ $SD = 1.41$) or violent ($M_{American} = 3.36$, $SD_{American} = 1.21$ and $M_{Kurdish} = 4.51$, $SD_{Kurdish} = 1.24$).

Perception of victimhood

A significant effect of condition, $F(1, 311) = 34.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .101$, indicated that people were more likely to perceive a nonviolent movement ($M = 5.11$, $SD = .86$) as the victim than a violent one ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.11$). A significant group by condition interaction, $F(2, 311) = 5.83$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$, indicated that Turkish, $F(1, 311) = 18.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$, and American, $F(1, 311) = 5.31$, $p = .022$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$, participants were likely to see the movement as the victim when it pursued a nonviolent ($M_{American} = 5.18$, $SD_{American} = .80$; $M_{Turkish} = 4.76$, $SD_{Turkish} = 1.06$) rather than violent ($M_{American} = 4.88$, $SD_{American} = .93$; $M_{Turkish} = 3.45$, $SD_{Turkish} = 1.32$) strategy. Similarly, Kurdish, $F(1, 311) = 11.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$, participants were more likely to see the movement as the victim when it pursued a nonviolent ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .85$) rather than violent ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.17$) strategy.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 show that third-parties (i.e., Americans) and the oppressor group (i.e., the Turkish) that is targeted by a social movement tend to support nonviolence over violence. However, the same does not appear to be a case for members of the oppressed group (i.e., the Kurdish), which were equally open to nonviolent and violent movements, and also considered violence to be a more effective strategy than nonviolent strategy to achieve their aims. These results suggest that preference for nonviolence over violence depends on a group's role in the conflict, as the oppressed group, unlike the oppressor group and a third-party, did not prefer nonviolence over violence but were equally open to both types of strategies. However, it remained unclear whether this effect was specifically driven by group membership (e.g., their historical background and knowledge) in the oppressed group or whether it might be more generally driven by psychological closeness to the oppressed group.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 by further examining third-party attitudes toward nonviolent and violent movements. Specifically, Study 1 found that people's position in conflict is important to understand their preferences, as the oppressed group (Kurdish) was less persuaded of the superiority of nonviolence over violence, while the oppressor group (Turkish) and a third-party group (Americans) preferred nonviolence. While it is unsurprising that Turkish participants, who identified with the group that would be targeted by any violent strategies, would reject violence, it was less clear whether third-party Americans would always favor nonviolence over violence the same way, or whether their personal preferences in the conflict might affect their preferences of strategies. Therefore, in Study 2, first, we replicated the third-party preference for nonviolent versus violent resistance in the Kurdish context in Syria. Second, we measured whether personal preferences between third-party and the Kurdish movement

and knowledge of the conflict situation would lead to greater support, and whether that increase in support would be especially strong in the violent compared to the nonviolent movement.

We hypothesized that people who preferred that Kurds win the conflict or were more aware of the situation in Syria may show less of a preference for nonviolence over violence as a movement strategy. We chose this new context because we believed that Americans might feel more connected to Kurdish movements in Syria, in light of (at the time) widespread knowledge about the Syrian civil war, and the Kurdish role in that conflict. Given the different context and to shorten the length of study, we selected six measures from Study 1, including the main five reported above, for inclusion in Study 2.

Method

Power analysis

We conducted a priori power analysis with G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul et al., 2013) to determine the minimum sample size to test our main analysis of a difference between the nonviolent and violent conditions, using a medium expected effect size of .25, p -value of .05, and power of .80. The analysis indicated a minimal sample size of 128 participants; therefore, we aimed to collect 200 participants to ensure a large enough sample after removing participants who failed to follow the instruction or pass attention checks.

Participants

Two hundred eight American participants were recruited through online crowdsourcing tool Prolific. Two participants were excluded after requesting that their data not be used, four for indicating that they had not completed the survey seriously, and another ten for failing the attention checks. All analysis was conducted with the remaining 192 participants (gender: 50.0% female; age: $M = 31.58$, $SD = 12.27$, range = 18-71; political orientation: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.36$ [1 strongly liberal, 6 = strongly conservative]; race: 63.0% White, 17.7% Asian, 9.9% Black/African, 6.8% Hispanic/Latino, 2.1% other).

Procedure and measure

The questionnaire was designed in English. In the violent condition, participants read an article² about a Kurdish movement using violent strategies to fight for equal rights in Syria. In the nonviolent condition, participants read an article about a Kurdish movement using nonviolent strategies to struggle for equal rights in Syria. After that, participants followed the same procedure as in Study 1.

Knowledge of the Kurdish context. Two questions were asked of participants before they read the article to measure their knowledge about the Kurdish issue in Syria. The first was a continuous item ("How knowledgeable would you say that you are with the situation of the Kurds in Syria?") and the second was a multiple-choice question ("Which of the following statements is

²The article was very similar to that used in Study 1, with some adaptations made to suit the situation in Syria.

TABLE 2 Effects of strategies (Nonviolent vs. Violent) on groups and the dependent variables (Study 2)

| Condition: | Nonviolence (<i>n</i> = 97) | Violence (<i>n</i> = 95) |
|------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | M(SD) | M(SD) |
| Support | 3.94(1.18) _a | 3.28(1.31) _b |
| Morality | 4.88(.88) _a | 4.49(.92) _b |
| Efficacy | 3.85(1.07) _a | 3.58(.97) _a |
| US Help | 4.25(1.17) _a | 3.86(1.24) _b |
| Victimhood | 5.03(.86) _a | 4.93(.93) _a |

Note. Cells with shared subscripts did not differ significantly ($p > .419$); cells with different subscripts differed significantly ($p < .001$).

true about the Kurds?"). The continuous knowledge item was used as a moderator of the effect of violent vs. nonviolent social movements ($M = 1.61$, $SD = .75$).

Personal and National Preference. Two questions asked participants to what extent they preferred the Kurds or the Syrian government to prevail in the conflict (e.g., "What is your personal preference as to who wins the conflict between the Kurds and Syrian government?", "In your opinion, is it better for the United States if the Syrian government wins or if the Kurds win?"; $r = .743$; $M = 3.49$, $SD = .87$).

Attention check. Three questions assessed participants' attention to the article they read (e.g., "Who is involved in the struggle in Syria?"). All the questions had multiple choice answers, and participants with incorrect answers on the movement's strategy (e.g., those in the nonviolence condition reporting that the movement used violent methods) were excluded from data analysis.

Outcome measures. We focused on the same five outcomes from Study 1, namely support for the movement ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.29$), perceived morality ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 4.69$, $SD = .92$), perceived efficacy ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.03$), the third party's help and support ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.22$), perception of victimhood ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.98$, $SD = .89$). These scales were slightly adapted to reference the Syrian rather than Turkish context.

Results

One-way analyses of variance tested for significant differences between the violent and nonviolent conditions on the six dependent variables. We focused on the five dependent variables in this study and reported illegitimacy variable in the appendix. As displayed in Table 2, there were differences between the experimental manipulation of violent and nonviolent movements in support, help, and morality. However, there was no experimental effect on perception of victimhood and perceived efficacy. Results showed that American participants were willing to support, $F(1,190) = 13.04$, $p < .001$, and the U.S. help, $F(1,190) = 5.05$, $p = .026$, a nonviolent movement more than a violent one. Participants also saw the movement as more moral relative to the state when it used nonviolent compared to violent strategies, $F(1,190) = 8.79$, $p = .003$.

We then tested our prediction that the effects of strategy type would be moderated by personal preference in the conflict and knowledge of the context on the five dependent variables: support and help for the movement, morality toward the movements, and perception of victimhood. However, contrary to our expectation, the interactions with resistance strategies did not reach

TABLE 3 The main effects of strategy, knowledge, and preference in Study 2

| | Strategy | | Knowledge | | Preference | |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Support | 14.45 | .001*** | .13 | .720 | 11.28 | .001*** |
| Morality | 12.33 | .001*** | .41 | .523 | 46.42 | .001*** |
| Efficacy | 3.24 | .073 | .18 | .671 | .48 | .490 |
| US Help | 6.67 | .011* | .31 | .578 | 3.44 | .001*** |
| Victimhood | .95 | .331 | .01 | .968 | 19.57 | .001*** |

Note. * indicates significant main effects. Strategy signifies a difference in responses to nonviolent vs. violent movements experimental condition. Knowledge signifies the extent to which people felt knowledgeable about the Syrian Kurdish question. Preference signifies the extent to which participants prefer a Kurdish victory.

significance for personal preference (all *F*s < .66, *p*s > .417) or for knowledge (all *F*s < 2.44, *p*s > .120).

However, significant main effects did emerge for violent vs. nonviolent strategies on support, help, and perceived morality of the movement (*F*s > 6.67, *p*s < .011). Significant main effects also emerged for preference in who won the conflict on support, help, perceived victimization, and morality (*F*s > 11.28, *p*s < .001). There was no significant effect of knowledge on any of the outcomes (*F*s < .41, *p*s > .523); see Table 3 for the main effects of strategy, knowledge, and preference in Study 2).

Discussion

Study 2 further supported the third-party findings of Study 1, showing that third-party Americans were more supportive of nonviolent compared to violent protest movements. Similar to Study 1, American participants show more support and perceive the movement to be more moral when Kurds use nonviolent strategies. Different than Study 2, participants did not show preference in terms of the US support, efficacy, and perceived victimhood in Study 1. Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find that less preference for nonviolence over violence was moderated by third-party members' personal preferences for who should succeed in the conflict. Instead, we found that the more that Americans wanted the Kurdish protest movement to achieve its goals, the more they supported the movements in general, both nonviolent and violent. In other words, our hypothesis regarding closeness and movement support was not only true for violent movements but also for nonviolent movements.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In response to perceived oppression, the oppressed group often responds with resistance to their oppression (Vollhardt et al., 2022). Those responses can take different forms (e.g., nonviolent and violent), and while the literature strongly indicates that nonviolent strategies tend to be more effective than violent strategies, members of movements and their supporters often hotly debate which strategies they should use. Here, we proposed and tested in two studies the hypotheses that the preference for violence vs. nonviolence may depend on people's role and position in the conflict. In Study 1, our results revealed that while Turkish and third-party American participants

were more willing to support the Kurdish movement if they use nonviolent rather than violent strategies in Turkey, the same was not true of Kurdish participants who were equally supportive of whether the movement used nonviolent or violent strategies. In Study 2, we investigated whether personal preferences in favor of the movement or increased knowledge of the conflict would lead third-party group members to similarly be more open to violent compared to nonviolent strategies. Consistent with Study 1, Americans showed a general preference for nonviolence. Contrary to our hypotheses, this effect was not conditional on personal preferences or knowledge. However, we did find that Americans who preferred that Kurds win the conflict universally supported the Kurdish social movements more, regardless of whether they used nonviolent or violent strategies.

Nonviolent versus violent strategies

While past research (Orazani & Leidner, 2018a, 2018b) found that people were more willing to support nonviolent movements and perceived that nonviolent movements are more moral rather than violent ones, in the current research, we proposed and found that this may depend on the different roles that different groups have in the conflict (see also Alinia, 2015). In other words, the current research goes beyond Orazani and Leidner's (2018a, 2018b) studies by investigating different groups' understanding of nonviolent vs. violent resistance to conflict rather than examining this question among a majority or advantaged groups. As mentioned before, oppressed groups may have different experiences of the event (Li & Leidner, 2019) than other groups and their resistance strategies may include more violent tactics. It may be that oppressed groups perceive a greater threat to their group and therefore feel the need for more extreme actions (Wohl et al., 2014). On the other hand, even if oppressed groups believe that they might accomplish better outcomes with nonviolence, they may also include more violent tactics due to a focus on process rather than outcomes. Even though they may not get a specific outcome from a collective act, they could believe that resistance, including violence, is a right response to injustice (Argo, 2009). However, our research suggests that the support for violent strategies is likely affected by which approach is seen as the best way to end the perceived oppression. Indeed, our research also found that unlike Turkish and American participants, Kurdish participants believed that violent strategies would be more efficacious than nonviolent ones, which suggests that in an asymmetric conflict situation, oppressed groups may believe that violent resistance is necessary to stop oppression due to the extreme violence of an authoritarian government (Fanon, 1961). Therefore, oppressed groups may perceive that, in such situations, violent tactics are the fastest way to end the violence against their group. Crucially, our result implies that when we discuss methods or protest and reactions toward that protest, it is essential to take a nuanced and contextual approach. As we show, based on people's experiences in a conflict situation, they will support different protest strategies, and despite the research suggesting the success of nonviolent strategies (e.g., Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), they may consider violent strategies not only more desirable but even more effective. Beyond the theoretical implications, practically, this may lead to escalating conflict between groups and reduced probability of peaceful resolutions. Therefore, these contexts and shifting attitudes need to be watched closely by those involved in the conflict and third-part observers seeking to prevent conflict escalation.

It is also worth highlighting that Turkish participants who are part of the conflict as an oppressor group showed support for the Kurdish social movement, but this support was limited to nonviolent resistance. Indeed, previous research has shown that an advantaged group may show greater support for nonviolent collective action because it is perceived as less damaging to their

ingroup social image (Teixeira et al., 2020). The different tactical choices that the different groups of participants make suggest they perceive threats in different ways based on their role on the conflict, which is consistent both with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the needs-based model of reconciliation (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Furthermore, supporting a nonviolent movement can be seen as low-risk and can help Turkish people minimize threats that may challenge their power and status. Furthermore, this limited support may show openness to basic Kurdish rights (e.g., language and culture) but also restrict more radical Kurdish rights such as demanding Kurdish autonomy or independence (Uluğ & Uysal, 2021).

The role of third-parties

While the success of resistance movements is complex, an important factor may be gaining and maintaining support from third parties, which can enable the continuation of, and success in the conflict (Adelman et al., 2016; Orazani et al., 2021). Indeed, conflict groups show this effect, and in extreme conflict situations, the groups compete for third-party engagement (e.g., the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict), especially when a third-party has the power to influence the conflict. In the present research, the results of both studies revealed that American participants showed greater support for the movement when it pursued a nonviolent strategy (rather than violent); although personal preference increased support for the movement regardless of strategy (Study 2). While American participants did not make their country's help conditional on the nonviolent strategy in Study 1, in Study 2, we found evidence that they were more in favor of American support for a nonviolent movement. Thus, these findings are broadly consistent with past research on support for nonviolent over violent protest movements, which may suggest that third-party groups, by not being directly involved in the conflict, may be more willing to apply a general social convention of nonviolence, much like other social conventions of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and absence of malice (Ekman, 2001; see also Sutton et al., 2006). For those directly involved in the conflict, however, their motivations in favor of their own group may overcome general conventions about being against violence and in favor of nonviolence.

However, the preference for nonviolence by third-party groups may also pose a problem for groups engaged in resistance actions against perceived oppressors. For example, in situations where a state or oppressor violence is used to prevent nonviolent protest, the generalized preference for nonviolence may leave oppressed groups stuck between not responding to their oppression, thus making the oppression invisible, and responding with violence or force, thus losing essential support from third parties. Furthermore, some researchers suggest that a sole emphasis on nonviolent tactics can be used to delegitimize resistance strategies of the oppressed and may lead to normalized repression (Butler, 2020). Together, our findings contribute to collective action literature by examining multiple actors to the conflict and their preferences regarding resistance strategies and the solidarity literature by showing perpetrator group's solidarity with oppressed group which may help us to better understand intergroup conflict.

Limitations and future directions

There are also some limitations that are worth addressing in future research. First, due to the sensitivity in Turkey, we were unable to recruit our hoped-for number of Kurdish and Turkish

participants. Therefore, the Study 1 sample size limited our ability to conduct a strong test of our hypotheses.

Second, both American, Kurdish, and Turkish participants in the studies were more on the leftist/liberal side of the political spectrum. As left-wing people are often discriminated against in Turkey, our left-wing participants may be expected to show more support for the Kurdish social movement. Indeed, relatively advantaged groups may join together with disadvantaged groups to show solidarity (Subašić et al., 2011). A qualitative study shows that people at Gezi Park (environmental) protest in Istanbul showed support towards disadvantaged groups (Acar & Uluğ, 2016). This solidarity may create some awareness among relatively advantaged groups towards an oppressed group which may in turn, demand Kurdish rights together. Moreover, right-wing Kurdish participants who are close to the Turkish state might show different effects of an experimental manipulation study, such as supporting nonviolent over violent resistance. Thus, the over-representation of politically left-wing Turkish and Kurdish participants may have affected our results. Future studies should, therefore, include more participants from various points on the political spectrum to investigate how political perspectives play a role in solidarity among conflicting parties. Additionally, it might be more likely for Kurdish participants to have Turkish friends than vice versa, which might have differentially affected intergroup attitudes (Bagci & Çelebi, 2017), which may in turn affect support for violent vs. nonviolent resistance.

Last, we found that Americans show the same unwillingness to support violent strategies as the oppressing group, which some may see as a principle that effectively maintains the status quo. However, living far away from the conflict area and having less connection with the conflicting groups can play a role in third-party groups' perception in terms of which resistance strategies they support in the region. Furthermore, it may be that their non-direct involvement allows them to rely more on general principles of nonviolence (see, e.g., Adelman & Verkuyten, 2020). Therefore, future research should further investigate third-party groups' (e.g., Turkey's role in the Palestine-Israel conflict) attitudes towards resistance strategies to better understand the principles guiding their support. Moreover, while there is a NATO allyship between Turkey and the US, it may play a role in Kurdish and Turkish participants' perception in terms of the US support. Both parties (Kurds and Turks) may be aware of the US allyship with Turkey. However, the US is still a good fit in general and in this given context due to its role in different asymmetric conflicts (e.g., the Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine conflict).

CONCLUSION

People's collective action strategies can vary from group to group because of the complexity of situations in terms of their role, power, and resources. While previous research indicates that people were more willing to support nonviolent movements (rather than violent ones), the current study suggests that preference for nonviolence over violence depends on groups' roles in the conflict. Oppressed groups may be driven to see violent strategies as necessary and effective in their struggle. This highlights the importance of addressing conflicts before people start to perceive a necessity for violent strategies to end their perceived oppression. Finally, our results contribute to the recent discussion on whether people should use nonviolent or violent strategies to achieve their political goals by highlighting the importance of acknowledging multiple factors (role, power, and resources) and the multiple actors of the conflict in order to account for people's preferences regarding their collective action tactics. Future research should acknowledge groups'

victimization and groups' positions instead of equating these experiences in a broader context. This may provide a richer understanding of intergroup relations and third-party roles in conflicts.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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